There are a number of reasons why the Italian film director Michelangelo Antonioni speaks to the AMC television series *Mad Men*. To begin with, the show has evinced a consistent fascination with things Italian, from the ethically marked body and desires of Salvatore Romano (the show’s gay Italian American artist) to its fascination with Italian style. Betty Draper turns out to speak a fluent if stilted Italian, and showcases her appreciation for Italy by dressing up as an early 1960s Italian film vamp in the episode “Souvenir” (3.8). And Antonioni is explicitly cited in “The New Girl” (2.5), if not by name. When Don’s lover Bobbie Barrett discovers he likes movies, she gushes “Spartacus!” Then she says, “You seen the foreign ones? So sexy.” Don replies with the title of an Antonioni film as his paradigmatic choice for foreign and sexy: “La notte.”

*Mad Men* consistently reminds its viewers that Don Draper is a cinephile. Movies, we learn, fill Don’s offscreen time: when he’s not in his office or another woman’s bed, he is catching a matinee. His tastes are catholic, so much so that when it turns out he hasn’t seen *Bye Bye Birdie*, his protégée Peggy Olsen is shocked: “But you see everything!” So it’s no surprise Don has seen Antonioni. Indeed, Don knows Antonioni better than he realizes.
Don’s familiarity with Antonioni is—as we would expect from the show’s obsessively accurate creator, Matthew Weiner—consistent with the era depicted in Mad Men. Italian film enjoyed an almost unparallelled period of success and influence from the late 1950s to the early 1970s: directors such as Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti, Antonioni, and, later, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Bernardo Bertolucci were dominant figures whose fame helps explain Betty Draper’s familiarity with the fashion, style, and language of Italy. The same period saw an American love affair with Italy, especially on celluloid: Italy then, as now, was an American fetish, a privileged site of sexual, romantic, melodramatic, and comic fantasies (the films September Affair [1950], Roman Holiday [1953], Three Coins in the Fountain [1954], Summertime [1955], It Started in Naples [1960], and the comic Come September [1961], starring Rock Hudson, Gina Lollobrigida, Sandra Dee, and Bobby Darin, were all set in Italy). By 1963 even Gidget went to Rome (in Gidget Goes to Rome)—along with Betty Draper, evidently.

Don Draper, however, seems to prefer the art side of European films. La notte (1961), for example, is a typical Antonioni film: it stresses interpersonal, socioeconomic, and existential forms of alienation (figs. 10.1–10.2). Characters stand with their backs to each other. Sequences are long, and often wordless. There is little or no plot, and character actions are not driven

**Figure 10.1.** Lidia in La notte (1961): disconnected and isolated.
by strong underlying motivations, but are aimless and wandering. Characters are passive or even unresponsive. There is a considerable amount of real time in the film. Characters seek erotic adventures but are left unsatisfied by them—as in *Mad Men*, infidelity is commonplace and yet does not seem to provide any “way out.” Antonioni’s camera strays away from its human subjects—sometimes while they are speaking—to contemplate the deserted landscape, or architecture uncontaminated by human figures. *Mad Men* has clearly drawn on Antonioni’s stylings: the persistent theme of alienation; characters who are dissatisfied or “blank”; infidelity that fails to stem the characters’ sense of emptiness; and—by television standards—a surprising willingness to have scenes without dialogue, real-time sequences, and a pacing that is slow, if not Antonioni’s glacial pace.

But *Mad Men* shares something deeper with Antonioni, something that goes beyond an early 1960s culture interested in exploring sexual liberation, pervaded by a sense of alienation and a love of midcentury modern style. What *Mad Men* really shares with Antonioni are three fundamental concerns: (1) the impenetrable surface of things, especially other people; (2) the fragility and fluidity of identity, which appears not as a foundational feature of the subject but as an external shell, discarded at will; and (3) a dedication to watching things—especially people—disappear.

In a very significant sense, these three categories—superficiality, identity exchange, and the disappearance of the subject—are all fundamentally
linked. Slavoj Žižek has persistently argued that apparently “deep” phenomena (religious belief, identity) are in fact entirely superficial. He is particularly fond of Pascal’s motto—Act as if you believe, and you shall believe—but with a twist. For Pascal, the motto suggested that “mere” action, a rote following of banal exterior rituals (genuflecting before the altar, for instance) would later lead to a real interior conviction, a true part of the self. But it also suggests that perhaps the apparently deep, inner conviction of religious belief is nothing more than the habit of mere exterior ritual. Žižek invariably returns to the tag line of the X-Files: “The truth is out there.” This phrase does not mean that the truth is in some distant and inaccessible place, however—rather, that the truth is “out there,” entirely visible, on the surface (Žižek, Plague of Fantasies, 3–7).

Indeed, numerous commentators on Antonioni have noted that his “true vision” is not to be found in the “depths” of his characters (who generally appear to have very little interiority in any event), but in the surfaces his camera prefers to film, especially landscapes and architecture. And what these reveal is a preference for flat, closed, and deserted forms. In L’avventura (1960), the character Claudia approaches a building in a deserted town that appears to have been designed by the artist Giorgio de Chirico. She presses her face to a shuttered window and gently calls, “C’è nessuno?” (Nobody’s there?) Only her own voice replies in an echo. In a Žižekian sense, it contains the “real” her, the rote repetition of her external actions in the form of an echo. Act as if you are Claudia, and you shall be Claudia.

But Claudia herself is not acting as if she is Claudia; how can she, if her “innermost truth” is that she is an empty building, shuttered and inaccessible? “Claudia” means nothing more than a rote repetition of a script. And this brings me to the second category—identity exchange. Antonioni’s dissatisfied, restless characters, hoping to find a truth that has depth (“the truth is in here”), often find themselves assuming the role of another. If “Claudia” is just a cipher, a name in scare quotes, perhaps her friend “Anna” has authentic being, depth, and interiority. And so when Anna disappears, Claudia takes her place, and her boyfriend. It is enough, in this vision, to fill the same structural place—Anna’s boyfriend now loves Claudia; Claudia now enjoys the same rich hotels and friends as Anna did before. The same exchange takes place in a more radical way in a later Antonioni film, The Passenger (1975), in which David Locke (Jack Nicholson) exchanges identities with a recently deceased guest at his hotel, becoming a man named Robertson. Locke does not take on Robertson’s mannerisms or personality, or attempt to look like him. Instead, he follows the most superficial and exterior parts of Robertson:
he simply keeps all the appointments in Robertson’s appointment book. For the rest of the world, this is enough for Locke to “be” Robertson, to be him in perhaps the most profound way possible: to live and eventually to die as Robertson. Antonioni signals the identity exchange the same way he did for Claudia and Anna: through an exchange of shirts.

For viewers of Mad Men, this will sound rather familiar. In the show’s backstory (revealed directly in flashback), there is a man named Dick Whitman who is, socioeconomically, a “nobody.” He exchanges dog tags, however, with his commanding officer, a certain Don Draper, when the officer is killed. And so Whitman, this whit of a man, both dies (officially, legally) and becomes someone new. It is certainly a symbolic promotion from an everyday Tom, Dick, or Harry—Dick in this case—to a title of minor Spanish nobility. Don (there is of course also an erotic promotion here, from a vulgar term for male genitals to the suggestion of an accomplished seducer: Don Draper is certainly a Don Juan—or he is at least draped in the outfit of a Don Juan). And this transformation brings me to this chapter’s title.

After Don’s assistant, Peggy, becomes pregnant without realizing and gives birth, she goes a little crazy and spends some time in the hospital. Don eschews conventional ego-bolstering or self-help psychology—he does not tell her to get in touch with her feelings or that she needs to confront what happened. Instead, he urges her to simply forget. Don has already learned from Antonioni that the subject is something like a suit of clothes that may be disposed of at will (he is, after all, quite literally a draper): a shirt or a set of dog tags to be exchanged for something new. He tells her with conviction: “This never happened.” Then he pauses, and says as much to himself as to her, “It will shock you how much it never happened.”

In the ironically titled episode “Souvenir” (3.8), Don’s subordinate at the advertising firm, Pete Campbell, goes to a department store with a stained dress. Joan, formerly the head secretary at the agency but now working as a store manager, promises to have the dress replaced as a favor to Pete’s wife, Trudy. As they continue speaking, it becomes apparent that each is concealing something, and that the other is aware of it. Joan doesn’t want Pete to let anyone know that she has taken a new job (her husband, a doctor, should be providing but cannot), and Pete doesn’t want anyone to know about the dress (it doesn’t belong to his wife). Without ever openly stating their concerns, they come to an uneasy and familiar truce. “This never happened,” Joan assures Pete, a promise that this, too, will disappear from memory. When Pete returns the now unstained dress to its owner, the German au pair next door, and then uses the favor to pressure her into sex, he tries to make
the same pact with her. “It never happened,” he says, ostensibly about the
stain. And indeed, although the girl’s employer and then Pete’s wife eventually
learn that Pete raped or coerced the girl into sex, no one ever says so out
loud; everyone appears to forget. A collective, unspoken agreement reigns
over the show: this never happened. There is still a dress (even if it has been
exchanged), but the stain on it is gone—it becomes a souvenir of what can-
not be said or recalled, what never happened. The episode’s literal souvenir is
a tacky gold charm of the Colosseum that Don gets for Betty from the hotel
gift shop in Rome. Betty makes her dissatisfaction clear, saying bitterly that
she can look at it when they “talk about the time [they] went to Rome.” But
what they cannot talk about, cannot recall, is precisely the fleeting Eros so
typical of Antonioni: Betty dressing up as an Italian vamp, flirting with Ital-
ian men, pretending to meet Don for the first time at a café, sleeping with
him on this casual “first date.” These fantasies and sex games will have “never
happened” back in Betty’s domestic, suburban world, and the ruins of the
Colosseum are a reminder not of an event, but of the erasure of an event.

This is just one way that, like Antonioni, Mad Men is concerned with
photographing an absence or a disappearance. It shows things as they are
vanishing, and allows us to watch their disappearance so that we too may be
shocked by the ease with which the most permanent and foundational cate-
gories of our lives are disposed. Within the show, identity (Don), personal
history (Peggy, Pete), and desire (virtually all of the characters) disappear,
and leave little or no trace of what they were before. The show is often pre-
sented as a kind of historical re-creation, but its real investment is in the
power of forgetting. Its larger project is tracing the disappearance of a set
of economic, sexual, and racial relations that seem unimaginable to many of
today’s spectators. Don knows that the first thing people want is to forget.

As with Antonioni, the “depth” of Mad Men is found in its preoccupa-
tion with surfaces and appearances — its obsessive attention to “superficial”
exteriors: props, clothes, design, advertisements. This has made the show
appear complicit in the superficiality of the advertising culture it some-
times critiques, and many have been happy to celebrate a return to mid-
century modern design (from the website Brides.com’s advice on how to
“Mad Men your wedding” to the Banana Republic ad campaign discussed
by Mabel Rosenheck in this volume). Here we learn that “to Mad Men” is
now a transitive verb in English, and the advertisements reduce binary gen-
der opposition (men and women) to specific items of clothing—suits and
skirts. Following Žižek again here I suggest that “the truth is out there,” in
the sense that it is to be found precisely on those pointless surfaces: these
characters are what they wear in the most literal sense. “Don Draper” is the person wearing Don Draper’s dog tag. The identity “Don Draper” has no other meaning. This is why the counterculture’s denigrating epithet for corporate bosses is more accurate than they realized: corporate bosses are literally “suits,” not people, something that Don dimly realizes. In Antonioni and in Mad Men, to put on a suit makes you a boss.

A few years ago a phenomenon swept the Internet: “Mad Men yourself” (the transitive verb, now reflexive). An AMC-sponsored website invited the viewer to construct an avatar or online self-image in early 1960s Saul Bass style, built out of a limited repertoire of hairstyles, corporate outfits, and period-appropriate accessories (fig. 10.3). The site was quite explicit about the nature of this virtual paper doll: “Be sleek, be stylish—be yourself!” If you were not sure how to “be yourself” (an apparently tautological endeavor that strangely requires a great many psychosocial and material props), Mad Men could teach you—you do it like Don Draper, by assuming a series of apparently false and superficial signs until a kind of critical ontological mass is achieved. Voilà! Overnight, on the popular social networking site Facebook, users’ normal photos disappeared and were replaced by these Mad Men-ized “suits” and “skirts.”

As much as these dress-up games may be consonant with capitalist directives to produce new styles, fashions, and merchandise, I suggest that there is also something potentially risky in the exposure of the arbitrary nature of identity. Like Betty with her fantasies of being a “dolce vita” courtesan, we play dress-up at costume parties and online, but such play can be an unspeakable embarrassment—not only because it may not fit with our idea of who we are (mature, restrained, adult, for example) but also because it suggests that the very notion of “who you are” may be arbitrary, something that one day will have “never happened.”

To make the model of identity (and its risks) explicit, I turn to Jacques Lacan and his essay “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function.” In that essay, Lacan argued that the subject assumes an identity early in life by taking an image as his or her self, as in a mirror. For Lacan, the key here is that this is a mistake, a misrecognition, akin to confusing things and the words that denote those things. After all, I am not my mirror image, not only because it reverses left and right, but more crucially because it represents me as complete, rather than reflecting my psychic disorganization. For the rest of my life I assume a series of specular images, consciously and unconsciously, that I identify as me, images with a coherence and permanence that my own psychic and socioeconomic life lacks.
Here capitalism faces an essential contradiction: on the one hand, it depends on the subject assuming a series of ever-new images as identities in order to sustain its relentless expansion (“Just do it,” or “Be all you can be”), but on the other hand, there is an inevitably traumatic dimension in the loss of one’s old identity. After all, if my old self—the one before I became a “Gillette man”—was so disposable (like my new razors), why does this new one have such an aura of permanence? Why is this the “real me”? The fissure or gap between the trauma of losing who you were and the imperative to become someone new is not a challenge to the dominant ideology; it is the traumatic kernel around which the pearl of ideology grows in the first place. This is the risk at stake in *Mad Men*’s credits, repeatedly fracturing, dropping, and reconstituting the subject; it is the risk in our 1960s costume parties and *Mad Men* Facebook profiles—they encourage us both to consume and to question the value of that consumption (a kind of “psycho-ideology of everyday life”). This is not a naive rhetoric of “resistance”: instead, it captures some of how *Mad Men* both attracts us and makes us feel uneasy, how the show makes viewers cognizant of the “ideological work” that advertising does, while simultaneously manipulating viewers with a parade of seamless, seductive images.

In *La notte*, Antonioni’s preoccupation with watching people disappear is a constant concern. It is present in the film’s opening shots of completely deserted high-rises in Milan. It appears again in the first sequence with dialogue, as the principal characters Giovanni (Marcello Mastroianni) and Lidia (Jeanne Moreau) sit in a hospital room with their dying friend—who afterward disappears from the film, dying offscreen. There are Antonioni’s signature tracking shots, in which a camera follows a character—but in Antonioni, when the character moves out of sight, the camera lingers, registering the character’s absence. At one point, Lidia stops to watch some boys firing off rockets in a field. Although the spectators crane their necks to see the rocket above, the camera lingers instead on the boys on the ground, watching them slowly vanish in an expanding cloud of smoke, a cloud that expands toward the spectators—and presumably toward us as well (figs. 10.4–10.7). Later Lidia returns to the spot with Giovanni and says, “C’erano lì; adesso sono andati via” (They were over there; now they’ve gone away), a phrase that could stand for all of Antonioni’s work. This gesture is absolutely foundational, as Rohdie remarks: the “fate of characters . . . of objects and images to disappear, to lose form and identity, is a permanent feature of all of Antonioni’s films” (4). Elsewhere Rohdie notes Antonioni’s preference for “the dissolution of shapes, the disappearance of objects and their reappear-
FIGURE 10.3.
Figures 10.4–10.7. A cloud of rocket exhaust grows larger, reaching toward the spectators (*La notte*).
ance as other things, still figurative, yet threatened with a loss of identity, a blur of outlines” (15).

Equally, *La notte* films the disappearance of desire. Eros is the only element in Antonioni’s films that ever seems to have the potential to drag his characters out of their persistent ennui and alienation. Eros appears unexpectedly, suddenly animating Antonioni’s characters—they smile, make eye contact, joke, and play. A nameless female patient asks Giovanni for a match (the heat of desire), only to abruptly blow it out, rather than light her cigarette with it. She pulls Giovanni into her room for an attempted coupling that is as madly passionate as it is stylized and empty (see fig. 10.8, but note how this image is repeated in a darker vein with Valentina [Monica Vitti] at the end of the film [fig. 10.9]). They are interrupted, and Giovanni drifts away. Desire is at war here, as it always is for Antonioni, with the camera’s overwhelming interest in photographing empty or nearly empty space, abstract forms, shadows, black and white silhouettes—and so desire turns away from its ultimate aim.

Lidia is the most depressed character in *La notte*, flat and without affect, but she is persistently brought back to life by brief flirtations as she walks about the city—a waiting cabbie, two men passing by, her husband as they are about to go out to a nightclub. In something like the film’s climax (if that term can be applied to Antonioni’s films), Lidia is caught in a downpour with Roberto (Giorgio Negro), who has pursued her all evening. They are
filmed largely in silhouette and their speech is inaudible as they drive slowly through the rain. Lidia is luminous, finally happy, beaming, gesticulating, energetic—alive. Until Roberto touches her; then her smile fades, and she returns to the car and asks to be taken home. The disappearance of desire is marked by the return of spoken language—suddenly, the spectator can again hear them speak.

This disappearance of desire is never clearer than in Lidia’s brief flirtation with her husband: she emerges in her new dress as the couple prepares to go out to a nightclub. Her husband admires her—there is the “catch” of Eros. He looks at her with desire. She reciprocates and begins to sway her hips, make herself visible for him, and she turns to him with a smile. But Eros fades, and as it fades, so does the person who was animated by it (figs. 10.10–10.11). The eclipse of desire in Antonioni is tantamount to the eclipse of the subject. Lidia turns away, falls back into the shadows, disappears, a gesture repeated elsewhere in the film by other characters.

These two kinds of disappearance are united in La notte’s final sequence. Giovanni and Lidia discuss their vanished love. Giovanni desperately embraces her—is this a renewal of their former passion or a grotesque and pathetic “going through the motions”? Antonioni doesn’t care. His camera, as it so frequently does, cuts sideways to a deserted, adjacent field. A slow leftward dolly; the sound of their tryst is replaced by the sound of the distant jazz band, oddly close and present. The camera ends by attempting to
register an absence. It is hard to convey just how relentlessly Antonioni does this—the filming of absence—but his film *L’eclisse* (*The Eclipse*, 1962) is perhaps the best example. Here another estranged couple makes an appointment to meet and give their relationship another try. Neither shows up—but Antonioni’s camera does, for a seven-minute montage of all the places in which they are not. And the closing montage of *L’eclisse* demands to be compared to Antonioni’s single most famous shot: the seven-minute circular tracking shot that ends *The Passenger*, one that also photographs the definitive disappearance of the subject, as Locke-cum-Robertson begins the shot alive and asleep on the bed, but ends it dead.

*Figures 10.10–10.11. The “spark” of erotic desire . . . which fades away (La notte).*
In *Mad Men*, that vanishing is always less definitive—there is always the possibility that Don Draper/Dick Whitman will “get in touch with his true self,” or that Betty will “become who she always wanted to be” when she gets away from Don. This is television, after all (and indeed, the fourth season of *Mad Men* flirts with this possibility throughout, as Don attempts to restrain his drinking, get in shape, and crusade against smoking, while the fifth season delights in turning Betty into the person she never wanted to be). But these potential “self-realizations” are constantly put at risk in the show, particularly through the figure of Don. The thrill of Don is the same as the thrill of vertigo—not so much the fear that one might fall as the excitement of giving in to that terrible temptation and jumping. Don shows a remarkable willingness to do this, not only before the show begins when he exchanges “Dick Whitman” for “Don Draper,” but also in episodes such as “The Jet Set” (2.11), where he appears perfectly ready to dispose of his old drapery and don a new set of clothes for an endless California vacation. (He does the same in the first season’s “Nixon vs. Kennedy” [1.12], where he offers to disappear in Los Angeles with his lover Rachel Menken.) In “Out of Town” (3.1) Don is mistaken for another man by a stewardess. In yet another recall of Antonioni (and Hitchcock, of course), Don has borrowed his brother-in-law’s valise, which has “William Hofstadt” engraved on it. He looks baffled when the stewardess addresses him as Mr. Hofstadt, but then he realizes once again the pleasures of the dissolution of identity. “Call me Bill,” he says with a smile.

Finally, the credit sequence reminds us in every episode that Draper and the other characters are a collection of flat images (silhouettes, suits), prone to dissolve at any moment (fig. 10.12). (This was the real lesson of AMC’s “*Mad Men* Yourself”—learning that you are also an assembly of crude vector graphics, assembled in haste and prone to dissolution, just as in the credit sequence.) Or, as Bert Cooper says when pressuring Don to finally sign with Sterling Cooper: “After all, when it comes down to it, who’s really signing this contract?”

Something changes, however, between Antonioni’s obsessive photographing of absence and the same interests in *Mad Men*. For Antonioni, the instability of identity is always charged with a sense of inevitability, even doom: in *The Passenger*, Locke can become Robertson, but the itinerary he embarks on when he does so can have only one end. Identity change in Antonioni is always something like suicide (very often it is suicide). *Mad Men*, however, has all the possibilities and limitations of any serial format (although it has not shied away from suicide as a solution to existential dilemmas), as well
as the particular ones that pertain to television. Draper must go on in some form or another, but “Don Draper” has become a successful brand that cannot be simply dissolved. *Mad Men* watches things disappear, but not always the same way that Antonioni does. At the end of *Blow-Up* (1966), the protagonist simply fades out of existence in a lap dissolve, leaving behind nothing but a field of green grass, while at the end of *Zabriskie Point* (1970) everything literally blows up, a general detonation of the world and film.

But perhaps the most crucial difference between *Mad Men* and Antonioni is in how viewers have responded to the mode of destabilized identity that each makes available. Antonioni was an infamous but not exactly popular director (he called his own films “tremendous commercial failures”), and his lessons about identity and its disappearance were largely seen as avant-garde, radical, and heavy (Chatman, 1). As Peter Bondanella reminds us, “when *Blow-Up* appeared in 1966, the critics and reviewers reacted as if Antonioni had tackled—and resolved—most of the weighty problems of Western metaphysics” (225). But it is quite clear that viewers of *Mad Men* do not conceive of the show, or even of Don Draper’s transient and tenuous identity, in this way. The credit sequence reminds us in every episode that Don falls, his world disintegrates, identity is a construction that, when peered at too closely, opens up into a terrifying and vertiginous abyss of nothingness; but at the end, this falling figure is always miraculously reconstituted, apparently seated on a firm foundation, stable. *Fort/da*. Unlike the traumatic dissolution of the subject in Antonioni, *Mad Men’s* “dissolved subject” ap-
pears at ease—the credit sequence begins with Don stiffly upright, shoulders tensed, holding a briefcase, but it ends with him relaxed, an arm casually outstretched, cigarette dangling from his right hand (fig. 10.13). Surely we must imagine a drink in that other, unseen hand.

On some level, the ending of the third season of the show mirrors this movement as a whole; the ad agency of Sterling Cooper becomes progressively more and more entangled in a series of stifling relationships, just as Don’s marriage with Betty becomes increasingly untenable. The third season chronicles the disintegration of the old and the reconstitution of the new; its stirring finale (“Shut the Door. Have a Seat,” 3.13) features a small band of former Sterling Cooper employees, now ad agency renegades, operating what is effectively a start-up in a hotel room, pretending to be something that they are not (but hope one day to be). They too have changed their name (now Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce). This, of course, is also the story of Don Draper, who re-creates himself as something he is not (an officer, not an enlisted man; a professional Manhattan sophisticate instead of an Illinois bastard doomed to poverty), but something that he will one day be.

In “The Gypsy and the Hobo” (3.11) Don and Betty finally discuss Don’s identity change. Twice they address the question of names:

**Betty:** Is that you? **Dick**? Is that your name?

**Don:** People change their names, Betts. You did.

**Betty:** I did. I took your name.
DON: Where do you want me to start?
BETTY: What’s your name?
DON: [quietly, but emphatically] Donald Draper. [Very long pause]
But, it did used to be Dick Whitman.

Betty’s outrage (she uses Don’s former name as both a proper name and an insult) is checked somewhat when Don notes, again, the quotidian nature of these identity changes. Don’s transformation could be labeled “identity theft,” but Don simply claims that everyone changes their name. Elizabeth Hofstadt became Betty Draper, and Don emphasizes this by not using either of those names, calling her instead “Betts” (he also refers to her as “Birdy”). When it comes right down to it, who’s really signing her divorce papers, anyway?

NOTES

1. Seymour Chatman writes that “seeking whatever certainties it can find, all [Antonioni’s] camera can be sure of is the regularity of plane geometry. In such moments, the screen ceases to be a window looking into deep space and becomes a nearby surface . . . against which the characters are flattened” (119). Chatman also notes that for Antonioni’s characters, “no real effort is made to find out what lies under the surface. Perhaps the implication is that there is nothing there, that these people are all surface, that they do not know how they feel” (27). Sam Rohdie’s vision of Antonioni’s flatness or superficiality is more complex, always linked to dissolution: “a surface, which, though pierced, swallows things up, without a trace, into a nothingness; the loss of figuration, of objects losing shape, and the shimmering between that loss and the figure itself, like a corpse, or an image . . . ; a story, as if appearing from nowhere and just as easily disappearing into a void” (39). Critical attention to the surfaces of Antonioni continues (see Paulicelli, for example).

2. Numerous viewers, including some of the authors in this collection, celebrated the show’s third season by dressing up for a Mad Men–themed party — and yet it will shock you how much that never happened.


5. If I remember correctly, several of the authors in this volume changed their identities on Facebook in just this way — but perhaps that never happened either.