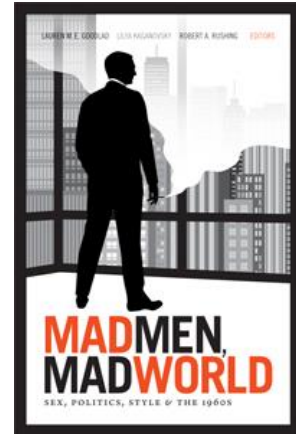


Lauren M. E. Goodlad, Lilya Kaganovsky & Robert A. Rushing (Eds.), **Mad Men, Mad World: Sex, Politics, Style & the 1960s**, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013, 420 pp., \$18.76 (paperback).

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From its 2007 debut to its sixth season's finale that aired in June 2013, AMC's series *Mad Men* has been greatly praised as well as emulated. Critics place it among the harbingers of the medium's renaissance in what has been called television's "platinum age," maintaining that its exploration of WASP ennui through the lives of characters gravitating around 1960s Madison Avenue attests, among other things, to an effort to elevate television's standard by means of a cinematographic, "quality" production style. Hailed as "must-see TV" by the likes of U.S. President Barack Obama, this is, indisputably, one of the most discussed TV series of all times.



Fueled by such enthusiasm and a growing success among the desirable demographic of affluent thirtysomethings and fortysomethings, *Mad Men* has inspired a considerable amount of journalistic and scholarly literature. Beyond a panoply of essays available in various anthologies and innumerable blogs and fan sites in different languages, including weekly columns published in *The Guardian*, Natasha Vargas-Cooper's *The Footnotes of Mad Men*, and the fan site *Basket of Kisses*, the show is the subject of a special section of *Cultural Studies Review* (Sunderland & Randell-Moon, 2012), a special section of *The American Journal of Psychoanalysis* (Boschan, 2011), and three edited collections titled *Mad Men and Philosophy: Nothing Is as It Seems* (South & Carveth, 2010), *Mad Men: Dream Come True TV* (Edgerton, 2011), and *Analyzing Mad Men: Critical Essays on the Television Series* (Stoddart, 2011).

As a recent addition to this impressively long list of publications, ***Mad Men, Mad World***, released by Duke University Press in 2013, is a comprehensive reading of the rich world of the series with an eye to making sense of its success among individuals who have, in all likelihood, not experienced the world of the show firsthand. What makes 21st-century viewers all over the world obsess over the insulated and self-referential cosmos of postwar, metropolitan America? According to editors Lauren Goodlad, Lilya Kaganovsky, and Robert Rushing, it is the show's ability to "adopt resonant material from the past to speak audibly to the present" (p. 11). It is in this light that the anthology's three sections ("Mad Worlds," "Mad Aesthetics," and "Made Men") delve into the production and distribution aspects of the show for a predominantly academic audience. Indeed, although the language of the essays is clear, the bibliographical and referential structure of the articles makes them mostly suitable for scholars, including students at the graduate level, who are familiar with the transdisciplinary and argumentative approach of cultural studies.

The authors of the 17 chapters that make up the collection offer their own, at times diverging, interpretations of how *Mad Men* establishes its successful continuity between past and present. Addressing topics as various as the Civil Rights movement (Clarence Lang), racial politics (Kent Ono), reproductive rights (Leslie J. Reagan), queerness (Alexander Doty), and female fashion (Mabel Rosenheck), the contributors unpack the narrative universe and explore the pleasures of looking at the 1960s from a post-1960s perspective. Collectively these heterogeneous contributions share two interrelated tenets that take *Mad Men* as (a) historical fiction (Goodlad) and (b) social critique (Varon).

Discussed as a serialized form of historical fiction where past and present are entangled, *Mad Men* confronts us with the workings of memory as it informs its representation of WASP urban culture, raising issues of repression, the archive, collective consciousness, nostalgia, and, of course, official history itself, as it is mediated by television. The Introduction aptly states that "*Mad Men* is not simply jostling memories but creating them" (p. 2). In taking account of these abstract concepts, the contributors apply them to the often painful reality shown on screen, their concern being to explore in which ways identity politics in the early 1960s evolved under the pressures of capitalism and conservative sociocultural tenets. Ultimately, the show negotiates, in a self-referential fashion, an uneasy and complicated identification with a white, middle-class collective self that is neither too alien nor too familiar to ignore for contemporary audiences. Viewers may not like what they see on screen—the sexism and racism, for example—but they do not feel wholly superior to it either. In her essay on *Mad Men's* "progressive realism," Caroline Levine calls this sensation "historical uncanny," contending that the series

persistently invites us to feel both near and far, both at home and not at home. It also invites us, in its own subtle way, to honor the social movements of the late 1960s, which rise up between our present and the past represented, creating the shock of historical difference. (p. 144)

Often referencing *Mad Men's* "fetishization" (p. 74) of the postwar past (Lang) evident in the accurate recreation of 1960s architecture, design (Harris), and clothing (Rosenheck), the essays explore the show's rendering of the complicated but ultimately disheartening "structures of feeling" (Goodlad, p. 343) informing pre-1968 culture. While Jeremy Varon writes of "disaffection" (p. 265) and a "permanent twilight" (p. 271) of happiness, Goodlad's essay focuses on the sense of permanent exile felt by Donald Draper, the main protagonist, describing him as a "figurative Jew." Along a similar line of argument, Kaganovsky points to Draper's "nonidentity," and Dana Polan argues for a more general feeling of "incompleteness" that pervades the narrative as a whole. This sense of crisis reworks the volume's historical argument. Not only does it expose *Mad Men's* nondocumentaristic nature, it also shifts attention from the obsession with accuracy and authenticity that characterizes journalistic and fan accounts of the show to the affective implications of watching. If history is set in stone and memory is, in contrast, fluid, partial, and often incoherent, the "Mad spaces" (Polan) created by executive producer Matthew Weiner extend to television. The screen becomes itself a dense repository of individual and collective tensions, of investigation and, possibly, recognition, where serial viewing sheds light on the syndrome of unhappiness and disconnection taking place at the height of neocapitalist rampage.

It is ultimately capitalism with its corollary of commodification and endlessly deferred and unfulfilled desires that becomes the spiral where the supposed evolutionary linearity of time collapses to bring the present into the past and the past into the present. It is also capitalism's dehumanizing drive that brings historical representation and social critique together in this volume. It is then not unsurprising that the contributors link so much of *Mad Men's* success to the audience's vicarious and seemingly perverse pleasure at watching unhappiness unfold on screen. Varon suggests that "above all, *Mad Men* screams that we have not found a solution to the happiness problem (at least among an influential slice of American life), no matter the advent of the 1960s and their enlightening sensitivities" (p. 270).

Yet, for all the writing about the intense feelings invited by the show and its serial format, *Mad Men, Mad World* does not provide any in-depth analysis of this experience of the audience's affective viewing. Even if the same thing could be said about other acclaimed TV series, this seems to be especially true for *Mad Men* in light of the almost cultish forms of consumption it has generated, including the themed parties repeatedly referenced in the essays, such as the one held in Times Square for the premiere of the show's third season. This latter aspect is conspicuously underexplored in the volume. Indeed, although the editors acknowledge that a study of the series would be incomplete without an exploration of its reception—they devote a section of the introduction to this notion—and Mabel Rosenheck's chapter on fashion mentions that the show's mass-mediated emphasis on retro clothing is pivotal in developing audience loyalty and interest, the book does not include any essay on audience or fan engagement.

Ultimately, the collection evidences the significant relationship that cultural criticism entertains with not only the show but with the literature devoted to it. Perhaps not as central to unpacking the textual pleasures and shortcomings of *Mad Men's* representation of troubled postwar identities, the love affair of criticism with itself nonetheless points to the contribution of scholarly and journalistic publications to the show's success and impressive longevity as an object of speculation. Every essay contained in the book provides an analysis of salient diegetic features as it establishes a direct dialogue with other opinions consigned to the Anglo-American press and Web. Not only are citations from newspaper and magazine articles regularly invoked to make sense of the televisual spectacle, they are employed extensively to map out the world of the show. In a truly metatextual effort, the authors in this volume acknowledge that *Mad Men's* boundaries are far from fixed. The series, it seems, acquires more depth and meaning precisely as it fuels investigation, something that, in turn, influences and inspires the showrunners' efforts to make it relevant to contemporary audiences.

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