
Parallel Editing, Double Time

MAD MEN's Time Machine

Elisabeth Bronfen

IN ORDER TO DISCUSS the intricate play with temporality at work in the prestige TV series MAD MEN (USA, 2007–2015, Matthew Weiner), it is first worth recalling that Matthew Weiner garnered much critical praise for what was an apparently pitch perfect reconstruction of a particular historical moment: the decade that began with the bid for the presidency on the part of J. F. Kennedy and that ended with the Coca-Cola hilltop advertisement, marking the end of counter culture and its appropriation by mass market commercialism. Much research and loving care went into the recreation of the sets, costumes, objects, books, movies, and TV shows within the show, as well as the choice of music, the latter of which often serves as a commentary on the film narrative. This obsession with historic verisimilitude led critics and viewers alike to compare MAD MEN to a time machine, upon which Weiner asked us to join him on a nostalgic journey into the past. Indeed, the 1960s, the decade in which he was born, were supposed to be resuscitated on the TV screen not only for an audience that had lived through this watershed cultural moment but also for an audience born later, which knows of this period only through precisely the representations cited and recycled in MAD MEN itself. At the same time, it was always clear that, insofar as Weiner is taking us back into the American past, he is doing so through the lens of cultural concerns of the early 21st century. As with all historical re-imaginings for the screen, we are thus dealing with a double time. While the actors and actresses (particularly in their appearance, gestures, and in the way they deliver their lines) draw our attention to the contemporary moment when the prestige TV drama was filmed and aired, the world referenced by MAD MEN's overall narration as well as the individual storylines brings into focus a different historical time.

This double vision raises two important issues. Firstly, the past events invoked—from the election of John F. Kennedy (in the first season) to the moon landing (in the last)—had specific political, social and cultural consequences and, given that we are called upon to revisit these events through media images that have subsequently been recycled, refigured and remediated, we are aware that ours is a belated gaze. Indeed, we (which is to say the culturally informed viewers) are meant to take these well known representations and mediations of the past as our point

of reference. We are meant to note how Weiner has chosen to deploy them in his attempt to *look back at* the past and to *look into* this particular moment in American history. While the individual characters we come to empathize with over seven seasons—Don Draper and his family, as well as the men and women who work with him at the advertisement agency Sterling, Cooper, Draper & Price—do not know how their lives or how the political and social changes that so profoundly impact them will develop, we, the spectators, do know what the outcomes of the civil rights movement, the war in southeast Asia and, indeed, Madison Avenue advertisement were and what their impact in the following decades will have been.

The double vision at issue in Weiner's re-imagination of this historical period consists, then, in the following: we are engaging with these personal stories in retrospect. Even though we are seeing the world through the eyes of fictional characters, we are also viewing it through our own vision of the present and the way it relates to this past. One of the issues of temporality that *MAD MEN* thus raises is that there is no direct, unmediated gaze back into history. As is the case for all historical re-imaginings of the past on screen, we are, instead, compelled to ask ourselves: why are we concerned with this particular period again, today? How has it influenced us? What similarities can we discern between the past and present? And what differences emerge as we embark on revisiting the past? In other words, the time travel Weiner takes us on is also a voyage of return to the present. So it is a question not only of what is rendered visible and comprehensible, perhaps for the first time, once we look back at the past retrospectively, which is to say through the lens of the consequences we know it to have had. Rather, at issue is also what we can learn from the past for the present and about the present through the past. What do we come to realize about ourselves, and the world we live in today, once we look at a moment in recent history which we know to have been a cultural turning point, and one that, to boot, continues to haunt and affect us? What comes into focus once we return to a world initially dominated by a hegemony that is white, male, upper bourgeois? And how do we re-evaluate the shift that occurred in the course of the 1960s for a far more diverse public sphere, with all the contradictions and complexities this change has brought with it? What does *MAD MEN* remember and what does it forget? What does it uncover, what does it relegate back into invisibility and illegibility? What legacy is at issue here?¹

¹ For a discussion of *MAD MEN* and the American cultural imaginary, see Elisabeth Bronfen: *Mad Men, Death and the American Dream*, Berlin/Zürich 2016, as well as M. Keith Booker and Bob Batchelor: *Mad Men. A Cultural History*, Lanham/Boulder/New York/London 2017.

Alternative Endings

Double time, however, concerns not only the question of how to re-imagine history on screen, but it also concerns Weiner's manner of depicting the development of his characters and the trajectory of their storylines. All personal issues—the choices characters are confronted with, the decisions they are compelled to make, and the responsibility they are ultimately forced to assume—are also represented on the level of the overall narrative as a matter of double time. For Don Draper, the character around whom the TV show revolves, this entails the fact that although, on the outside, he is the most aggressively optimistic pursuer of the American dream that the show portrays. Insisting that one must forget the past, move on and always look towards the future, he is also the one who is most profoundly haunted by the past. Since a case of identity theft on the Korean war front that resulted in the burial of his CO under a false name, Dick Whitman has been living a double life. Even after he has succeeded in becoming a celebrity in the Madison Avenue advertising world, this secret past continues to have a hold on him. To illuminate the backstory of his hero, and with it the fact that Don is troubled by his former self, Dick Whitman, *MAD MEN* repeatedly uses flashbacks, rendered in a gothic mode quite different from the clear light usually deployed for the scenes in the Manhattan offices of the advertisement agency. Visually performing a disturbance in Don's ordinary everyday existence, these flashbacks speak to the psychological consequences of his duplicitous existence.

In contrast to the way Don recalls his war experiences, an ominous mood permeates those flashbacks pertaining to the destitution and moral depravity of his childhood and adolescence: such as the death of his mother and the stillborn child of Abigail Whitman, whose place he assumes in the family of his biological father, or the fatal wounding of his father by his horse while attempting to mount it one night in a drunken stupor. While the dark colors in which these memory scenes are cast underscore the contrast to Don's apparent good fortune, his imaginary resuscitation of these phantoms of the past seeps into the places he currently inhabits, rendering this ordinary world uncanny. As the editing cuts between these two temporal moments, the past sense of foreboding not only displaces all sense of security, it also renders Don's present a ghostly space, a backdrop for his affectively far more powerful and uncontainable recollections. Self-reflexivity comes into play as Don assumes in these re-imagined scenes a spectral presence that is neither fully in the past nor in the present but rather hovers between the two. In conjunction with the camera as the device producing these hallucinations, his remembering eye/I is the point of interconnection between actual experience and spectral recollection.

Living a life that straddles these two identities, however, Don finds not only that his past repeatedly catches up with him, but also that this personal double time is often negotiated in relation to the emotional ambivalence he entertains towards his family. On the one hand, he repeatedly tells himself that he wants to be a loving husband to his wife Betty and a responsible father to his children while, on the other hand, something keeps drawing him away from this seemingly perfect suburban home. In part, this double life involves his extramarital affairs, which often compel him to lie to his wife either about having to stay in the city overnight for work, or about suddenly leaving home in the middle of the night for work. His actual obsession with his job as creative director is in part also a reason why he prefers not to come home.

In the last episode of the first season, *THE WHEEL* (W: Matthew Weiner and Robin Veith / D: Matthew Weiner), we find the double time Draper lives in underscored by the dramaturgic inclusion of a double ending that is predicated on the question: what if I had arrived home a few minutes sooner? Initially, Don tells his wife, Betty, that, owing to an important project at the office, he will have to stay in town for the Thanksgiving holidays, entailing that she will drive to her parents' house alone with their children. Then, however, Don gives his magisterial pitch for the Kodak carousel. To illustrate the sentimental bond with the product for which he develops his advertising strategy, he has plundered his personal archive of family snapshots. The story he tries to sell to his clients during the pitch, in turn, is predicated on the claim that the device they had come up with, namely a round slide projector, »isn't a space ship, it's a time machine, it goes backwards and forwards. It takes us to a place where we ache to go again.« The snapshots Don chooses to support this claim all revolve around the idea of a happy, intact, and safe home. Although this pitch is conceived, first and foremost, as a clever sales tactic, Don himself is gradually overwhelmed by nostalgia for his family life as he watches the sequence of images he has assembled; so much so that, after the emphatic praise he receives for his presentation from clients and colleagues alike, he boards the commuter train home in Ossining still under the influence of the fantasy he has spun.

Now, leaning his head against the window, he falls into a daydream that offers a correction to his unsatisfied reality. On the soundtrack we hear sentimental music to signal the family romance he is imagining for himself. This music affectively underscores the first half of the final sequence of the last episode, which, in fact, consists of two narrative outcomes for the risk Don took when he told his wife he wouldn't be home before she left for her parents' house with the children. In the first part, Don enters his home hesitatingly, as though unsure what he will find. The front hall is dark, yet there is still light in the living room and he soon recognizes that his family has not yet left. Betty's puzzled response is meant to

signal to the dreamer (and to us, sharing his dream vision) that while she has not expected him home so soon, she is pleased with the change in events. Reminiscent of many 1950s comedies, we become privy to a reconciliation between the couple, with both acknowledging each other in mutual sympathy. Following the obligatory kiss that always serves as the Hollywood insignia for a happy resolution of family troubles, Don turns towards his children, takes them both into his arms, fondly hugs them while Betty looks on smiling. The Draper family seems reunited again.

It is worth recalling that in his discussion of dream-work, Sigmund Freud argues that fantasy hovers between three temporal moments. While a fantasy is »linked to some current impression, some provoking occasion in the present« involving one of the daydreamer's major wishes, it also »harks back to a memory of an earlier experience,« namely one in which this wish seemed to have been fulfilled. At the same time, it also »creates a situation relating to the future which represents a fulfillment of the wish.« Freud's conclusion is that in the work of fantasy, »past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them.«² Applied to the first part of the final sequence of *THE WHEEL*, we might surmise: the photographic images Don uses in his Kodak-pitch invoke a past happiness he once felt with his family, and, as these snapshots reverberate in his mind, they allow him to imagine a future reconciliation with his family. This first part of the closing sequence thus involves virtual time in two senses. The restorative fantasy occurs in a train, taking him from New York City to his home in Upstate New York, which is to say in the suspended time of his travel between the two sites that are constantly competing for his attention. Virtuality is also underscored in that his daydream speaks to a future he can now imagine for himself, rather than to an actually realized time.

The second half of the final sequence in *THE WHEEL* seamlessly follows the exuberant embrace between Don and his children, making visible that the sequence up to now has been nothing but a fantasy, an embellished outcome no longer open to him. Once more, Don opens the door to his home, finding the entrance hall dark. The reality he is compelled to confront involves the sobering consequences of his previous decision not to join his family for the Thanksgiving feast. This time, there is no one to answer as he calls out into the darkened space. Instead, we get a shot from the top of the staircase that frames his isolation. He then sits wearily down on the stairs, as though deeply exhausted, the rug a visual continuation of his upper body. An expression of anxious sadness spreads across his face. The editing cuts back and forth between a view of Don's back, framed by

² Sigmund Freud: *Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming* (1908), in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 9, London 1959, p. 148.



Fig. 1: MAD MEN. The Wheel SoE13. Don Alone at Home

the stairs, and a frontal shot of his seated figure, staring out forlornly into space. In contrast to the daydream on the train, the pensive thoughts now occupying him are not ones Wiener seeks to share with his audience. And while sentimental music had underscored his fantasy of family reconciliation in the first half of the sequence, the sober reality of his solitude is now accompanied by silence. Only once the camera begins to pan away from him, sitting alone on the bottom of the stairs, thus leaving Don visually behind, do we begin to hear Bob Dylan on the soundtrack singing »Don't think twice, it's alright.« His song, invoking as it does a lonely dawn, serves as a comment on the reality of our hero's solitude. As the camera moves back further, Don visually fades into the empty spaces of his home before the screen goes completely black. This second ending draws its affective power from the way it is so markedly different from the alternative temporal moment of the daydream. If the second part of the closing sequence proves the impossibility of the first, this can also be read as Matthew Weiner's comment on the way his TV series is itself a time machine. Tapping into nostalgia even while debunking it as a sentimental journey reveals the latter as an impossible historical dream.

Parallel Editing

Another dislocation of unified time can be found in the powerful montage sequences with which many episodes in *MAD MEN* come to a close. In all cases, parallel editing is employed in these closing narrative moments so as to underscore the connection between a set of characters at the same time that they highlight the very different attitudes they assume. Each performs simultaneity with a difference. While the characters depicted share a point in time, they inhabit different emotional spaces. Which is to say, even though they are connected, they are also deeply severed from each other. As such, Weiner's deployment of parallel editing picks up on modernism's multiperspectival narration and the aesthetic premise that there is no single coherent view of the world, but rather only a conglomerate of many, different, competing and sometimes even contradictory perspectives *on* and views *of* the world. While these closing montage vignettes all perform simultaneity, the mood they transmit varies.

The montage sequence at the end of *A NIGHT TO REMEMBER*, for example, foregrounds the sense of quiet despair that haunts all of the characters, even though—or precisely because—they pursue their ambitions. Betty has learned of her husband's extramarital affairs, and, though still lacking concrete proof, she calls Don in his office to tell him not to come home because she does not want him there. The editing moves to Joan, alone in her apartment, sitting on her bed, massaging her tense shoulder muscles as well as the wound which the strap from her uncomfortable dress has left there; a corporeal mark of the price she pays for insistently putting her sexual attractions on display at the office. Peggy, in turn, is shown sitting in her bathtub. For a brief moment, she covers her face with both of her hands before dropping them and looking out in front of her. The distraught expression on her face along with this gesture signifies how alone she is with her sense of uncertainty regarding her position as Don's favorite assistant. The young priest from her parish, meanwhile, moves around in his small bedroom and puts out his cigarette. Then he slowly takes off his habit to reveal another person beneath his symbolic role. He picks up his guitar and begins to sing »Early in the Morning.« With gusto, we hear him appealing to his Lord: »let me find the way to the promised land, this lonely body needs a helping hand.« As his rendition of the song morphs into the familiar voices of Peter, Paul and Mary, we realize that this music is what forges a community between the different characters. Each isolated from all the others, they are all caught in an emotional conflict. The montage editing ends with Don, now confined to his Manhattan office. First, he fetches himself a Heineken from the refrigerator in the office kitchen, then, having sat down at the table there, he quietly sips his beer, annoyed and puzzled at his predicament. Once more the camera tracks back to underscore that he is dwarfed by the architecture

of the otherwise completely empty office space. What the montage renders visible is that these characters, as if united together, are all in need of guidance.

The last episode of the third season, *SHUT THE DOOR. HAVE A SEAT* (W: Matthew Weiner and Erin Levy / D: Matthew Weiner), in turn, brings closure to the intersecting storylines of personal solitude, confused misunderstandings, and lack in communication among the characters. What is depicted is not the mood of waiting for something to happen but rather a decisive turning point. At this point in *MAD MEN*, Don's marriage to Betty has definitively fallen apart. So, too, the advertisement agency Sterling Cooper, where Don emerged as a genius creative director, has come to an unequivocal end. Because of a merger with a British agency, Don—along with the other partners, Roger, Burt and Lane, as well as Pete (accounts), Peggy (copy writer), Joan (office manager) and Harry (media)—have lured away some of the most lucrative clients to a new company they are about to form. They have moved into a hotel suite where they intend to conduct business until they find new office space. The montage sequence begins with Don leaving the bedroom where he has just said goodbye to Betty on the telephone. He returns to the others, who are cheerfully having lunch in the adjoining living room. When Lane assures him that this morning has been very productive, Don begins to smile although his thoughts seem to be elsewhere. The montage editing connects him to Betty, on a plane to Reno. She is holding their baby son on her lap, while the man she is about to marry sits next to her, focused, however, on the papers he is reading. In the Draper home in Ossining, Don's other two children are watching television in the living room. Their African-American maid, Carla, brings them some hot chocolate before sitting down on the couch to join them. The final shot shows Don leaving a taxi with two suitcases, entering the building in Greenwich Village where he has rented a new apartment. This montage sequence is a classic example of narrative bifurcation. For all of the characters, a particular episode in their personal or professional lives has come to an end and a new episode is about to begin. At the end of this season, however, we are left in suspense not knowing exactly what shape these new beginnings will take. While this, too, is a risky moment, it is less so compared to the alternative endings in *THE WHEEL*, because one choice is contrasted with another that could not be taken. Nevertheless, this is a risky moment in the overall narrative of *MAD MEN* because at this point the future of the main characters is completely open. No one yet knows what the consequences of the decisions made—to form a new advertising agency, to get a divorce, to move into a new apartment alone—will be. Instead, what connects all these characters is an attitude of expectation.

At the end of *LADY LAZARUS* (W: Matthew Weiner / D: Phil Abraham), the montage performs a different mode of suspended time. We are shown four of the main characters in vignettes that place them outside their ordinary circumstances.

Don's second wife, Megan, has chosen to leave her job at the advertisement agency in order to pursue a career as an actress, while Peggy is slowly advancing there as a copy writer. Pete, having fallen in love with the psychically unbalanced wife of a man he keeps meeting on the commuter train, is forced to recognize that she has decided to end their affair. Don, who wants to remain perfectly in tune with the »sound« of contemporary culture, realizes that in order to get a sense of what the new generation is all about, he must ask his significantly younger second wife for help. Megan, leaving for her acting class, suggests that, in her absence, he might listen to »Tomorrow Never Knows.« What follows is a series of nocturnal vignettes, all revolving around the unsolvable antagonism between the sexes. Don, having put on the record, sits down on his Eames lounge chair, a whiskey glass in his hand, relaxing to the modern sounds of the Beatles' *Revolver* album. As the music continues on the soundtrack, we move to Peggy and Stan, who are busy working together in the office at night. Although focusing on their separate tasks, they pass a joint back and forth without looking at each other. Pete, having arrived at the train station with Beth's husband, goes to his own car but keeps looking over at his rival. Beth has been waiting for both of them, and, after ceding the driver's seat to her husband, she looks out through the window at her clandestine lover. The heart she surreptitiously draws and then quickly erases on the misty window pane is her signal that their affair is over. Megan, in turn, is completely immersed in a relaxation exercise. Lying with her back on the ground, her arms extended to both sides and her eyes closed, she is looking inwards. The montage editing returns to Don, who has been trying to fathom the unfamiliar sounds emanating from his loudspeakers. Then he turns off the music, and walks in silence alone to his bedroom, a glass of whisky in hand. With the final credits, the music begins again, and we once more hear the refrain: »it is not dying.« Given that in hindsight we know how significant the appearance of *Revolver* was for popular culture in the 1960s, the temporal suspension celebrated in this montage sequence not only uses this music to forge a connection between four singular experiences on this one single night. It also gestures to the way the personal time of each of the characters (alone after work, working together without speaking, ending an affair, training for a new job) is invariably interlocked with a particular historical time and the upheaval it has since come to stand for.

Finally, in *THE PHANTOM* (W: Jonathan Igla and Matthew Weiner / D: Matthew Weiner), we have come, once again, to the end of a marriage. Megan has gotten her first part in a TV show and, on set, the make-up artist is putting the final touches on her appearance before the shooting will begin. Don has turned his back on her and is walking away through the dark hall of the studio. In explicit reference to the ending of King Vidor's melodrama *STELLA DALLAS* (USA 1937), in which Barbara Stanwyck turns her back on the window through which

she had been allowed to watch her daughter's marriage ceremony, the camera tracks back to stay for a few moments with Don as he leaves the scene which fulfills his wife's ambition to be an actress but which also undermines his notion of marriage. Like Stanwyck at the end of *STELLA DALLAS*, he too, ultimately passes by the camera, signaling that a new episode in his life is about to begin as well. The montage seamlessly moves to him, sitting down at a bar and ordering an Old Fashioned. He is once again alone, now open to a new romantic adventure, and, indeed, at the end of the montage sequence, two women will try to pick him up. In the narrative interval we see Peggy, getting ready to go to bed with some unfinished work. Briefly, she looks out at two dogs copulating on the lawn in front of her window. Then, she, too, turns her back on this scene and enjoys the glass of whiskey that she, as Don's doppelgänger, is now holding in her left hand in bed. Pete, also enjoying himself at home that night, has put on earphones to listen to one of his classical records. This allows him, in turn, to turn his back serenely on Trudy and his children, asleep in the adjoining rooms. Roger, also alone in his bedroom that night, is standing, stark naked, in front of the window. He is on an LSD trip, and, as he enjoys his solitary pleasure, his gaze is focused on the glittering nocturnal cityscape unfolding beneath. In contrast to the final montage sequence in *A NIGHT TO REMEMBER*, the solitude that connects these characters no longer signifies loneliness and quiet despair. Instead, what this sequence foregrounds is intoxication as a visual trope for the movement from an ordinary to an altered state. Even while they experience this night differently from normal time, by virtue of the montage they implicitly do so together, while allowing us to partake by proxy in their moments of self-enjoyment.

Historical Events and Fictional Time

There is yet another aspect to the performance of double time in *MAD MEN* since throughout the series, TV newscasts, newspaper articles, and radio broadcasts bring actual current events of the 1960s into the fictional timeline of the show's overall narrative. The pinnacle of this splicing together of historical events and Weiner's fictional re-imagination of history is, of course, the Moon landing in the final season. In this case, a visual connection is again forged between the main characters by virtue of montage editing. To watch this epochal event, they have all come together, albeit in different constellations. Double time, in this case, intersects with the simultaneity of an experience of community. What connects the various characters is the news broadcast—the flickering black-and-white images on different TV screens along with Walter Cronkite's voice-over commentary—of what they, along with the rest of the world, are watching. The affective climax is

the moment when Neil Armstrong, taking his first steps on the surface of the moon, asserts: »That's one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind.«

The shot/reverse shot editing keeps moving from TV screen to those sitting in front of it, which is to say, oscillating between the iconic new images and the group portraits of fictional characters watching them. We find Don, sitting in front of the TV set in a sparse hotel room in Indiana, along with three other members of the advertisement agency, Peggy, Pete and Harry, who intend to pitch their strategy for Burger Chef the next day. Roger, in turn, is at his first wife's house. Sitting on a couch next to her, with his grandson on his lap and his son-in-law in a chair to the other side, he is as enthralled by what they are viewing on the TV screen. As is Bert and his African-American housekeeper, who are watching the news transmission while sitting on a sofa in his living room. In the back, we see an enormous Jackson Pollock painting. After the montage editing has interwoven these three locations, moving back and forth between them, it finally moves to Betty, who is with her children, her second husband Francis, and his family in their stately home.

The affective power of these vignettes of collective wonder and national pride is, of course, also indebted to the unfamiliar view of the planet Earth, now suddenly made possible from the position of the moon. This implicitly offers a new perspective on the people who inhabit the planet as well, which is to say the many players in *MAD MEN* sharing in this experience. At the same time, given the shot/reverse shot editing, the characters are implicitly also looking at us, the audience. We are occupying the same space as the historic news images these characters, but also the actors and actresses playing them, are looking at. We are where the astronauts are—in the past, outside fictional space-time. We are in the place from which this past looks both back at them and out at us, which is to say that as spectators, we are located in an impossible position. This rapt involvement in the incredible event, in turn, attests to a collectively shared fantasy that consolidates all the main characters into a series of static group portraits, even if this achieved unity will only be sustained for a short moment. Soon, the individual characters will turn back to other matters and once more confront their everyday lives. Indeed, on the diegetic level of *WATERLOO* (W: Carly Wray and Matthew Weiner / D: Matthew Weiner), the actual historical moon landing is overshadowed by the sudden death of Bert, prompting yet a final turn of intrigue and struggle for power, and with it the sale of the advertisement agency to McCann Erikson.

The prestige TV series *MAD MEN* itself ends on a final montage sequence which deftly blends together fictional time, historical time, and real time, beginning with Don's anagnorisis during a group therapy session at the Esalen Institute in Big Sur and ending with an actual hilltop Coca-Cola commercial, produced by McCann Erikson that aired in 1971. After Don has tearfully embraced the man who has just

shared his story about how insignificant he feels with other members of the group, the editing moves to a series of closing vignettes. Pete, together with his radiant wife Trudy and their young daughter, is about to board a private jet. Reunited with his family, he will begin a new life as chief executive of Learjet in Wichita, Kansas. Equally cheerful, Joan hands over her son to her mother, who will take him for a walk in the park so that she, having founded her own production company called Holloway-Harris, can work undisturbed. She has turned her living room into a home office. The pin board on the wall separating it from the kitchen, covered with scribbled notes, shows us that November 1970, is already heavily booked. Roger, meanwhile, is spending a honeymoon in Paris with Marie, the mother of Don's second ex-wife Megan. They are sitting in a bistro and he orders champagne and lobsters. The intimate camaraderie shared by this mature couple suggests that this marriage may actually work. Don's daughter, Sally, has assumed the position of her mother in the kitchen of their home, since Betty, having come to terms with the fact that she is dying of cancer, is now no longer fit to take care of the domestic chores by herself. Sally is wearing her mother's yellow rubber gloves while she washes the dishes. Betty, seated behind her, a cigarette elegantly poised in her hand, quietly reads a newspaper. Finally, the editing moves to Peggy, who is once again working in her office at night. At first, she is typing up something in a frenzy, her gaze concentrated on the words that are emerging on the paper in front of her. Then Stan, now her steady boyfriend, joins her and, as she looks up at him, he kisses her gently on the forehead before they both look at what



Fig. 2: MAD MEN. Waterloo S07E07. Lap Dissolve Connecting Peggy's Writing and Don's Anagnorisis



Fig. 3: MAD MEN. Waterloo S07E07. Don's Reverie at Dusk

she has just written. It is this gaze that leads to the lap dissolve, which reveals the silhouette of their former creative director, Don, standing in the sunset behind the Esalen Institute in California.

For one final time, the parallel editing connects individual characters who have already gone their separate ways, splicing them together into an affective community. Yet it is important to note that the final episode of *MAD MEN* does not end with this sequence of redemptive vignettes. Instead, along with the lap dissolve that blends together the two coasts of America into one superimposed image, we return once more to Don. This lap dissolve, however, also fuses Peggy's nocturnal work with Don's awakening from his own melancholia. While it is nighttime in New York, it is dusk in California, where he stands above a cliff, looking out over the Pacific Ocean, where the vision of the hilltop ad will subsequently appear to him during an early morning meditation class. It remains open, of course, whether we are to take his inspiration as the result of Peggy's suggestion, or whether we are to imagine her mentally coaxing him back to Midtown Manhattan. Or perhaps the Coca-Cola commercial is an idea they have worked out together? In any case, we are dealing with a vision that no longer takes place on the same diegetic level of the narrative where Don comes to experience self-knowledge. We are in a different time zone. Not only do the vignettes, function-

ing like an extended subordinate clause, separate this moment of anagnorisis from the meditation the next morning. As the only lap dissolve in the entire interpolated series of closing images, Stan and Peggy's gaze at the copy she has written, superimposed on Don's ecstatic awakening, also draws our attention to a narrative break. At work in Don's final vision is a metafictional play. The scene, performing the reawakening of his creative genius in double time, serves as our point of exit from the fictional world in which we were allowed to participate over seven previous seasons.

With his eyes closed, Don looks forward into a future, which, in the shape of an actual commercial from the year 1971, at once draws us back into the force field of the past. Owing to his memory work, the double time that keeps resurfacing in *MAD MEN* is carried through to the end. With this iconic commercial, real history enters into the past of a fictional world that Matthew Weiner historically re-imagined from the position of his own present, even as it leads us back into our contemporary moment. Young men and women from all over the world stand on a hilltop and, with their song, proclaim a collective desire for a global sentimental bond, achievable at a future moment in time. The fact that everyone is holding a Coca-Cola bottle in their hand further serves as the corporeal testimony of this wish for shared community: »I'd like to buy the world a home and furnish it with love.« Deployed as metafictional closure, this commercial offers its own comment



Fig. 4. *MAD MEN*. Waterloo So7Eo7. Don's Vision at Dawn

on the very promise of happiness, on which the string of short vignettes of Pete, Joan, Betty and Roger (serving as the transition between Don's self-recognition and his vision) are predicated. Cutting to this iconic commercial at the conclusion of the series signals, on the one hand, that this particular soft drink is »the real thing.« On the other hand, the commercial also entails that within the visual history of America, reference to the real itself endures. Weiner's choice to use the hilltop Coca-Cola ad (a decision which he claims was already made when he began filming season 4) also puts closure on the many instances in *MAD MEN* during which news broadcasts from the 1960s—such as the moon landing—were inserted into the narrative diegesis so as to draw attention to and affectively incorporate a politically charged event into the fictional storylines of his characters. If, however, this commercial performs an intrusion of real time into the temporality of the fictional world, it also serves to replace the historically re-imagined world. It dissolves the fictional time of the show, *MAD MEN*, into the transhistoric time of a commercial that really was aired worldwide.

In contrast to the montage sequence involving the moon landing, the real does not break into and disrupt the fiction as a news broadcast but rather as a carefully designed image formula, which—as we know in hindsight—was not only able to contain the pathos of this transition into the 1970s but, when recycled, is also able to resuscitate collective emotions that pertain to this historical turning point. Precisely as a mediated representation, the past adheres to the colors of the old film stock, to the timbre of the voices of the young people singing, to the movement of their bodies as they come together, coke bottle in hand. In contrast to *MAD MEN*'s time machine, the Coca-Cola commercial is a time capsule in the strict sense of the word. Indeed, by perfectly encapsulating the *zeitgeist* of 1971, this advertisement affects us—once again—as it did its target audience then, even while it allows us to belatedly understand this historical moment. For one final time, an ambivalent logic of double time is at play. Conceived with the war in South-East Asia as its implicit backdrop, the choreographed community of young men and women of different ethnicities, each holding a Coca-Cola bottle while making their appeal to world peace, speaks perfectly to the end of an era of cultural promise, upheaval and disappointment—as a fantasy of what could have been but also what might still be achieved.

The double time with which we, the audience, are called upon to leave the world of *MAD MEN* involves a *return to* and a *return of* the real of the past, at the same time that the fictional character, Don, who has been our guide throughout these time travels, dissolves into his own vision. Having dreamed up a commercial that really exists, he now vanishes into the surface of its moving images. By virtue of a series of lap dissolves, with the camera repeatedly panning back and forth along the beaming faces of the singers, the separate individuals that make up the



Fig. 5. MAD MEN. Waterloo So7Eo7. A Late Capitalist Version of the Body Politic

chorus are in turn blended together into a multi-layered composite image. At the end of the hilltop commercial, once the camera has moved into a long shot, the close-up of an enraptured young woman is shown, superimposed over the crowd, to unite all the separate figures into one collective body. We might read this as a late capitalist version of the body politic. We have not only left behind the realm of fiction, but the advertisement image itself has also been depleted of all referentiality. The scene it puts on display—in order to encapsulate the affective intensities of this historical moment of cultural transition, which is to say the transformation of counterculture into the language of consumer capitalism—taps into the singularity of this past even while transcending its specificity. Matthew Weiner's creation, *MAD MEN*, and the world his time traveling has evoked for us on screen each in turn dissolve into this temporal loop.