Mad Men, Mad World

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In the fall of 2009 the television program *Sesame Street* debuted its own television network—“emc, the Emotional Movie Channel”—which proudly presented a stylish period drama. In it, three dapper Muppets meet in a wood-paneled office of a New York advertising firm to pitch ideas for their “Happy Honey Bear” account. They run through various possibilities: an image of raccoons running off with a bear’s honey and one of a weeping bear looking at his now empty jar. While the first makes them all “mad, mad men” and the second makes them “sad, sad men,” they finally hit on the perfect picture, with the bear as satisfied consumer, dripping with honey as he eats out of the gooey pot, and the ad men themselves are now “happy, happy men.” Going from mad to glad, Muppet Draper notes, is quite an “emotional roller coaster,” but it is one that still yields his praise of “good work, sycophants” for the ad men’s ability finally to reach a happy medium—one brought to us literally through the medium of television.

This parody from *Sesame Street* introduces many of *Mad Men’s* notable aspects: the program’s emotionality (or lack thereof); the performativity of identity (here literalized by the use of performing puppets); power relations in the image and in the workplace; and change or stasis over time. Yet
I start with this example primarily to raise that question of “medium,” happy or otherwise. For fascinating as those issues of affect and identity, style and signification, power and history are (and they are subjects to which I will return), for me the key issue that this skit introduces is that of televisuality itself: the point (so obvious and yet so overlooked) that these are TV shows.

Of course, neither PBS’s *Sesame Street* nor AMC’s *Mad Men* is a typical television show. Both their evaluative and institutional standings distinguish them from the usual fare: as well-made educational TV for kids and high-production-value drama for adults, they seem to stand out from the rest of the flow—which is further reinforced by their locations not on broadcast commercial TV but on public television and a specialty cable channel. Yet it is precisely what they reveal about TV flow—a term I am using to refer both to television’s particular textual/technological form and to the shifting course of that form—that is so telling, indicating something about television’s operations as well as its historical changes, with implications for the issues (textual, sexual, technological, ideological, personal, political) treated on *Mad Men*. That is, I am interested in the way in which *Mad Men*’s position as a media product might produce the positions it represents and addresses. Defined by such (re)production and reciprocal flows, *Mad Men* is an ad-supported TV show about advertising, branded by its retro look and airing on a channel that too is branded by a celebration of looks of the past even as it also turns toward the future of new televisualities in digital culture. It is how that media identity of the program intersects in complex ways with the identities represented on the program (themselves defined by both the enactment and disavowal of past heritages as well as future imaginings) that I explore in this chapter.

**FLOWS AND FREE FALLS**

To skip to those imaginings, though, is to fast-forward ahead of the argument, risking falling into those futures (much like the figure in *Mad Men*’s opening credits) before surveying the media landscapes and flows from which they emerge (or the media skyscrapers and streams through which the figure falls). So let me go back to the beginning with *Sesame Street*. This is a text, in fact, that I use at the beginning of my TV studies classes—not as my own attempt to lure audiences through nostalgia nor as a coded message about the lessons to expect in my classes. Rather, I use it to introduce exactly that concept of TV flow—which, I would argue, is not only the inaugural concept in television studies but still one of its most important (despite—
maybe even because of—changes in media). First coined as a critical term by Raymond Williams in his book *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, published in 1974 (though used earlier as an industrial term in broadcasting and, of course, advertising), *television flow* describes how commercial TV is constructed as an ongoing stream of material, with each segment yielding the next, the better to keep viewers tuned in across the lineup and, more importantly, the ads. Yet television flow is equally marked by discontinuity as TV highlights what some critics have called “video bites”: separable bits that offer their own small charges of visual, informational, and narrative pleasure (Mullen). In other words, television enacts a curious rhythm of flow and segmentation, protraction and interruption, yielding a paradoxical sense of continuity through discontinuity that forms not only the institutional operations of TV but the televisual experience as a whole.

However odd Williams may have found this experience in 1974, rendering his confusion of promos and ads with a TV program “proper,” this flow has since become so naturalized that it not only defines basic U.S. network programming (where, again, it is designed to allow and accentuate TV commercials, which therefore must be defined as TV’s “proper texts”). It also characterizes the structure even of programs on public and premium channels that do not rely on the implicit contract established between broadcast television and its viewers: the exchange of “free” programming for audiences’ willingness to accept commercial “interruptions.” *Sesame Street* provides a demonstration of this institutionalization of flow and segmentation even beyond an institutional commercial requirement, as each episode is composed of a succession of bits that is very much like a lineup of ads; indeed, episodes are “sponsored by” letters and numbers. Designed to promote literacy (even emotional literacy, as seen in the *Mad Men* skit) through those building blocks of communication, *Sesame Street* also implicitly teaches “television literacy” through its use of TV flow.

*Sesame Street* is now hardly alone as a program that is not institutionally dependent on broadcast flow—though most of the others that need not “interrupt” themselves do so not by “public” funding but by “private” sales (subscription channels, pay-per-view, DVDs, and so on). Certainly all of these terms (public, private, free, pay) have to be interrogated. In fact, this was Williams’s point in detailing how scheduled flow functions as the mechanism of articulation not only between the “technology” and “cultural form” of his title but between television’s textuality and its economics, and, beyond that, media formations and social formations more broadly. As the flow of the TV schedule has been ordered by and, in turn, itself ordered the
workday and week, becoming a household timetable and a national calendar, television has produced, in mutual determination, norms of the family and nation. In so doing, it has articulated the “domestic” and the “social,” “labor” and “leisure,” the “public” and the “private.” Bringing outside events into our living rooms even as it gives us access to the living (and board) rooms on our screens, television has served as the means by which the times, spaces, and identities of our lives are both distinguished and connected. As a television program that often includes other television programs, *Mad Men* offers plenty of examples of TV’s articulating role: there are scenes of the kids watching Saturday cartoons or “family hour” adventures, while, at other times of the day, the men catch the news, and women, using TV as an extension of their caretaking role, make do with what others have on. When something disrupts these patterns—for instance, when the ambitious account executive Pete Campbell watches a kids’ show during the daytime or, more dramatically, everyone breaks for coverage of the Kennedy assassination—it is a sure sign that something is wrong, personally, politically, or both (fig. 11.1).

**TIME MACHINES**

Some critics say that in our multichannel universe (with specialty channels that compose particular tastes rather than being scheduled to capture the “general audience”), “television flow” is an outmoded concept, applicable
to the TV of the 1960s that *Mad Men* references but not to the system to which it owes its own existence. *Mad Men* thus treats historical television like other aspects of history: through a play of sameness and difference, creating a potent mixture of identification and disidentification. There has been much commentary on the program’s precise use of period details and the ways in which, through invocation of the past, *Mad Men* reveals how “we” were formed. But those stylized invocations are as likely to produce an exclamation of “not us” as a feeling of recognition, with the program emphasizing precisely those details that are now strange to us (so that we are encouraged to gasp at the smoking and drinking, the careless littering and sexism, as much as to be charmed by the vintage fashions, furniture, and television consoles).

In this way—through our own affective flows—we can move in and out of history and presence, which *Mad Men*, paradoxically, can both engage and disavow: subjecting the past to its aestheticized view, the program raises issues for interrogation yet also allows for their evasion. As this volume demonstrates, many fascinating issues emerge in the program: the rise of corporate culture, the status of women at work and home, perceptions of race and ethnicity, and so on. Yet as easily as *Mad Men* may invite us to ponder these for the present, it also allows us to put them aside, to view them as simply set (as if on an old TV set) in the past. Indeed, as stated on *Mad Men* itself, there is profit in forgetting. That is what Bert Cooper, senior partner at Sterling Cooper Advertising, says when Pete tries to expose the true identity of “Don Draper”; but Don’s own words about remembering and forgetting may be even more telling.

I am referring to what is perhaps the program’s most famous scene, when Don lyricizes the temporality and emotions operative not in television, but in another media apparatus: the slide projector. Screening the “that-has-been,” this is a mediation identified in terms of nostalgia, about which Don says: “It’s delicate, but potent. . . . In Greek, ‘nostalgia’ literally means ‘the pain from an old wound.’ . . . This device . . . isn’t a spaceship, it’s a time machine. It goes backwards, and forwards. It takes us to a place where we ache to go again. . . . It lets us travel the way a child travels—around and around and back home again.” Television too might be discussed as a kind of time machine that goes forward and backward. Discussions of TV flow emphasize the former, implying that, as it carries us along, television pushes us ever onward. This is its illusion of “liveness”: the sense, even in historical programming, that we are continually checking in, being kept up-to-date with ongoing events. The aforementioned Kennedy story provides an excel-
lent example: even long after we, the Mad Men viewers, know the outcome, watching the coverage via the characters’ ever-present TV sets is still gripping as we too are caught up in television’s temporal progression.

Because of this, televisual form has often been seen as impeding historical consciousness. Yet as television theorists such as Mimi White, Gary Edgerton, and Steve Anderson have argued, and programs such as Mad Men demonstrate, history is also invoked by television.8 It is invoked, in fact, in a wide variety of ways: through the genre of “historical drama”; particular strategies of narration like the flashback; familiar actors who play on our memories of prior roles; recasts, remakes, and reruns on TV; shows compiled of clips of previous programming; and even whole channels devoted to “preserving our television heritage.”9 In other words, rather than ahistorical, television might best be described as multiply historical, flowing forward and back, wheels within wheels, letting us travel, not quite like a child, but in a way that only media allow.

**STYLE, SENSATION, STRATEGY: THE CINEMATIC AND THE TELEVISUAL**

This historicism operates, in Mad Men, not just via content but through form, with the same visualization of period details that grant its movement across time yielding what has been characterized as its classic filmic style. From the opening credits to the dolly work, lighting, and low-angle shots, Mad Men not only deploys what its cinematographer Phil Abraham describes as a “somewhat mannered, classic visual style . . . influenced more by cinema than TV” (qtd. in Feld et al., 46), but specifically associates it with certain films of the past. Critics have noted precedents in Alfred Hitchcock, Billy Wilder, King Vidor, and others.10 To those, I would add Douglas Sirk, as Mad Men’s attention to costume, color, setting, and décor allows it, as with film melodramas of the 1950s and ’60s, to mark meaning and affect through mise-en-scène and style. Imbued in objects, appearing through the placement of people and things, feelings are less voiced by the program’s characters than designated by its surface (though, rather than an expression of emotion, this often signals its evacuation, making the show’s lessons about the investment of feelings in commodity objects—and Sesame Street’s lesson on the basics of affect—even more ironic).

Such emphasis on mediated style does, however, perfectly correspond with Mad Men’s placement on AMC (American Movie Classics), given that network’s investment—literally—in cinematic form. Yet even that must be
seen as a particular TV strategy, linking the “cinematic” and “televisual,” as becomes clear when one considers not only those filmic precedents for Mad Men but TV precedents too—from anthology series such as The Twilight Zone to sitcoms such as The Dick Van Dyke Show and from such quotidian fare as soap opera to such “quality” offerings as The Sopranos (which is tied to Mad Men through not only Matthew Weiner’s work but, more generally, that label of distinction). I will return to the question of quality, but it is already clear how the term can serve as a bridge between film and TV, as it is used as code for television that is supposedly “filmlike,” and a similar bridge is operative with AMC. Described as “one of the great success stories in the emergence of cable TV in the U.S.” (Gomery, 93), AMC marked a shift from the era of TV’s “big three” networks (ABC, NBC, and CBS) to a multi-channel era, signifying a television system no longer limited to the “broadcast” but engaged in what has come to be known as “narrowcasting”: rather than all networks attempting to reach all viewers by ordering flow, with the TV schedule thus demarcating those “general” viewers as the “family” and “national” audience, each channel might attempt specifically to cater to and constitute the tastes of particular audiences.

For AMC that involved addressing and helping to form cinematic tastes, presented as a specialty appreciation worth paying for: when the network started in 1984, offering uncut movies from the 1930s, ’40s, and ’50s, it did so as a premium channel. It received rave reviews and impressive subscriber numbers, growing further when it became available on “basic cable” in 1987, quickly doubling its subscriber base. Those subscribers were not only rewarded with the pleasure of viewing films in the comfort of their homes without commercial breaks (as, initially, the network received sufficient revenue from cable providers alone). They were also rewarded with the prestige value of programming marked as “quality”—which must thus be seen as a market category that makes sense only in the context of the television flow from which it tries to be distinct—giving viewers cachet as consumers and the channel a valuable demographic (upscale adults). For, with television, the viewers themselves—not the programs, nor even, exactly, the objects in ads—have always been the true commodities: the industry operates by selling audiences to advertisers, who buy time to reach those target consumers (the more precisely defined, the better). Or, as Don says in one episode, “you are the product, you feeling something. That’s what sells” (“For Those Who Think Young,” 2.1).

While AMC was able to provide its prestige consumer-products with films without commercial interruption for most of its initial eighteen years,
it gradually moved to an ad format, inserting them first between, then also within, the movies it showed. Further, in 2002 it shifted its profile from a “classic” film channel to a more general one: younger audiences were sought, and those audiences apparently wanted “younger” movies. According to insiders, ad agencies dictated the move in their demands for programming relevant to their products’ consumers and for consumers not yet “set in their ways” whose brand loyalties might be bought (Dempsey). Yet this put AMC in competition with various other stations—for example, TBS, TNT, and USA, all of which also rely on films—and, arguably, suffering in comparison (if not necessarily revenue) to still others, such as Turner Classic Movies, now the go-to site for film classicists, or, more significantly, premium channels such as HBO and Showtime. Indeed, these last have taken over the mantle of the “cinematic” and “quality” labels, whose paradoxes are probably most evident in the tagline “It’s not TV, it’s HBO,” in which the announcement of quality—that this is not like television—is precisely what is used to define it as the television you should watch.

**TASTE/TOAST**

It was into this nexus that Mad Men arrived. Producers had, in fact, tried to sell the program to HBO or Showtime, but they were not interested (Witchel). In the words of its chief operating officer, Ed Carroll, AMC “was looking for distinction in launching its first original series, and we took a bet that quality would win out over formulaic mass appeal” (qtd. in Witchel). Yet in a fascinating inversion, “quality” here meant revisiting TV — returning not to classic films but to televisuality to distinguish itself. Moreover, this was television explicitly about television (among other things): a TV program that in exploring the identifications and disidentifications of consumer society also exhibits the growing significance of TV itself. For it is precisely in promoting mass-mediated images that the folks in Mad Men pose questions of identity, and the program treats its personal and political issues alongside its treatment of currents of communications, literally thinking through the media to think through identity.

In this regard, the show might be linked not just institutionally but ideationally to another—often neglected—AMC program. Mad Men tends to be labeled the network’s “first original series,” yet Remember Wenn (1996–98), about a fictional radio station in the 1940s, preceded it. While the amnesia around one historical program within the discourses of another might strike us as ironic, the similarities between the two are more symptomatic, point-
ing again toward the profit not only of remembering but also of forgetting. With both shows narrating the public and private formations of historical identity via media formations (whether radio broadcasting, print advertisement, or the creation and increasing importance of the “television department”), this is a connection that is notable for what it suggests about how, as subjects (on or of TV), we are constituted through, by, and within media texts and histories.

Yet, as mentioned in regard to HBO’s “quality branding,” making and marking differences through such media texts and histories is as significant as recalling their connections. Mad Men itself provides plenty of examples of this. One of the most instructive occurs in the very first episode, “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” (1.1), when Don confronts the difficulty of signaling product distinction in a sea of sameness (or, more accurately, a haze of smoke)—a marketing challenge that resonates with the larger social problem, set up in this episode and played out across the series, of finding individuality in the face of conformity. Meeting with Lee Garner Sr. and Lee Garner Jr., the father and son owners of Lucky Strike, the “mad men” of Sterling Cooper (like television promoters trying to commend what has been condemned) are trying to determine how to proceed now that cigarettes have become suspect. Even the usually suave Don is tongue-tied—until the Garners rise to walk out in disgust, with Lee Jr. stating, “At least we know, if we have this problem, everybody has this problem,” and inspiration strikes. They must produce a distinction in taste—here, literally. With a flourish, Don suggests the slogan “It’s Toasted.”

Don expounds: “This is the greatest advertising opportunity since the invention of cereal. We have six identical companies making six identical products. We can say anything we want. . . . Everybody else’s tobacco is poisonous. Lucky Strike’s is toasted.” “It’s toasted’ . . . I get it,” Lee Sr. exclaims: one might not notice a special flavor, but the very marking of it yields its own taste. Of course, this is not quite like television, since television texts are not the same in the way that Don describes breakfast cereals or cigarette brands as just “identical products.” But whether “toasted” or “quality,” this is about making difference from sameness, demarcating segmentation from flow.

**TELEVISION PROFILING, DEMOGRAPHIC SETS: THE CASE OF “COLORED TV”**

Yet, however telling these textual demarcations may be, ultimately I am less interested in how the program as a media object is marked as “differ-
ent” than in how it reveals the ways in which our differences as social subjects are marked by media: in its exploration of the articulation of identity (which is not merely expressed, but made emergent) within commodified and mass-mediated flows. One site of this involves Mad Men’s treatment of race, which, though not as elaborated as other subjects the program engages, is extremely significant. By its very omissions, Mad Men presents racial difference not so much as an experienced self or sociality as, from the perspective of corporate culture, a potential market slot—a target demographic to be distinguished from a so-called general group. While this obviously yields only a very limited perspective, it calls attention to how identities become, indeed, delimited—realized, in part, as market categories (the ways in which identities are constituted and reconstituted as they intersect with media formations that, however problematically, give them definition, and vice versa).

As scholars such as Sasha Torres and Kirsten Lentz have noted, this mutual definition has historically codified terms of both television and race. The emphasis on the “live” coverage of civil rights protests in the late 1950s and early 1960s, for example, helped to establish both TV’s presence in American culture and a sense of “presence” in race itself (authorizing an understanding of race as intrinsic to one’s very “life being”). This linkage became even further established in the 1970s with the rise of the “realist” and “relevant” sitcom, in which it was precisely those TV shows that dealt with race or racism (with what were conceived as “real issues,” even if treated via comedy) that were seen as appropriate to that televisual discourse (see Lentz; Torres, Black, White). In TV’s flow and segmentation, race might be even further defined—with, for instance, as Herman Gray has shown for African American representation, a division of marked racialized figures into the pull-oneself-up-by-one’s-bootstraps characters foregrounded by the rise of the so-called black sitcom and the poor, nameless masses in the backdrop of many news reports against whom that individuated character is implicitly positioned (see H. Gray, “Remembering Civil Rights”). Mad Men does not explicitly get into these issues, but in its narration of an early version of “narrowcasting,” it does allude to how race starts to become a TV category—literally, in one example, used for the sale of TV sets.

The idea to deploy race in this way is the brainchild of the account services executive Pete Campbell, whose approach to racial identity might usefully be counterposed to the copywriter Paul Kinsey’s. Kinsey is interested in “beatnik” culture, professes “bohemian” ideas, and, for a time, dates Sheila White, an African American woman. On a bus trip with her to Mississippi to register black voters, Paul espouses a utopian notion of an end to racial
difference—even if this is an odd, cynical utopianism, since he sees it as occurring less through the political movement in which he himself is taking part than through the very operations of consumer culture.22 “Advertising, if anything, helps bring on change. The market, and I am talking in a purely Marxist sense, dictates that we must include everyone. The consumer has no color,” he pontificates, as his (almost all African American) bus companions look on with tolerant amusement or ignore him completely (“The Inheritance,” 2.10). He brings up Marx again in a later episode in a conversation with Pete about the “catastrophic up and down of the marketplace,” leading to a discussion of those aforementioned TV sets (“The Fog,” 3.5). Noticing that Admiral television sales are flat in most places but growing in “Atlanta, Oakland, Chicago, Detroit, Newark, D.C., and . . . St. Louis and Kansas City,” Pete wonders aloud, “What does that mean?” “Great jazz cities,” Paul says, reading this in terms of media and cultural taste. Yet starting to label—or construct—this in terms of identity, Pete’s fledgling demographic view is in contrast to Paul’s Marxist-democratic vision: “Is it possible that these Admiral sets are being bought by Negroes?” he asks.

For an answer, he turns to one of the few black characters to be seen at Sterling Cooper: Hollis, the elevator operator. Yet Hollis is resistant to Pete’s informal brand of demographic profiling, attuned as he is to the risky politics of identity—not just, like Pete, to its commodification and consumer definition. Stating that he has an RCA but not wanting to say more, particularly since Pete starts questioning him in front of some white executives, Hollis tries to be polite but brief (simply shaking his head no to Pete’s question about his TV set: “Color?”). Yet Pete persists with his impromptu market testing, pressing against Hollis’s resistance: “Look, this is important, and I’d really like to have an honest conversation with you. . . . Do you think I’m a bigot?” When Hollis protests, “I don’t even watch the damn thing. . . . We’ve got bigger problems to worry about than TV, OK?” Pete responds: “You’re thinking about this in a very narrow way. The idea is that everyone is going to have a house, a car, a television—the American Dream.” Looking incredulous, Hollis starts up the elevator, spurring Pete to justify himself with “It’s my job.” “Every job has its ups and downs,” Hollis replies, cleverly alluding to his own low-wage job—and, by extension, to the distinction in status levels that Pete overlooks in his plug for a (consumerized) American Dream. Yet Pete recognizes in this quip not the sound of Marx’s aforementioned catastrophe, but an aphorism as American as mom and apple pie. “You don’t watch baseball?” Pete asks with a smile, “I don’t believe you,” finally earning a grin from Hollis and then a mutual laugh.23
The folks at Admiral, however, don’t share the sentiments. When Pete suggests advertising their TV sets in publications such as *Ebony, Jet, and Amsterdam News*, which “go just to this market,” as well as airing an “integrated” TV commercial (to which one executive quips, “I don’t think that’s legal”), he upsets the Admiral businessmen, who seem unable to accept differences in identity, whether democratically or demographically defined: “Who’s to say that Negroes aren’t buying Admiral televisions because they think white people want them?” Pete is called in to Bert Cooper’s office to be, as they say, “flogged” by the senior partners. “Admiral television has no interest in becoming a colored television company,” Bert admonishes. Worried about his own job, Pete stands chastened, with *Mad Men* itself seemingly more interested in the quality technical distinction of something like “color TV” than in the social one of “colored TV.” Yet Lane Pryce, the new financial officer from Sterling Cooper’s British parent company, ultimately concedes: “It does seem as though there’s money to be made in the Negro market. Obviously, not with Admiral . . . but I don’t think it would be wrong of us to pursue it in some way.” “Really?” Bert asks. “I just moved here; I’m a stranger in a strange land. But,” Lane says, claiming the insight of the outsider (a position like that of the *Mad Men* viewer, also a distanced observer of 1960s America), “I can tell you there’s definitely something going on.”

**TARGETING SEX, SCREENING SEXUALITY**

Perhaps more so even than with race, something is definitely going on with gender in *Mad Men*. The program explores the enormous significance of sexual politics as they impact men and women, across productive and reproductive spheres, in home and in work life, publicly and privately. Not coincidentally, these are exactly the divisions that TV both partitions and crosses. Publicizing private stories even as it privatizes the public, domesticating the social even as it socializes the family, television sets itself up precisely through the terms by which gender has been ordered—with gender itself becoming “TV-set” (technologized, channeled, and programmed). In reciprocal relation, gender is thus as much constituted by commercial media flows and formations as it is constitutive of them—a point that *Mad Men* makes insistently in its look at sexed identities as both product and process of media and marketing. There are so many examples of this that every viewer can elaborate his or her own favorite cases. One need only think of the campaigns to which the firm’s only female copywriter, Peggy Olson, is assigned—Belle Jolie lipstick, Clearasil acne cream, mom-dispensed pop-
sicles, Playtex brassieres, the Relax-A-Cizor vibrating “exercise” machine—to realize how sex roles are targets of and on the show. This is the case not only through target advertisement, but, given the aggression of the sexual politics, literally, as when viewers share Pete’s gaze at the secretaries through the barrel of a rifle he gets by exchanging a homey wedding gift (“Red in the Face,” 1.7).

As that instance demonstrates, this is a specifically heterosexual aggression. Homosexuality also makes an appearance on Mad Men—appears, that is, in its disappearance, in its closeting, and that too is tied to television.25 This is not to say that, given the history on Mad Men, anything like a “gay identity” can be conceptualized as a demographic category the way that a female consumer or the inklings of a commodified African American identity can be—meaning, in the terms of the show (and the society it historicizes), it cannot really be conceptualized at all. But it is notable that homosexual desire often presents (and screens) itself precisely around the presence of TV—for instance, when, at a screening of a program being pitched as a good opportunity for Belle Jolie lipstick, the closeted Sal Romano (Sterling Cooper’s art director) nervously reencounters a man whom he had liked but whose proposition he had been too scared to accept (“The Benefactor,” 2.3).

That pitched program is actually from the annals of TV history: it is the (in)famous episode of the legal drama The Defenders (CBS, 1961–65) in which the defense attorney heroes make a powerful case for sexual choice via the legalization of abortion—so powerful that it led to the program’s regular sponsors pulling their support (ironically, given that episode’s title of “The Benefactor,” after which this Mad Men episode too is named).26 In confirmation of, as well as ironic counterpoint to, that vision of sexual liberation, Mad Men claims the scandalous show as must-see TV even as it is also feared as “not wholesome”—a dialectic that still seems to define the presence of queer sexualities on TV (as evidenced by the oh-so-brief, overly polite, yet, for attentive viewers, poignant farewell between Sal and his would-be lover at the end of the meeting).27

Sal is later propositioned by another man, Lee Garner Jr. (previously seen during Don’s “toasted” pitch), in the episode “Wee Small Hours” (3.9), featuring the filming of a Lucky Strike commercial in which a hunky guy takes a puff from a cigarette and gazes off into the distance with satisfaction. Watching the shoot, Lee suggests instead a direct address to the audience, but he is overruled in his desire for a frontal gaze in an exchange that is full of double entendres. Sal claims, “I want what you want,” yet he insists that “it can make people very uncomfortable,” to which Lee proposes, “Let’s take
a risk together, shall we, Sally?” However, Sal is not quite as ready for risk, televisually or sexually—and neither, perhaps, is Mad Men itself. Indeed, the Lucky Strike slogan we hear may tout the brand’s “honest taste,” but textual “tastefulness” and sexual “honesty” seem to be at odds, even as they are bound up together in discourse, as Sal and Lee Jr.’s further conversation reveals. Arriving to see Sal working on the commercial, Lee explains, “I know I’m supposed to stay away . . . but I’m fascinated by this process.” Sal asks if he’s thinking about switching positions to get into the media business. “Not when my father’s alive,” Lee replies—though he worries that Sal will expose him for this interest in movies and TV and so asks him to keep this quiet (not to broadcast it, so to speak) before immediately going into a seduction attempt.

Yet Sal refuses Lee’s sexual as well as his televisial suggestions. Right after Sal opines that Lee’s idea for the TV shot “is going to feel strange,” Lee reaches to touch Sal’s chest, producing Sal’s panicked rejection through references to his marriage and work. “I got it,” the rebuffed Lee says—a “getting it” not so unlike his father’s earlier “I get it” in understanding the claims of “taste,” but, this time, to opposite effect. Far from being pleased, Lee Jr. demands that Sal be fired—and, in fact, this episode is the last in which Sal appears.28 This simultaneous emergence and erasure of homosexuality in “The Benefactor” and “Wee Small Hours”—both of which are self-reflexive about TV—is telling. For it is between their two televisial lessons—the reminder of the risks (and potential rewards) of controversial programming and yet the refusal of a direct gay gaze—that Mad Men reveals the limits of its own treatment of queer sexualities, again enacting and commenting on how identities (sexual, gendered, raced, classed, and so on) are televisually (dis)ordered.

COMMERCIAL CONNECTIONS AND CONTINUATIONS

The aforementioned examples reveal that, in exploring the history and textuality of mass-mediated consumer culture, Mad Men also explores the ways in which identities are constituted by and through media formations, and vice versa: the ways in which media constitute themselves by and through identity formations (how our “selves” become embodied in commodity objects, how personal and political identifications appear or disappear along with what media texts envision or erase, how private histories become intertwined with media publicities, how social categories become defined as demographic categories, and how we are articulated as particular sub-
jects through the articulations of media flows and segmentations). More so, *Mad Men* does not just explore these issues; it enacts them in its own flows and segmentations—even in an era that is supposedly “beyond flow” (our so-called postnetwork, narrowcast, niche-marketed, and digitally convergent era).

Of course, AMC is still a network (if a cable network) that supports itself by selling time and space, or, rather, by selling audiences to advertisers. Yet ever since technologies such as the VCR and DVR have made it easy for viewers to speed through ads, networks and advertisers have searched for ways to counter them—or, better, to turn those technologies to their advantage. Some strategies are quite familiar: the use of shorter “video bite” commercials (which operate through attention-grabbing bursts, with little time to evade them), or the insertion of commercial slogans or commodity objects within the framing programs (the old strategies of sponsorship and product placement, retooled for our digital age to ensure that even viewers who evade ads are unable to bypass the brands).

*Mad Men* uses both of these methods, but, as a program about advertising, it also has other resources with which to make its “interrupting” commercials as compelling as the show: specifically, by making them less like “interruptions” than continuations. This is achieved through the use of bridging “bumpers.” At the beginning of a commercial break, AMC displays a *Mad Men*-logoed title card stating some fun fact about a sponsor’s product or marketing history against the visual backdrop of the Sterling Cooper building—a gimmick that AMC dubbed “Mad-vertising” and Matthew Weiner simply called the use of “TiVo stoppers” (qtd. in Benton). Not only do the informative intertitles resonate with information gleaned from the program, but the commercials that follow are often linked to *Mad Men* through use of some of the same strategies that distinguish the show: an emphasis on retro style, yielding a dialectic of historical identification and disidentification; citations of texts and media events of the past that march ever ahead into our present (so a mix of nostalgia and liveness); the affective personification of objects along with, conversely, the objectification of affect; and, most significant for me, the demarcation of identity through media and marketing forms.

Consider the *Mad-vertising* that ran during one episode of *Mad Men,* “Souvenir” (3.8). One commercial break, moving across time and space, featured a Bridgestone tire and then a Clorox bleach ad. The first was preceded by a *Mad Men*-logoed title stating (rather obviously), “The Bridgestone commercial featuring rump-shaking astronauts was not filmed on one of
Saturn’s moons.” In the commercial, titled “Hot Item,” hip-hopping astronauts race a lunar vehicle along the surface of (supposedly) Titan, stopping to collect rocks while dancing to the House of Pain song “Jump Around”—only to find, upon returning, their vehicle jacked up on cinder blocks, their desirable tires stolen, and a flying saucer escaping in the distance. Astonishingly, this Bridgestone commercial, which first aired as a hyped Super Bowl ad in 2009, is generally well regarded despite its troubling, universalizing view of race (indeed, asserted as operative across the universe). Evidently, we are supposed to understand that the mere presence of hip-hop music—much as, recalling Paul Kinsey’s comments, the earlier presence of jazz—makes any space (even outer space) a black, “urban” area, with this racialization then naturalizing the tire theft, though this occurs in the middle of nowhere and the “gangstas” here are not just alienated but, in fact, extraterrestrial aliens. Thus revealing how media culture continues to be incapable of dealing with race coherently (and nonoffensively)—even as it tries to target race for marketing purposes—the ad demonstrates that, despite the commercial’s futurism, things have not changed very much since the awkward beginnings of this targeting narrated in Mad Men.30

Keeping with that narrative, the Clorox ad looks backward, not ahead, as suggested by the Mad Men intertitle with the factoid “Prior to 1960, Clorox was sold in amber glass containers.” Over the image of a room (prominently featuring some sort of clothes-washing device) that changes over time, remodeled through the decades while people (also remodeled in updated clothes) move through it in fast-motion, a female voiceover states: “Laundry’s not new. Your mother, your grandmother, her mother—they all did the laundry, maybe even a man or two. And although a lot has changed—the machines, the detergents, the clothes themselves—one thing has not: the bleach most trusted to keep whites pure white is still Clorox bleach.” Here, then, we get another historical gaze in which the attention to period setting and style creates a dialectic of distance and closeness, past and present, nostalgia and irony—indexing gender (not to mention “pure whiteness”) through those divisions and so presuming its categories even as it seems to expose gendered identities as particular domestic and work (even if unpaid work) roles. In other words, in its strategies and identity formations, the commercial arguably operates much like Mad Men itself—which may explain why this commercial, after (rightly or wrongly) being shelved because of charges of sexism, reemerged specifically to be used with Mad Men on AMC (see Wallace).31 (Likewise, Clorox put an ad in the DVD set that created a similar controversy: an image of a man’s shirt with lipstick stains on the collar and
the slogan “Getting ad guys out of hot water for generations”—again using a kind of historicism as an alibi to dehistoricize gender and sexual hierarchies.)

Keeping with the theme of historical tradition across change, the next commercial break featured an ad for Johnnie Walker Scotch whiskey with a “Mad Men–ized” intertitle: “Originally known as Walker’s Old Highland Whiskey, Johnnie Walker Black celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2009,” the year the episode and ad aired. Over stirring music, we see a wooden door, labeled “John Walker & Sons,” bang open as a man rolls out a barrel. Through cuts matched on action to the man’s forward-moving stride, the ad transitions to the following shots: men prodding a propeller biplane and the onscreen title “Keep Rising”; a man pushing a steel girder on a skyscraper under construction with the title “Keep Building”; men moving up the side of a mountain with the title “Keep Climbing”; an astronaut floating in space with the title “Keep Exploring”; people climbing atop and then pounding through the Berlin Wall with the title “Keep Uniting”; and a digitized image of a computer-generated figure walking with the title “Keep Innovating,” which merges into a shot of a British chap strutting along, becoming, finally, the animated image of the company’s “Walking Man” logo with the words “Keep Walking. Johnnie Walker.” Apparently documenting key leaps in history through these iconic shots (even sticking to the tasteful sepia-toned or black-and-white imagery now conventionalized in documentary filmmaking), this ad offers an instructive comparison case to the Clorox and Bridgestone commercials in its aestheticized image of white masculinity both remembering its achievements yet striding ever forward to greatness.32

Commenting on the aesthetics (if not politics) of advertising, the next Mad Men intertitle declares, “Victorian-era pharmaceutical ads were so attractive, they were collected by shop owners,” before going into a commercial for the millennial-era cholesterol-lowering medication Lipitor. There are then Mad-vertised commercials for, among others, Canada Dry ginger ale (featuring the AMC announcer praising the company’s “tradition of creative advertising” over cuts of old print ads and a 1960s-era TV commercial that shows a swinging beach party where “one gulp is for thirst; the other gulps are for kicks”) and American Express (featuring stylized shots of everyday objects arranged in the shape of first sad and then happy faces, with the wording “Don’t take chances. Take charge.”). Such commercials resonate in fascinating, if sometimes frustrating, ways across the program/commercial flow. For example, they encourage us to get our retro “kicks,” whether from historical TV texts or a commercial soft drink, yet also warn us, via not simply a pharmaceutical ad but Mad Men’s own plots, about the risks such a
Life of kicks might yield. \textsuperscript{33} There is even the way, in the American Express ad, that emotions are invested in—and literally projected onto—objects over which we are told to “take charge,” which not only recalls \textit{Mad Men}’s commentary on our investment of emotions in consumer objects but also returns us to \textit{Sesame Street}’s building blocks of feelings. Such resonances will vibrate in different ways with different AMC viewers who see them along the flow.

**APPLYING ONESELF: THE LINKS AND LABOR OF NEW MEDIATIONS**

Of course, not all \textit{Mad Men} audiences get those vibrations and flows. While these commercial breaks aim to be “TiVo-proof,” in today’s media universe many viewers access television programs via other technologies (DVDs, computer downloads, and so on). Thus, even other technological and media flows are established for viewer pleasure and commodity profit, which may, but do not necessarily, line up as expected. Indeed, there have been fascinating intermedial connections between \textit{Mad Men} and (so-called) new technologies, by which televisuality—and \textit{Mad Men} identities—get extended and reshaped in digital culture, sometimes with surprising effects. For example, even viewers who do not see AMCtv.com advertised during televised commercial breaks may find it on the Internet through social networks such as Facebook. Such viewers can then also learn how to “get mad” as “a \textit{Mad Men} icon” with “\textit{Mad Men Yourself}”—an application on the AMC site that enables users to transform themselves into graphic avatars, retro-styled to look like possible characters on the show. \textsuperscript{34} A hit among \textit{Mad Men} viewers, those avatars spread across social media sites, making fans into their own promoters of the program as they “applied” themselves to its world (or worlds). In fact, the “\textit{Mad Men Yourself}” application was created by a fan (a freelance designer who was then tapped to work on AMC’s official site), literally illustrating the ways in which identities—not only from the swanky 1960s, but those of producer and consumer—might be tried on, traded, and transfigured. \textsuperscript{35}

An even more intriguing example of fan activity is that of the Twitter community whose members (many of whom happen to work in advertising and marketing, although, significantly, not for \textit{Mad Men}) have taken on the identities of \textit{Mad Men} roles. Some of these roles are established in the series; some are wholly made up by fans, like that of a mailroom clerk or Grandpa Gene’s ghost; and some are even nonhuman or inanimate entities, like Duck’s dog Chauncey, an ant who escaped from Bert Cooper’s ant farm, the Xerox machine, and a bottle of seltzer always watching from the bar (see
Caddell; Isakson; King; Mapes). From posting commentary on the action of the series to making up stories to fill the gaps within and between commercial breaks, episodes, and seasons, these viewers take flow to a whole new level while also finding new forms of affective engagement, media identification, and television publicity. At first, AMC foolishly attempted to stop these fans, forcing Twitter to disable their accounts and threatening to sue over copyright and intellectual property infringement. Quickly, however, they realized that this fan activity was the best advertising for their television show that they could get—that it was, in fact, something that transformed advertising and television. For here viewers offer not only interest in the program but free labor for it. And the audiences are not just the consumers, nor even just the products sold: they become coproducers in their own selling.

REORDERING IDENTITY, RE-VIEWING TV: 
CHANGING MEDIA STREAMS AND SCREENS

Produced by and in turn productive of both labor and love, these are truly new “applications,” with viewers applying themselves technologically and textually, psychically and socially, culturally and commercially. Yet, in noting these developments, I am not trying to suggest that, as television audiences now play all the parts—consumer, commodity, content-producer, advertiser—their identities are fully enclosed in media flows from which there is no escape. To the contrary, activities such as “Mad Men Yourself” and Twitter role-playing (and, I would argue, other forms of viewing too, even if their activity is not as noticeably marked) demonstrate how mass-mediated identities can be examined, exercised, appropriated, and (often improperly) assumed as they are literally performed and played. In other words, identities might be articulated through media formations—but those media formations are neither univocal nor fixed. Linked to the past but also open to present and future transformations, they allow for de- and rearticulations as well, for multiple identity orderings and disorderings in our era of multiple mediation.

Thus, while Mad Men—both in its plots and in its placement and processes—might show how selves are established in media culture, it also reveals how selves might be revised. That is, it may announce not just commodity fixes but a more fluid culture, demonstrating how viewers invest emotionally as well as economically, how subjectivities are both envisioned and re-viewed, how our multiple identities are formed through television
and its related media and consumer technologies, yet how they might potentially be re-formed there as well. Returning to (yet reversing) the *Sesame Street* example with which I began, we might thus see how people are not simply puppets in mass-mediated culture, how happiness is not only an assurance that “we’re OK” getting all our honey, how (contrary to *Mad Men’s* credits) we do not just fall into media flows. Rather, we channel those in particular ways, looking forward as well as back, always (re)screening ourselves as we screen TV.

**NOTES**

Previous versions of this piece were presented at the symposium “Mad World: Sex, Politics, Style and the 1960s,” sponsored by the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and for the 2010 Gender and Sexuality Studies Lecture at Brown University; I’d like to thank the organizers and participants of both of those events for their work and for their valuable and thought-provoking comments and questions. Thanks also to my television studies students (especially students-into-colleagues Hunter Hargraves and Julie Levin Russo) and to Melissa Getreu for their help and always stimulating conversations.

1. The latter is marked by the history of *Sesame Street* itself, as this bit was created for its fortieth anniversary season, which authorizes the skit’s cross-generational address: wide-eyed kids can learn the lessons of emotions while adults can indulge their own emotions of nostalgia for a TV show with which they grew up.

2. For those not familiar with this description of his own unfamiliarity with U.S. television, Williams writes:

   One night in Miami, still dazed from a week on an Atlantic liner, I began watching a film [on TV] and at first had some difficulty adjusting to a much greater frequency of commercial “breaks.” Yet this was a minor problem compared to what eventually happened. Two other films, which were due to be shown on the same channel on other nights, began to be inserted as trailers. A crime in San Francisco (the subject of the original film) began to operate in an extraordinary counterpoint not only with the deodorant and cereal commercials but with a romance in Paris and the eruption of a prehistoric monster who laid waste New York. Moreover, this was sequence in a new sense . . . since the transitions from film to commercial and from film A to films B and C were in effect unmarked. There is in any case enough similarity between certain kinds of films, and between several kinds of film and the “situation” commercials which often consciously imitate them, to make a sequence of this kind a very difficult experience to interpret. I can still not be sure what I
took from that whole flow. I believe I registered some incidents as happening in the wrong film, and some characters in the commercials as involved in the film episodes, in what came to seem—for all the occasional bizarre disparities—a single irresponsible flow of images and feelings. (Television, 91–92)

3. Indeed, today almost every television program—including those that air on channels without commercial breaks—is “prestructured,” with the goal of eventual syndication, to fit into the flow of a commercial channel. Here too, however, flow is actually a mixture of continuity and disruption, since older programs were designed for fewer commercial interruptions even while today’s programs are discovering new ways of advertising within the flow (as suggested by the “Madvertising” discussed later in the chapter).

4. For what is the distinction between public TV’s corporate sponsorship, as it communicates prestige value, and corporations advertising on commercial networks? What costs more: “free tv,” for which we all pay through the higher prices of goods that advertise on television, or the various “pay” viewing services?

5. Or, more accurately, it shows the multiple “we’s that have been articulated across that history and the ways in which those identities and histories have been formed, in great part, by consumer dynamics, commodified relations, and commercial media industries.

6. As Roland Barthes writes, “The name of Photography’s noeme will therefore be: ‘That-has-been’” (77). Irene V. Small in this volume references Don’s Carousel pitch as an example of Mad Men’s engagement with “both avant-garde art and the culture industry of the 1960s.”

7. Many television scholars have written on “liveness,” but for an inaugural theorization of this, see especially Feuer, “Concept.” Other important pieces on television “liveness” include Auslander; Dayan and Katz; Dienst; Doane, “Information”; Gripsrud; Heath and Skirrow; McPherson; Morse; and M. White, “Television Liveness.”

8. For scholarly discussions of television’s construction of history, see especially S. Anderson; Edgerton and Rollins; and M. White, “Television: A Narrative.” Also interesting for considering issues of television’s construction of history and memory are O’Connor; Spigel, “From the Dark”; and Wales.

9. “Preserving our television heritage” was used (both seriously and ironically, I would argue) as the slogan for Nick at Nite’s “TV Land” block (and, later, station, when TV Land spun off to its own channel).

10. Gary Edgerton, writing in In Media Res, describes Mad Men’s title sequences as a “pastiche of Saul Bass’s title work from Vertigo (the optical disorientation), North by Northwest (the iconography of the Manhattan skyline), and Psycho (the foreboding strings à la Bernard Herrmann),” noting that “the use of a protagonist in black silhouette even suggests the 1955–1965 television series, Alfred Hitchcock Presents, where the producer-director steps right into a black silhouetted profile of himself.
during the opening credits of that show” (“Falling Man”). Jeremy Butler, also writing and curating for *In Media Res’s “Mad Men Theme Week*” (20–24 April 2009), compares *Mad Men*’s low-angle shooting to Billy Wilder’s work.

11. See, for instance, Waldman, “*Mad Men–Twilight Zone.*” The series creator Matthew Weiner specifically names *The Twilight Zone* (along with other anthology series) and *The Dick Van Dyke Show* as precedents for *Mad Men*. See Waldman, “Matt Weiner.”

12. According to Douglas Gomery, “*AMC* began in October of 1984 as a pay service, but switched onto cable’s ‘basic tier’ in 1987 when it had grown to seven million subscribers in one thousand systems across the U.S. This growth curve continued and by the end of 1989 *AMC* had doubled its subscriber base. Two years later it could count 39 million subscribers” (94).

13. In other words, this is a television system in which the multiplication of channels is less about reaching all kinds of viewers in a democracy of media pleasures than about commodifying those viewers in a demography of media consumers. For discussions of the connection or disconnect between “democracy” and “demography” in and for television, see Ang; and Marc.

14. See the quotes by Tom Karsch, executive vice-president and general manager of Turner Classic Movies, and Kate McEnroe, *AMC* president, in John Dempsey’s *Variety* article. See also Battaglio.

15. Ed Carroll heads Rainbow Entertainment Services, owner of *AMC*.

16. In fact, by 2003 *AMC* had started going almost solely by these initials, downplaying the original wording of “American Movie Classics” in the light of their not-solely-cinematic rebranding.

17. For another comparison of these programs, see Fredericks.

18. Or, as the senior partner Roger Sterling says, “Through manipulation of the mass media, the public is under the impression that your cigarettes are linked to . . . [awkward pause] certain fatal diseases.” “Manipulation of the media?” scoffs the senior Mr. Garner; “Hell, that’s what I pay you for!”

19. “It’s Toasted” was indeed the actual slogan for Lucky Strike cigarettes, though it was introduced in 1917 (not, as in *Mad Men*’s story, 1960). For historical discussions of this slogan, see two articles from *Time*: “Advertising: It’s Toasted” (1938) and “Advertising: Toasted” (1951).

20. *Mad Men* stages its own debate about the possibility of such demarcation on and in the light of *tv*. In an episode about the future of Sterling Cooper (in fact, the very future of the planet, given that the episode is set amid the looming Cuban missile crisis), rivals Don Draper and Herman “Duck” Phillips have their own showdown (“Meditations in an Emergency,” 2.13). According to Duck, advertising need not be tied to “creative’s fantasies of persuasion” (like the “toasted” label); rather, it is simply about “buying time and space, and right now that means television”—a medium that Duck sees as merely a filler, taking up all capacity and consciousness as opposed to particularizing specific goods (let alone good texts). Yet Don, again
staking a claim for distinction, declares, “I sell products, not advertising,” and the episode demonstrates how this particularization applies to television as much as anything else. Indeed, this exchange occurs in an episode filled with scenes of characters watching very particular things: most notably, Kennedy’s addresses about the build-up of arms or, in pointed contrast to those “significant” media moments, the “harmless” TV shows that Betty and Don have the kids watch instead (Leave It to Beaver and Wagon Train). In this way, in its performances, even if not in what (some) characters profess, Mad Men acknowledges the differences within televisual flow—a lesson that the program itself, in its own distinction and “taste,” certainly teaches.

21. Important work analyzing the construction of race as a category for television includes, among others, H. Gray, Watching Race; Hunt; Jhally and Lewis; J. MacDonald; and Torres, Living Color.

22. Paul actually seems to try to evade this trip by trying instead to take a business trip to an aerospace convention in California—a minor detail, but one that strikes me as telling not only for how it marks Paul’s preference for expansive fantasy over rough work on the ground, but for how it alludes to television’s own expansive fantasies of space. I am referring to the discourses and imagery of “universal” (supposedly “postracial”) humanism that tend to accompany U.S. TV’s treatment of space—as seen, for example, in the classic case of the program Star Trek (NBC, 1966–69), which stands as the prototypical “progressive” version of this, but also in some of the TV commercials discussed later in which the futurism of space imagery authorizes both a deployment and a disavowal of present constructions of race and, indeed, of these ads’ own racism. For further discussion of such “universal” fantasies, see Joyrich, “Feminist Enterprise?”; and, particularly helpful for contextualizing this in terms of the decade on which Mad Men focuses, Spigel and Curtin, especially the essays by Jeffery Sconce, Lynn Spigel, and Thomas Streeter.

23. For alternative discussions of this scene, see the chapters by Clarence Lang and Kent Ono in this volume.

24. Many television scholars have written on the mutual construction of gender and television. For just some work on this topic, see Baehr and Dyer; Brunsdon, D’Acci, and Spigel; D’Acci, Defining Women, and “Television”; Haralovich and Rabinovitz; Joyrich, Re-viewing Reception; E. A. Kaplan, “Feminist Criticism”; Morley; L. Mumford; and Spigel, Make Room.

25. I explore the connections between TV and the closet (and the ways in which sexuality is both announced and erased) in more detail in my essay “Epistemology of the Console.” For other interesting (and very diverse) work in queer television studies, see (among others) Becker; S. Chambers; G. Davis and Needham; Doty; Gamson; Gross; S. Jones; McCarthy, “Must See”; and Torres, “Television/Feminism.”

26. For information about the Defenders episode, see Alvey. See also Leslie J. Reagan’s chapter in this volume.

27. Of course, in its scandal about sexual and reproductive choices, the Defenders
episode poignantly resonates not only with Sal’s story but, more obviously even, with Peggy, who, in season 1, becomes pregnant in a casual sexual encounter with Pete, has a nervous breakdown and denies the pregnancy and birth, gives the child up for adoption, and (until she eventually tells Pete in season 2) keeps all of this secret from those at work (and, arguably, from even herself). For each story, though, we see both the risks and the rewards of television “controversy.” Though not about either The Defenders or Mad Men, interesting analyses of the construction and operation of TV “scandal” can be found in Lull and Hinerman.

28. For further discussion of this scene in the context of Mad Men’s treatment of sexuality, see Alexander Doty’s essay in this volume.

29. Joshua Benton also cites one blogger who writes: “They do this neat, ‘tivo-proof’ type of commercial billboard before most commercials. . . . I bite. Originally, I paused because I think that maybe the show is coming back—a la traditional billboard/bumper. Now I am conditioned to stop, because I am getting some value in exchange—I get ad history/trivia, facts, music/artists in spots, etc. . . . All good. I watch more, stay through commercial breaks, AND I have a high recall of the ads.” See also Flaherty.

30. The commercial’s use of music from the 1992 hit “Jump Around” by the hip-hop group House of Pain both contributes to and complicates the racialization discussed here (an insight for which I am indebted to Melissa Getreu). Because House of Pain is well known as a white, Irish American hip-hop group, it is the presence of the theft, not just the music, that creates the racializing effect—one that, on a secondary level, is even remarked on in the ad by the way that this appropriation of hip-hop is itself overtaken by the eruption of the “ghetto” into this (literally) “universalized” scene. In the light of my reading of the commercial’s racism, some of the comments posted about the video on the YouTube website are instructive (if irritating, or worse). For instance, they include the following: “Figures . . . tryin to party on the moon and the darkies are already raising the crime rate and lowering the property value”; “just like in Detroit!”; “Even in space u have black ppl stealing rims”; and “Are ghetto aliens covered by insurance?” See http://www.youtube.com/comment servlet?all_comments&v=1Bk878H3ZzY&fromurl=/watch%3Fv%3DIbBlFjj_HM84%26feature%3Drelated (accessed 11 October 2010).

31. In noting in this chapter both these charges and the ties between the Clorox ad and Mad Men’s own strategies of representation, I do not mean to imply that Mad Men can simply be dismissed as “sexist” (nor, for that matter, would I dismiss the commercial so simply). Rather, I would suggest that through its deployment of style and sensation, history and memory, address and (dis)identification, flow and segmentation, Mad Men manages to explore gender relations (often in very complex and compelling ways) even as it also manages to disavow its own reiteration of certain conventional constructions of gender. In this way, much as I discuss in more
detail about sexuality here, *Mad Men* paradoxically both interrogates and reproduces gender hierarchies, making any one pronouncement about its “sexism” (or, conversely, its “feminism”) too blunt-edged and univocal adequately to characterize the program’s multifaceted gender and sexual politics.

32. Interestingly, the version of this commercial posted on Johnnie Walker’s own website also includes civil rights marchers, both male and female, thus diversifying the imagery (delimited by race and gender, even if presented as expansively world historical) of the ad that played on AMC. See “Strides” in the Video Gallery at http://www.johnniewalker.com/en-us/VideoGallery/ (accessed 11 October 2010).

33. I’m thinking specifically here of the story of Roger Sterling’s heart attack (after his countless “gulps . . . for kicks,” with no help from cholesterol-lowering medications). But of course, *Mad Men* explores the many risks of a life of “kicks”—health-related and otherwise—across the series.


35. The designer of the application goes by the name Dyna Moe. For an interview with her, see Oei. See also Meghan Keane; Molitor; and Van Grove.

36. There has been a great deal of discussion and debate about the ways in which fan activity operates to reinforce and transform television. For some key work in this area, see Bacon-Smith; Bury; J. Gray et al.; C. Harris and Alexander; Hellekson and Busse; Hills; Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, Convergence Culture*, and *Textual Poachers*; L. Lewis; and Pearson and Gwenllian-Jones. For ongoing analyses of fandom, see also the online journal *Transformative Works and Cultures*, and Henry Jenkins’s blog, *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*.

37. For a fascinating discussion of the relation between television and “new media” formations and of fan activity as both labor and love, see Russo.