

Two Book Reviews: *Mad Men*, *Mad World: Sex, Politics, Style & the 1960s* and *Mad Women: The Other Side of Life on Madison Avenue in the 60s and Beyond*

By Astrid Van den Bossche

Teddy told me that in Greek, nostalgia literally means the pain from an old wound. It's a twinge in your heart, far more powerful than memory alone. This device isn't a spaceship; it's a time machine. It goes backwards, forwards. It takes us to a place where we ache to go again. It's not called the wheel; it's called the carousel. It lets us travel the way a child travels. Round and around, back home again. To a place where we know we are loved. (Donald Draper in Mad Men, Season 1, Episode 12)

The first-season finale of AMC's *Mad Men* features one of the most memorable and quoted scenes of the hit series. Delivering a pitch in the guise of a harrowing soliloquy, Donald Draper woos both his filmic and extra-filmic audience by taking them on a journey through the highlights of his family life. Unbeknownst to his clients, but all too conspicuous to the audience, this gripping moment stands in stark contrast with the reality of his quickly disintegrating marriage, his inability to connect with his children, and the precariousness of his moral high ground. "A twinge in your heart" is just about right: it is a ride on a glittering carousel in the midst of an emotional wasteland.

[INSERT VIDEO_03_15.2_Carousel HERE]

The power of the scene, however, draws on more than the pathos of Don's personal history. Threading the photographs together in a compelling love story whilst skipping the tough and the ugly, the scene comments on our ability to re-imagine the past, adjusting it as necessary to suit our sensibilities. Concurrently, it exposes archetypal advertising techniques: repositioning the staid to the novel and engaging consumers through emotional prodding. As Lauren M. E. Goodlad on page 343 of "The Mad Men in the Attic: Seriality and Identity in the Modern Babylon" notes, "Don's winning pitch is [a form of] capitalist realism: isolating a series of attractive moments, it disarticulates them from concrete histories and elevates the sentimentality to abstract ideal—eliciting desire for the sentiment, and, presumably, for the product." As such, this single scene is an exemplar of the fascination that *Mad Men* holds for its audience, but

equally hints at its contrived nature: Speaking to our cultural imagination of the 1960s and the advertising industry, *Mad Men* is a commercial construct that, supported by its success, may unearth more about our own values, beliefs, and prejudices than it accurately depicts a time “long past”.

In the wake of its success, publishers have released a variety of biographies, retrospectives, and historical accounts of mid-century Madison Avenue, sniffing out the televised phenomenon’s real-life roots. In this issue of *Advertising & Society Review*, we reprint excerpts from Rosser Reeves’ 1961 *Reality in Advertising* as a taster of one stream of advertising dogma prevalent at the time, and from Mary Wells Lawrence’s *A Big Life (In Advertising)*, her autobiography in which she recounts numerous of her iconic campaigns. To supplement these original texts, this review presents two further works that pick up the *Mad Men* theme. Exploring, scrutinizing, and evaluating criticisms and commendations alike, *Mad Men, Mad World: Sex, Politics, Style & the 1960s*, edited by Lauren M. E. Goodlad, Lilya Kaganovsky, and Robert A. Rushing sets out to uncover the show’s relevance to our twenty-first century susceptibilities. Truth being occasionally stranger than fiction, we subsequently turn to advertising woman Jane Maas’s own account of that mad, mad world, *Mad Women: The Other Side of Life on Madison Avenue in the ‘60s and Beyond*, for comparison.

Roughly divided in three sections, every chapter in Goodlad, Kaganovsky, and Rushing’s compilation picks apart a critical aspect of the series. Part I, Mad Worlds, begins with Dana Polan’s discussion of *Mad Men*’s relation to the “madness” of the 1960s, drawing parallels and highlighting the differences with other representations of the decade in television and film. Dianne Harris follows with an exploration of the spatial environment reconstructed for the series; whether it’s the International Style Manhattan offices, the suburban home, or the city bachelor pad, all contribute to the narrative depth and development of the characters and their fictional world. Further fleshing out the show’s historical setting, the two following essays deliver a commentary

on the representation of race (authored by Clarence Lang) and reproductive history (by Leslie J. Raegan). Lang denounces *Mad Men's* lack of portrayal of African-Americans, whose presence is limited to a few peripheral characters with little or no depth. It reflects, she argues, an "American exceptionalist myth of gradual, inevitable progress toward racial democracy" (p. 74). Equally admitting the show's focus on white middle-class Americans, Raegan nevertheless admires its portrayal of gendered power struggles and reproductive issues. Both essays serve as precursors to further discussions in Part III. Finally, Michael Szalay concludes Part I by highlighting producer Matthew Weiner's mark on *Mad Men* in light of his involvement with the pioneering *The Sopranos*.

In Part II, *Mad Aesthetics*, varying degrees of depth are attributed and applied to one of the series' most commented-on features: style. Where some see an aesthetisation of the past that is mostly of visual interest and nostalgic import, others remark these stylistic choices fundamentally comment on the show's subject matter and our relation to it. "Progressive realism" is what Caroline Levine calls *Mad Men's* distinctive feel in "The Shock of the Banal," foregrounding the uncanny as a crucial device to de-familiarize and question the everyday. Taking on the challenge of pinning down Don Draper, Jim Hansen follows with a treatment of the 'dandy' as a type of masculinity, positioning Draper in a series of other literary and filmic masculinities. Picking up on Hansen's discussion of men's fashion, Mabel Rosenheck delves into the femininities represented through apparel: Betty's housewife New Look, Joan's 'bombshell' wardrobe, and Peggy's "working girl" makeover.

Yet aesthetics can equally comment on ways of knowing, and hence the last two chapters in Part II reflect on the implications of these stylistic choices. In "Against Depth," Irene V. Small argues that the seemingly superficial can become depthful ("operative") by virtue of its ability to comment on itself. "It will shock you how much this never happened: Antonioni and *Mad Men*" furthers the argument by paralleling *Mad Men's* aesthetic to Antonioni's body of work and highlighting their common interest in

the impenetrability of the surface, the fragility of identity, and the disappearance of being.

The particularities of *Mad Men's* aesthetization of the past naturally lead to questions of representation: stylistic commentary assumes a perspective on the represented and is sometimes indicative of value judgment. The last and third part, *Mad Men*, thus brings us full circle by turning its attention to the specifics of the show's depicted world, and in particular its representations of class, race, and gender in the 1960s. Lynne Joyrich's contribution, "Media Madness," discusses the medium's impact on its content, harking back to cinematic aesthetics as well as some bygone characteristics of television programming: "the program treats its personal and political issues alongside its treatment of currents of communication, literally thinking *through* the media to think through identity" (p. 220). "'Maidenform': Masculinity as Masquerade" by Lilya Kaganovsky, and "History Gets in Your Eyes: *Mad Men*, Misrecognition, and the Masculine Mystique" by Jeremy Varon again focus on Don's identity, acknowledging the many facets of this enigmatic character that both fascinate and unsettle: Don as a performer of masculinity, Don as the detached agent of the male gaze, and Don as a hot mess-in the existential sense. Kaganovsky and Varon agree: Don is "*the* fetish object of the show," (Kaganovsky, p. 255) his cracking veneer too familiar for comfort.

But beyond Don, the show depicts a variety of social dynamics that has also unnerved the contemporary viewer. In "The Homosexual and the Single Girl" (this title being a spoof on Helen Gurley Brown's 1961 how-to guide for single working women), Alexander Doty traces the show's treatment of queer sexualities, while Ken Ono does the same for race in "*Mad Men's* Postracial Figuration of a Racial Past." Both authors highlight the difficulty of accurately representing these uncomfortable social histories, without falling prey to the same prejudices that underwrote them. Attributing to *Mad Men* a self-consciousness with hints of self-reflection, they agree the show seems

nonetheless not to give either race or sexuality the type of attention that sufficiently addresses past injustices. In the penultimate chapter of the book ("The *Mad Men* in the Attic: Seriality and Identity in the Modern Babylon), Lauren E. Goodland compares *Mad Men's* to Trollope and Flaubert's serial realism, in which she identifies a similar engagement with the existential quandaries of living in a globalizing capitalist world.

Overall, *Mad Men, Mad World* posits the show as reconstructing a highly aestheticized 1960s, not only with great attention to historic detail, but also in conversation with our cultural imaginings. It may not surprise the reader that the real Kodak ad for the Carousel lacks the melodramatic undercurrent of Don's version, instead extolling the merits of this cutting-edge technology (see **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**). Naming the device the 'Carousel' seemed to have more to do with the shape and rotary motion of the device, than any implication of trips down memory lane and reminiscences of lost innocence. In how far, then, should we believe the world portrayed by *Mad Men*?



Relax! The spillproof tray shows 80 slides...automatically!

NEW KODAK CAROUSEL PROJECTOR

Here's the most carefree, automatic, and trouble-free way you've ever seen to show color slides. The new KODAK CAROUSEL Projector can make your slide shows half the work and twice the fun! Here's why:

The unique 80-slide revolving tray lets you enjoy twice as many slides at a sitting as average projectors. And this

tray's on top . . . so it takes only a second to put it on or take it off.

The smooth-working gravity feed makes jamming almost impossible. And slides can't spill . . . even if you drop the tray!

The projector can put on the whole show automatically for you. Or, a flick of the finger selects any slide you want.

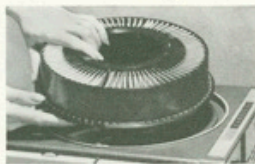
And editing is as simple: you just lift any slide from its slot!

Remote control lets you fine-focus, advance and reverse from up to 12 feet away. A lighted keyboard at the rear makes automatic and manual controls easy to operate even in the dark.

See the KODAK CAROUSEL Projector at your dealer's soon. Less than \$150.



Trays store like books! Just drop them in their individual jackets and store on a shelf.



Changes like a phonograph record! Unique revolving tray slips on and off in a second.



Lighted keyboard control! Simple push-button controls can be seen easily in the dark.



Vary the speed! 5-, 10-, 20-sec. automatic intervals, or manual change.

YOU CAN DEPEND ON THE NAME KODAK

Price subject to change without notice.

EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY, Rochester 4, N. Y.

ENJOY WALT DISNEY'S "WONDERFUL WORLD OF COLOR" SUNDAY EVENINGS, NBC-TV

Kodak
TRADEMARK

Figure 1. Kodak Carousel ad, 1962

A show in itself! The Kodak Carousel projector

Amazing performer, this color-slide projector. It won't jam, won't damage your slides. (It has no metal prongs to push your slides around.) Slides drop gently into place. You put on a dazzling 80-slide show automatically, starting with any slide. Or manually, by touching a button on the console panel or remote control unit. Remote focus, remote forward and reverse, too. Surprisingly, the Kodak Carousel projector is less than \$150! See your Kodak dealer. EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY, ROCHESTER, N. Y.

Price subject to change without notice.

Kodak
TRADEMARK

Figure 2. Kodak Carousel ad, 1964

Mad Women: The Other Side of Life on Madison Avenue in the '60s and Beyond recounts, in delightful detail, Maas's experiences in the advertising world as a young

copyrighter, a woman, and later, a well-established guru. In chapters that are thematically rather than chronologically themed, Maas picks up many of the issues treated at length in *Mad Men, Man World*—most of them even pop up in her reflection on a “typical day,” which makes up the first chapter. From fashion to motherhood, Maas details her experiences as prototypical of women in her (rare) position.

“Work first, husband second, children third” is her striking mantra, which she offers not without a measure of guilt towards her daughters. Yet it was the only way, she explains, that she was able to “do it all”: proceed up the ranks at Ogilvy & Mather and later Wells Rich Greene, set out on her own with the infamously difficult Leona Helmsley as her sole client (see chapter 10), raise two children (chapters 1, 3, and 4), and keep her marriage not only intact, but also happy (chapters 1, 3, and 4). In between giving us the backstories on still recognizable campaigns such as Maxim coffee (with Patricia Neal and her marriage to Roald Dahl), and “I Love NY” (of which she is “its only mother,” as she notes on page 174), Maas brings to life a Madison Avenue that features many of the real-life Don Drapers. Anecdotes about superstars Mary Wells Lawrence, David Ogilvy, and Gene Grayson are woven into Maas’s commentary on the drinking, smoking, sexist, “work hard, play hard” world of the Creative Revolution advertisers.

By virtue of being a woman, Maas’s professional history contains enough instances of startling sexism that suggest Peggy Olson, Joan Holloway, and Betty Draper’s portrayals in *Mad Men* are accurate. One of the other top women in the business, Shirley Polykoff of Clairol “Does she...or doesn’t she?” fame, even advised her to “Get all the money before they screw you, darling” (page 52). Squeezed in a double whammy of demeaning company practices (i.e., vastly lower salaries) and the stigmatizing mother/careerist dichotomy, the identities of Maas’ generation of female professionals were assaulted left, right, and center. Although advertising men, Maas retells puzzlingly, now like to boast about their pro-women business decisions, hiring one woman certainly did not undo the sexism in their daily lives. The sight of pregnant

women at work unnerved even Ogilvy, but then all women in the business world needed to quit as soon as they showed; indeed, we don't see Don Draper associating with growing bellies. At least Ogilvy cared enough to ask female consumers what they thought of their products—a revolutionary attitude.

Chapter 11, “Have you really come such a long way, baby?,” gives the mothering politics of the 1960s, which she describes in frustrating detail in chapter 4, an unsettling update: as if stuck in a time warp, the working mom feels she is “not doing *anything* as well as [she] should” (page 212). So the guilt, the frustration, and the anxiety that were associated with Maas's own career have, in her eyes, remained constants in the position of women over the last few decades. Too bad the advertising world, with its mission to be at a pace with the consumer, has not introduced better practices towards achieving gender-equitable childrearing and work/life balances.

In popular culture, advertising is still largely viewed either as an evil manipulator, or as a dismissible phenomenon “for the masses.” It is therefore an apt vehicle to explore how (little) our attitudes have changed since the 60s. Advertising is a glamorous yet morally objectionable occupation, so it is entirely credible ad men in the 60s displayed little morality. It is safe to imagine that they behaved in ways we love to condemn. They were in tune with culture, they were creative, but they also walked the liminal zone between staid civilization and the wilderness of the progressive. This position of superiority gave him—rarely her—a vantage point from which to play with humanity. It is perhaps with awkward relief that we, as the *Mad Men* audience, stand outside it, and it is on this note that Michael Bérubé warps up *Mad Men*, *Mad World* in his afterword “A Change is Gonna Come, Same As It Ever Was.” Tying together the commentaries presented in this compilation, he highlights the complex viewership that such a complex show elicits. And he details its sometimes uncomfortable, sometimes gratifying, attraction: “It is a good series about good advertising that advertises itself

well while calling advertising into question. Structural irony, *Mad Men* style. You'll love, and at the same time you won't love, the way it makes you feel" (page 359).

An intelligent treatise of the series, *Mad Men, Mad World* can occasionally be tough going for readers unversed in literary studies. Yet the work is well rewarded: A pleasurable read, it sets a high standard for the deeper reflection on popular culture and historic re-imaginings. Conversely, Maas's memoir is light and breezy: her accounts of those mad times are given with genial panache, and her insights are all the sharper for it. Together, these two books offer much to unravel for the 1960s advertising world aficionado. In her sanguine manner, Maas ends her book on a brief epilogue summarizing advertising's "sixties survivors's" opinions of *Mad Men*, and confirms: "The television show doesn't capture the most important creative secret of all. We were having a *wonderful* time. We were in love with advertising" (page 214).

Astrid Van den Bossche

Astrid Van den Bossche is a doctoral student in Management Studies at Saïd Business School, University of Oxford. Under the supervision of Professor Linda Scott, her research spans across marketing history, consumer culture theory, and branding. Prior to beginning her studies at Saïd Business School, Astrid obtained a Master of Studies in Film Aesthetics at the University of Oxford. She then taught as an Alumni Tutor at her undergraduate college, University College Maastricht in The Netherlands, before completing a Master in Management at London Business School. Her particular interest in branding and marketing was awakened during her work experience as a brand strategist.

Contact details

Saïd Business School
Park End Street
Oxford, OX1 1HP, UK
E-mail: astrid.vandenbossche@sbs.ox.ac.uk