

August 2018

Don Draper, Teacher-as-Artist: A Diffractive Reading of Mad Men

Gabriel Huddleston
g.huddleston@tcu.edu

Sam Rocha
sam.rocha@ubc.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/taboo>

Recommended Citation

Huddleston, G., & Rocha, S. (2018). Don Draper, Teacher-as-Artist: A Diffractive Reading of Mad Men. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 17 (3). <https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.17.3.05>

Don Draper, Teacher-as-Artist

A Diffractive Reading of *Mad Men*

Gabriel Huddleston & Samuel D. Rocha

Abstract

Popular culture can be used as an apparatus of diffraction, in order to understand the complicated entanglements within both the object and in connection to other elements of society. This article posits that the television drama *Mad Men* is an ideal apparatus of diffraction of the role of teacher, making that assertion collaboratively between the co-authors, demonstrating how popular culture continues to diffract, even when it is “held” from different angles. This article initially reads disjointed as the authors’ work is intercut strategically but not necessarily coherently. By using popular culture as an apparatus of diffraction, the authors become implicitly implicated in a larger entanglement; in this case, between the authors, *Mad Men*, and education. With your reading, the entangled web is extended, and the authors hope further understanding can be gleamed.

Introduction

Gabriel Huddleston: As I have mentioned elsewhere (Huddleston, G., 2016a, 2016b) popular culture can be used as an apparatus of diffraction. Relying on New Materialism scholarship (Coole & Frost, 2010), more specifically Barad’s (2007) work, I have argued that, for a variety of reasons, popular culture is an ideal candidate for diffracting objects of examination in order to understand the complicated entanglements within both the object and in connection to other ele-

Gabriel Huddleston is an assistant professor of curriculum studies at Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas. Samuel D. Rocha is an assistant professor of philosophy of education at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Their email addresses are g.huddleston@tcu.edu & sam.rocha@ubc.ca
© 2018 by Caddo Gap Press.

ments of society. In other words, popular culture diffracts the traditional hierarchy of researcher examining (or measuring) the researched into a multitude of entangled connections. Building on this argument, I posit the television drama *Mad Men* as an ideal apparatus of diffraction of the role of teacher. While similar to my previous work, this paper adds a slight variation by working collaboratively with a co-author whose use of *Mad Men* is different than my own, but reinforces my point by demonstrating how popular culture continues to diffract, even when it is “held” from a different angle. As such, this article will initially read disjointed as our work is intercut strategically but not necessarily coherently. To the ends that Barad suggest, diffraction is a way to glimpse into the entangled nature of our world, so the aim of this paper is to honor such an aim and not detangle such entanglements, but rather an attempt to examine them as they are at the moment of our writing and your reading. By using popular culture as an apparatus of diffraction, the scholar, in this case two scholars, become implicitly implicated in a larger entanglement; in this case, between us, *Mad Men*, and education. With your reading, the entangled web is extended, and we hope further understanding can be gleamed.

Sam Rocha: In my domain of interests, I am better described as an agnostic to diffraction in its theoretical usage. Larger still my agnosticism extends to the very idea of “culture” invoked within cultural studies, most of all when the object of study is, ostensibly, a work of art. My doubt emerges from the dilemmas of art that for me are not so much entangled within cultural or social elements but, instead, hold those realities hostage and supply the necessary and sufficient conditions for their own contingent entanglements. My interest in *Mad Men*, as we will see, is idiosyncratically somewhere between phenomenology and art criticism.

A short prefatory note on method. As should already be clear, I am not a “cultural studier” or a “cultural studyist.” I am a phenomenologist, so my interests are less cultural and more phenomenological in nature. My interest in film is because phenomenology, at its most basic level, is nothing more or less than the study of appearances. The “moving picture” is one way to understand the appearance of film and cinema, which functions within a conceptual sense of movement and the pictorial image that a phenomenological reduction might be especially suited for. This of course rejects out of hand the false limitation put on phenomenology by being reduced to the immediacy of “lived experience.” I am not familiar with dead or killed experience, or any experience that is not lived, but, more constructively, I believe that phenomenology can engage with the ordinary as such, which I have developed at some length in my notion of “folk phenomenology” (Rocha, S.D., 2015). In what follows, I will try to apply this sense of folk phenomenology to the appearance of the television moving picture series, *Mad Men*, as an analogy to and allegory of, the modern-day schooling industrial complex.

Gabriel and Sam: This article contains both a macro-level objective and two micro-level objectives, with a series of negations attached to each. The larger

objective is outlined in the first paragraph with its negation expressed in the paragraph to follow. The smaller, more specific objectives are (1) Using *Mad Men* as an apparatus of diffraction to examine the teacher-as-artist role, negated through “seeing” *Mad Men* as formalist visual art with little to no content, and (2) excavating *Mad Men*’s version of nostalgia to diffract larger questions of curriculum and schooling, negated through the text of the film itself that interrupts the pastiche from settling in.

Gabriel and/or Sam: A profane narrative of office life has been a part of the modern social imaginary since at least Melville’s *Bartleby the Scribner* and was surely canonized by Kafka. Schools, by contrast, contain an affective recollection of institutionalization that largely goes on without irony or interruption. What I mean by this is the following: while the office is a worthy object of pop culture ridicule (as opposed to simple satire), the school is less easily profaned. What offices and schools share is an analogous disciplinary structure and relationship to the eros present in their archetypal nostalgia, desire for home. This short essay will describe an affective subtext found in the moving images of *Mad Men*, in and out of memory, and make believe (as one sees often in the daydreams of its protagonists) to show how *Mad Men* can be understood through the lens of school-day absurdity, imitating what seems to be culture but may only be smoke.

Mad Men, as with other period dramas, offers a bit of a dilemma. Is it saying something about the time of which it is set or something about our current moment? More specifically, is it problematic because of the period it represents or its current productive elements? Probably not surprisingly, I would contend it is both. A cultural studies framework (Grossberg, 1996, 2010; Hall, 1996; Johnson, 1996) insists on such an analysis due to a cycle of cultural production that considers the production of the text, the text itself, the multiple readings of the text and how those reading play out in the structures of everyday society and the lives of those within them. Period dramas like *Mad Men* present an interesting mode of diffraction because of their dual nature, a chance to analyze the past as well as the present. More specifically, while the text is set in the past, the popularity of it in terms of the readings represent a connection to the present moment. This is not unique to *Mad Men* (I am looking at you *Downton Abbey* and our current class identity crisis) but what is an opportunity for diffraction is the central character’s (Don Draper) dual role as both artist and ad man.

Make no mistake, this dual nature complicates all the things that makes *Mad Men* problematic. Its lack of diversity, treatment of women, and glorification of capitalism can all be discussed either in terms of a text representing the late 50s/60s world of corporate America or the various components of the production of the text itself. Throughout several episodes of season five, as examples, women are portrayed as either victims of horrible mothers or horrible mothers themselves. There are certainly documented examples of how women were discriminated against and

oppressed during this time, but to equate it all to a cycle of terrible mothers suggest that Matthew Weiner and the other writers of the show were making a comment on motherhood in general that certainly smacks of a present undercurrent of sexism. The point is to undercut *Mad Men* as an exalted touchstone and portray it as a tool of diffraction because of its imperfections—to lay claim to its whiteness and sexism is necessary to perhaps uncover the same in whatever object you seek to diffract.

Two terminological preambles on operational distinctions regarding nostalgia and emptiness. I want to first briefly distinguish between nostalgia and what I have called “nostalgia for nostalgia.” Nostalgia is what we find in the poetics of Homer’s *Odyssey*, where Odysseus’s longing for home is concretely located in Ithaca and his lover Penelope. Odysseus misses his home; his journey is moved by the eros of his nostalgia; his passion to return home greater than the offers to stay in other homes; his love for Penelope is never satiated by the offers of other lovers. In short, nostalgia accepts no substitutes for home. Odyssean nostalgia is the stuff that builds the Platonic Christian soul and its corresponding theory of recollection—the basis for all major theories of learning. “Nostalgia for nostalgia,” by contrast, is the sort of longing I experienced when I read and re-read the *Odyssey*. My experience is to yearn for Odysseus’s nostalgia, to wish I could have a home to long for like he does. Since I cannot experience nostalgia properly, in the Odyssean sense, my sense of nostalgia is then doubled. I suspect that this is the same sort of nostalgia for nostalgia we find in Don Draper’s existential angst about his bastard origins and later identity theft (yet the series itself discloses something different from Draper’s nostalgia for nostalgia). This is also a commentary on the experience of *mestizaje* in the United States, as opposed to native indigeneity—in this case, Draper’s experience is a mestizo experience while the series itself is steeped in a quintessential nativism that often lurks in essentialist conceptions of indigeneity that border themselves in the “Turtle Island” of the North American anglosphere. “Nostalgia for nostalgia,” then, is not knowing where one should or will be buried as opposed to the simple nostalgia of being far from one’s proper site of burial. “Nostalgia for nostalgia” is partly what is implied in the “X” of Malcolm X’s namesake: the rejection of a therapeutic and false home (e.g., “Back to Africa” or “I too am an American”). Here, in Malcolm’s “X” we find two complementary senses of emptiness: one the on hand, we have the empty signifier, which holds open the possibility of a home to come, a negativity that clears space for a future; on the other hand, we have true emptiness, which is what here I will refer to as “smoke,” where the object of desire is in fact nothing at all and all that is left is the nihilistic and consumerist pastiche of nostalgia: the ad and marketing campaign and shopping mall. Any other uses of these terms for this essay would risk a misunderstanding of my analysis.

Draper’s job at the beginning of the series is the Director of the Creative Department at the advertising firm of Sterling Cooper. His title morphs dependent on the changes at the company of which he works, but his job is essentially the same, create and pitch ad campaigns for his company’s current and prospective

clients. This is perhaps captured best in the episode, “The Wheel,” in which Draper reintroduces Kodak’s new slide projector as the Carousel:

Draper: It takes us to a place where we ache to go again. It’s not called the wheel, it’s called the carousel. It lets us travel the way a child travels—around and around, and back home again, to a place where we know are loved.

In the fictitious world of *Mad Men*, Draper is considered a giant of the industry with peers often seeing his process as artistic and magical. Draper himself extols the creative virtues of advertising eschewing research and data as irrelevant. At the same time, Draper’s cynicism about the very emotions he seeks to stir is evident by the line, “What you call love was invented by guys like me, to sell nylons.” Draper’s cynicism alludes to the awareness of his artistic process within a larger capitalist system where his creativity, however impressive and rewarding, is meant to simply sell products.

This dual nature of Draper’s job is intensified by (is it acceptable to write “spoiler alert” in an academic text?) his literal dual personality. Draper is actually Dick Whitman who, after the real Draper’s death, assumed his identity. While this assumed identity and Draper’s continual denial of his real past is a fascinating plot point, its interest here is only secondary to the other dual life he has, the artist and the ad man.

Draper’s lack of an actual past only adds to the mystique of his character for others on the show. As one coworker remarks, “Draper? Who knows anything about that guy, no one’s ever lifted that rock. He could be Batman for all we know.” This mystique plays into what others see as a mythical, magical process for not only coming up with aesthetically pleasing ad campaigns, but then convincing the companies during the pitch session that they want these campaigns at all. As I will argue later, it is also essential for Draper’s ability to remain within a world with which he is not at all comfortable.

The other world that Draper feels both a kinship and unease with is the burgeoning counter culture movement during this time period. Throughout the show’s run, Draper is a serial adulterer with various women from various backgrounds. During the first few episodes, we meet Draper’s mistress (Midge Daniels) first, then his wife (Betty Draper). Midge lives in the Village and is an artist, her scene is other artists, musicians, and bohemian types and Don seems to enjoy dropping in from time to time and engage in philosophical discussions with her friends to indulge his inner artist while at the same time flaunting his privileged position of “ad man.” The following exchange demonstrates this:

Midge’s Friend: Dig. Ad man’s got a heart.

Midge Daniels: The grown-ups are talking.

Midge’s Friend: Don’t defend him. [*to Don*] Toothpaste doesn’t solve anything. Dacron sure as hell won’t bring back those ten dead kids in Biloxi.

Don: Neither will buying some TOKAY wine and leaning up against a wall in Grand Central pretending you're a vagrant.

Midge's Friend: You know what it's like to watch all you ants go into your hive? I wipe my ass with the *Wall Street Journal*.

Woman: How come every time we have a party the ladies have to sit and listen to the men talk?

Midge's Friend: Look at you. Satisfied, dreaming up jingles for soap flakes and spot remover, telling yourself you're free.

Don: Oh, my God. Stop talking and make something of yourself.

Roy: Like you? You make the lie. You invent want. You're for them... not us.

Don: Well, I hate to break it to you, but there is no big lie. There is no system. The universe is indifferent.

Midge's Friend: Aww man, why did you have to say that?

Roy: You can't go out there, the cops.

Don: I can... *you* can't.

The point here is that Don finds himself between two worlds, both of which he can never fully be a part of due to his split persona. And yet, each half allows him movement within its opposite world. Draper's business side makes him more attractive to women, for example, and grants him privilege to move easily in and out of the lives of those he has a connection to, while, as mentioned before, his artist side makes him a valuable asset for the companies of which he is employed. This calls to mind Spivak's (1993) in terms of how access is granted in some arenas, but full acceptance is denied because the thing that grants one access is attached to that which makes one still "other".

In the end, as Buzzanell and D'Enbeau (2013) discuss, Draper represents the ability to make ordinary work within an ad agency "meaningful work." Meaningful work is work that acknowledges or impacts one's own being and existence in some way beyond wages. In other words, a person feels called to do work for a higher purpose beyond the apparent demands of the job itself. It is the concept of meaningful work that I wish to explore by using Don Draper as a model to discuss the teacher as artist.

Let us go to the bar. Wolf and Hound, in Kitsilano, on Broadway and Alma, an Irish Pub owned by a Pakistani man where I play soul music once or twice a month. I asked my students one night, "What *is* it about *Mad Men*? I think I love it, but I just don't *get* it. I'm not even sure what I'm watching." Then I lit up a Lucky Strike and squinted through a collected haze of smoke and sipped my cool light beer, a respite from a day of hard liquor. (Aside: I of course didn't really do that, but the imaginary progression describes something about the affect of *Mad Men* that is

perhaps its most constitutive element.) Again I asked my students, “What is *Mad Men* even about?” One of them, a middle-aged German woman, said softly as if she was exhaling, “All the smoking, I just adore it. Everyone smokes.” Everyone seemed to agree, even those who didn’t smoke and didn’t like smoking. There was something about the “smokiness” of the series that had to do with what it was about. “The clothes,” another student said. The mood at the pub table moved into something almost pensive but not ponderous. It was as if there was a sense that the world of *Man Men*—not the literal, historical, or political world, here I mean the phenomenological *real* world—was gone forever. We seemed, some more than others (I felt I was observing but being drawn into the moment at the same time), we seemed to be smoking on the unfiltered cigarette of nostalgia, imported from Greek epic verse.

Draper, Teacher as Artist

The connection between *Mad Men* and education or Don Draper and teacher as artist are not entirely tenuous. Admitting that there is some intellectual heavy lifting to make the connections, it is helpful to start where the show actually intersects with education. In a five-episode story arc of season three, Don begins an affair with his daughter’s (Sally) former teacher, Suzanne Farrell. Throughout the show and sometimes while married, Draper has sexual encounters with a variety of women and his complicated relationship with women is a recurring theme of the show. While the relationships themselves vary in terms of length and depth, and therefore importance, they tend to all tie together with Don’s childhood (as Dick Whitman) in which he spent most of his life in a brothel. Reifying Don’s dual professional life, his personal life’s duality is symbolized by his traditional, domesticated relationship with one set of women and his illicit affairs with objectified and highly sexualized women. While not the focus of this paper, this duality is of particular interest as it relates to Don choosing to start an affair with a teacher. Perhaps, in seeing the dual nature of a teacher, Don sees a kinship.

Grumet’s (1988) work elucidates the duality of teaching as it relates to gender. Ultimately, the profession of teaching, as constructed by a patriarchal society, was to exploit “maternal” qualities as a means to indoctrinate students into a hegemony that oppresses women. As such, women who were teachers found themselves in a duality that meant to question the construction of gender was to question their role in reifying such a construction through their teaching. Grumet seeks to break this connection and writes: “Stigmatized as “women’s work,” teaching rests waiting for us to reclaim it and transform it into the work of women” (p. 58). Grumet speaks to a process in which the emancipation of women is directly tied to a move from teachers engaged in the process of schooling to one of true education—from indoctrination-as-instruction to teaching-as-artistry. Ayers (2010) posits such a duality as a moral choice that all teachers must make, do we encourage conformity or truly

educate? If we are to believe Althusser (2006), such a move is nearly impossible due to schools' roles as ideological state apparatuses.¹ Althusser aside, Tyack and Cuban (1995) speak to the "grammar of schools" that make true change difficult at best and Kliebard (2004) outlines the difficulties of one particular version of US curriculum winning out over others. All this being said, Don is witnessed to the duality of teachers, first meeting Suzanne in a meeting to discuss Sally's bad behavior thereby fulfilling her role of "schooling" and later becoming more attracted to her when he watches her at a school field day, dancing with children and thereby symbolizing a certain type of idealism. Over the course of their relationship, Don finds a kindred spirit who sees herself as complicit, but trapped in a society of which she does not belong. She, as many teachers do, yearns to be more than a simple bureaucrat pushing children towards conformity and wants to express herself in the artistry of teaching.

When we look at the language of schools, from policy to administration to teaching, there is something very similar, if not identical to *Mad Men* going on in a vague and perplexing way. For all the defense and offense of and about schooling, there is an equal volume of haziness about the aboutness of schools. Schools have mostly lost their bathroom smoking—with the recent exception of the Juule—and classrooms in universities no longer have their lecturing smokers. It may seem that the smoke has cleared, but the truth may indeed be the reverse, just as today's longing for smoke happens in bars where smoking is outlawed. Today, many lament the loss of teacher agency and blame neoliberalism for privatizing public schools into shells of their former progressive selves. This, of course, is highly oversimplified—however pious it is to feel deeply about such oversimplifications—but the school narrative has more depth when considered through the hazy question of what *Mad Men* might be about. Office fiction often does this, but *Mad Men*'s nostalgic seriousness may do it in a different way. No one longs for Dilbert. We laugh at Steve Carell. If this unique smokiness from *Mad Men* were to translate into the sacred realm of schooling we might find that its mystique forces us to admit that we don't really get what schools are. I mean, sure, there is the history, the politics, the assumptions, the kids, the teachers, the state, the lack of cigarettes and danger, and the shootings. I get that much. But in Greece, Spain, Russia and more, schools are taking shape while facing some stark and concrete challenges. They are post-economic. The youth go to school for something other than jobs. There are no jobs to be had, but people go regardless, some by law, others by choice, but no one can say what for. Neoliberal austerity and collapse does not seem to be deterring the school; schools may not be as fragile as capitalist ideology would have us believe. Across the global south, by contrast, many youth have never wanted to attend school, and continue to avoid schools altogether, despite sanctimonious Church and State efforts. So there is nothing so fragile nor so durable as "the school." If there is anything to this thing we call school, and I hope that can agree that there really should be at least something, then perhaps we should take a closer look at *Mad*

Men and the love of vinyl records. The smoke we hear that is cloudy and warm, that burns slowly, like a Dunhill cigarette.

To be clear, I want to state what this paper is not. It is not an attack on the notion of teacher as artist. As someone that continues to view his teaching as an artistic endeavor, I obviously identify myself as such. I do think the teacher as artist must be problematized, however, to fully understand its role in the furthering of neoliberal education reform. As I have stated elsewhere (Huddleston, G., 2016a, 2017), the true power of such reforms are not their effectiveness in solving problems within the US public education system, if this was the case they would cease to exist, but rather their ability to become embodied by the actors within said system. Building off Puar's (2007) conception of bodies as contagions, I wonder if the teacher-as-artist is an inoculation or does it make us more prone to become infected by neoliberalism? I have often remarked that the liberating and simultaneously frustrating feeling of "no one in the administration cares what you do" marked my experience as a high school theatre teacher. In other words, because I taught a subject that was not tested, few of my superiors were concerned about both the classes I taught and the plays I directed. Unless a parent complained about the curriculum, I was free to do what I wanted. Combined with a culture often apathetic towards theatre in general (especially in our sports obsessed school), I was an artist nation unto myself. I was frustrated, however, that our work as a theatre program was not given its deserved attention and my student's talent and ability was not appreciated. Case in point, we were not allowed to have a Friday night show of our Fall musical as it conflicted with the football game. While this status sheltered me from the No Child Left Behind deforming of my school, it also granted me permission to disengage from the battle and content myself with my role as the artist in the back of the room only calling attention to myself when it served my purposes.

The teacher as artist has long been framed as haunting presence alongside teacher as professional or teacher as scientist. hooks (2014), Greene (1995), Dewey (2005, 2008), and Freire (2000), saw the aesthetic side of a teacher as essential to bring a sense of fluidity to the more static notions of teaching and learning. It filled the gaps of what a teacher had to do with what a teacher was inspired to do. It helped to explain and justify what some (including myself) come to call "teachable moments" when inspiration meets opportunity. Just writing those words fill my mind with moments from my own teaching that I felt were magical—goose-bump inducing. But were they? My judgement of those "teachable moments" as magical are only based on my interpretation of what was taught, and more importantly, what was learned. And yet, my experience as an actor works to confirm the magic as real because they felt so similar to the times I was on stage and knew I had the audience in the palm of my hand.

The usual analytic route is to use pop culture to make sense of schooling and curriculum, but in this case the direction must be reversed phenomenologically. At that pub table, sitting with graduate students over beer and appetizers and some-

thing approaching ordinary talk, there was a collective sense that this moment was our *Mad Men*, this time and place that seems fleeting if not gone in the institution we live and work in, the university, but long gone—in fact now extinct—in the schools of children and teenagers. In *Mad Men* we see the smoke that we do not see anymore because the absence of smoke is true emptiness, just as the Golden Age of television celebrates the recent escape from this emptiness that surrounds us as we listen to a zombie speak to us about education when we'd all rather watch them on Netflix.

In any case, the role of teacher as artist is often discussed as a safe place to shelter those of us who find the other work of teaching to be debilitating and dreadful. Again, it presents a chance for us to do what we *want* to do, not what we have to. And while all these things can be true, it can also be true that we do considerable harm when we wrap ourselves in the cloak of the artiste. As Taubman (2009) discusses, we teachers and educational researchers must be held accountable for our role in the growth of the very reforms some of us rail against. By positing our work as either artistic or valuing the teacher as artist, could we be in danger of reinforcing its position as only worthwhile in service to the production of knowledge as capital in the form of standardized test scores? I think it directly depends on what type of artist we are discussing.

Taking a cue from Spivak (1993), I contend the teacher-as-artist we typically discuss is one firmly planted in the margins of the U.S. public education system, with the center being teacher as bureaucrat, checking boxes in a continually overwhelming audit culture (Apple, 2001). This teacher as artist is like Draper as artist, a privileged position that allows one to hide in the margins and never really engage in what Derrida calls a deconstructive “event” (Caputo & Derrida, 1997). This artist relies upon artistry as a means to stay within the education system so that the privilege of being a teacher allows a continual retreat from the sea of troubles represented by neoliberal education reform. It is not as though this teacher as artist is excluded from the new free market frontier of public education, to a certain extent it is valued. Look at the rhetoric surrounding said reforms. Words such as “powerful,” “special,” “impactful,” “magical,” and “love of learning” make the discussion of teachers sound like a superhero origin story and tap into the same descriptors often associated with teacher as artist. In other words, the place at the neoliberal table for the teacher-as-artist may not be at the head, but it is set and ready for us to dine, even if we are occasionally rude. At this table, we are the crazy uncle, tolerated, but accepted and welcomed.

Jackson and Mazzei (2011) have used the same Spivakian analysis to discuss how race plays in the relationship between the center and margins of the teaching profession, more specifically in the academy. What *Mad Men* and Don Draper bring into focus, however, is how arts reifies notions of who a “teacher” is. As mentioned earlier, many have posited the arts as a potentially liberating experience for both the teacher and the student. Spivak (2012) herself speaks to how literature could

be used to examine oppression, power, and liberation. Greene (1995) positions the arts as potentially liberating because she sees it as a key way for a person to achieve the fullest potential of her existential self. While this analysis does not refute completely the potentiality of the arts in the world of teaching, it does seek to problematize it by examining three scenes from the *Mad Men* series: The Carousel Pitch, the Hershey's pitch, and the final scene in the last episode.

The Carousel Pitch

The final episode of season one, "The Wheel", finds many of the storylines coming to a resolution, or at least a resting point. One of those storylines is the advertising firm for which Don works pushing for higher quality clients as a means to raise its status. One of those potential clients is Eastman Kodak who are unhappy with the campaign for its latest product, the Wheel, a slide projector. The "pitch" scene, in which Don describes his idea for an advertising campaign starts with executives sitting down and stating they know it's hard to market something called the wheel, the world's oldest technology, as it doesn't seem new enough. This remark triggers the following monologue from Don:

Well, technology is a glittering lure. But there is the rare occasion when the public can be engaged on a level beyond flash, if they have a sentimental bond with the product. My first job, I was in-house at a fur company, with this old-pro copywriter, a Greek named Teddy. Teddy told me the most important idea in advertising is new. Creates an itch. You simply put your product in there as a kind of calamine lotion. But he also talked about a deeper bond with the product. Nostalgia. It's delicate, but potent. Teddy told me that in Greek, "nostalgia" literally means "the pain from an old wound". It's a twinge in your heart far more powerful than memory alone. This device isn't a spaceship, it's a time machine. It goes backwards, forwards, takes us to a place where we ache to go again. It's not called the wheel. It's called the carousel. It lets us travel the way a child travels. Round and around, and back home again, to a place where we know we are loved.

Don's pitch is effective. Everyone in the room is moved, including an associate of Don's who starts to cry and leaves the room. The executives from Kodak-Eastman waste no time calling from the lobby to say they have cancelled meetings with other advertising firms and want to hire Don's.

This scene helps to understand that for all the talk of the lessening roles of teachers in the classroom, especially as it relates to control of the curriculum, teachers still play and are placed in crucially located role as it relates to students and to the curriculum. Don's selling of the slide projector as "The Carousel" offers insight into how the placement of the teachers reinforces our ideas of teacher-as-artists.

When watching the scene, it is notable to see how the characters stage the pitch meeting. An ongoing theme of the series is how potential clients are "setup" to be as receptive as possible to Don's pitch. Clients are usually fed a good meal,

the account managers go on and on about Don's magic that they are about to witness, they are brought into a nicely appointed boardroom, Don is introduced by means of some humorous small talk, and then he lets loose as only he can. In other words, everything is done to cultivate the spotlight for Don and set himself up to deliver on a magical performance. The key point in understanding the teacher as artist is the placement of Don's performance as it relates to the clients and the clients' product.

The main goal of Don's pitch is to reintroduce a product to clients that already know it well. In the case of the projector, the representatives from Kodak have spent months in meetings about the product, how to develop it, push it along to production, why they see it as an a lucrative productive for its potential customers, etc. They "know" this product inside and out, so it is up to Don to sell them on his radically different vision for how the product should be marketed. Don is squarely placed between a "new" product that he has now transformed and the potential clients, the onus is on him to unveil it in a performative, artistic manner. In this sense, Don and his performative pitch have become intertwined with this transformed product as one piece of art. For teachers, it is the same, as they are placed squarely between their students and the curriculum—expected to present something as transformed from what students already knew or how students would have experienced it if encountered on their own.

A teacher in such a centrally located position between the student and curriculum is nothing new. Kliebard (2004) points out how the different factions of curriculum development in the United States often vacillated between the two poles, placing the teacher not necessarily in the middle but towards one pole or another. Dewey (2008), however, was committed to the teacher in a position, while perhaps not equally from one side or another, in a "sweet spot" between the student and the teacher. Dewey saw the teacher as constantly finding her place between student and curriculum, carefully weighing the child's interest, abilities, and weaknesses against what society decided as important. He bemoaned any approach that he saw as favoring one side over the another as he saw the teacher as essential to constantly judging the contextual to decide what to teach and how.

Ayers (2010) expands the point by elucidating what Dewey was getting at, that the curriculum is not inert, but contained society's wishes for how an individual was to be enculturated. Ayers saw teachers in a moral position in which they would often be put in a position to choose between what society wanted students to be and what the teacher saw as the best interests for the student. In this sense, both Dewey and Ayers saw the stakes as high, not unlike how Draper and his co-workers saw the stakes in landing a potential big client. Dewey (2013), not one for hyperbole, stated as much when he said, "The teacher always is the prophet of the true God and the usherer in of the true kingdom of God" (p. 40).

But how to do this? How does teacher occupy this position? A scientific approach is definitely one option in which a certain amount of research is needed for teachers to find the balanced position between student and curriculum. One could

study child psychology to understand her students better, gain a significant amount of content knowledge by studying, and find the best methods for delivering such knowledge to students. However, there has always been another way and Don's philosophy about his job points to it. Don is in the business of telling people why they want to buy a product, so he sees his potential clients as no different. For Don, he doesn't need research to tell him what he needs to do, he relies on his artistry as a means to sell. The way society views teachers and how they view themselves is no different. One can look at various popular culture iterations of teachers to see a magical, mystical artistry as central to the teacher archetype. For Don, the artistry works, Kodak signs on as a client and the firm is put in a position for success. In the case of the teacher, artistry is often posited as a positive, a mystical process by which a teacher can occupy the liminal space that Dewey describes or tackle the moral paradox of which Ayers speaks. It is powerful, and as will be discussed later, is is easy to co-opt.

The Hershey's Pitch

The last episode of season six finds Don at a crossroads. The firm has gone through numerous changes, including a merger with another advertising company. Don has continued his affairs, although now he has divorced his first wife, Betty, and is now remarried to his current wife, Megan. His drinking has also become a problem, leading to numerous lapses in judgement, including his daughter walking in on him having sex with another married woman and punching a minister at a bar leading to a night in jail. All the while, Don continues his artistry as the firm's leading creative force, but his personal life is starting to affect his work resulting in a precarious position that culminates in the last episode of the season. What is telling about this story arc is it's echoing of the other side of artistry, the dangerous, maddening side--the side of artist that society does not venerate but fully acknowledges.

Regardless of the larger picture of the artist that Don's character arc alludes, the final pitch he gives at the end of season six is telling for how a specific version of the teacher-as-artist is allowed in the margins of the education system and how other versions are not. As will be discussed later, this means that perhaps one version of the teacher-as-artist is more likely to be co-opted than another. The scene in which Don pitches to executives from Hershey's chocolate company gives us a glimpse of this difference.

The scene starts off very similar to the one previously mentioned. Executives from Hershey are brought into a boardroom and everything is set up for Don to do his usual artistic magic in delivering the perfect "pitch". Don, as he has come to be expected, delivers and the Hershey executives are clearly impressed. However, this time, the magic Don conjures has worked against him and offered him a glimpse into the current travails in his life. The camera remains focused on a troubled Don

as the executives gush and the Don's partners sing his praises, assuming they have another client in the bag. The scene then takes a turn:

Don: I'm sorry... I have to say this, because I don't know if I'll ever see you again.

Hershey's executive: What?

Don: I was an orphan. I grew up in Pennsylvania, in a whorehouse. I read about Milton Hershey and his school in *Torn Up Magazine*, or some other crap the girls left by the toilet, and I read that some orphans had a different life there. I could picture it. I dreamed of it—being wanted. Because the woman who was forced to raise me would look at me every day like she wished I would disappear. The closest I got to being wanted was with a girl who made me go through her johns' pockets while they screwed. If I collected more than a dollar, she'd buy me Hershey bar, and I would eat it alone in my room with great ceremony. Feeling like a normal kid. It said "sweet" on the package. It was the only sweet thing in my life.

Hershey's executive: You want to advertise that?

Don: If I had my way, you would never advertise. You shouldn't have someone like me telling that boy what a Hershey bar is. He already knows.

It here that we see Don rendered vulnerable because his of artistry, usually used only as a means to sell product, has offered him a fleeting look at something more tangible—possibly even more true. At the very least, at this moment, Don finds himself seeing how he usually applies his craft as meaningless—as artifice. By recognizing a past moment when a candy bar meant so much to him personally without the aid of an advertising campaign, we see the true talent of Don's work which is not the ability to sell things to people, but to recognize how things become meaningful in the lives of the ordinary. As we find out later in the episode, this type of talent is useless to his partners, his firm, and to society at large.

Towards the end of the episode, Don's partners call him into the office and ask him to take a temporary leave of absence. His personal behavior over the last few months has become a problem, mainly because it has resulted in the loss of clients due to his shoddy work. The Hershey's pitch crystallized for Don's partners what they had suspected, his artistry could no longer justify his presence in the firm. The episode ends with Don taking his children to the brothel, now completely run down and in a crumbling neighborhood, to show them the house in which he grew up—no doubt as a result of his epiphany in the boardroom.

Similar to the Don in the first scene, the typical teacher-as-artist holds an accepted, if not exalted, place within schools. However, there are limits on that artistry and as soon as a teacher relies on artistry that is either considered useless, or perhaps, even dangerous, they are just as likely to be excommunicated as Don was from his firm. Ironically, as with Don gathering some type of insight into his own life, the teacher-as-(dangerous) artist, could be the type of instructor students

deserve because of the inherent power. I believe there are anecdotal examples of such expulsions, when teachers artistry offers powerful educative moments for students only to find that such moments are not wanted because they do not fall within the confines of traditional schooling. More recently Ta-Nahesi Coates (2015) writes of how teaching artistry that powerfully engages students to think beyond the confines of what society expects and accepts is often marginalized and quarantined.

This nostalgic pastiche of mourning and curious delight from a distance grasps at what has been called the curricular question, “What knowledge of is of most worth?” The knowledge worth its very existence is the one, it seems, that has a certain poetic transmissive capacity to replicate a dream world of affect, color, and smoke. But the smoke ultimately, in this appearance, is empty. I am afraid that the aesthetic core of *Mad Men* is a sort of nihilism that in this case has always been part of the American psyche with respect to officework and surely the grim preparation for officework literacy we find in schools. Indeed, on this reading, *Mad Men* is nothing more than the result of the compulsory schools campaigned for in the 1930’s by the Common School movement, and vaguely satirized by Melville’s anarchic Christological protagonist, Bartleby. This may seem remote to discussions of schooling, but the phenomenological route is obvious and direct. Indeed, there is perhaps no greater caricature of itself in this regard than the school of today—everything we hate about our mendicant and sycophantic lives collect and culture there in a haze of empty smoke that dropouts refuse. In fact, *Mad Men* is a fairly modest bit of nostalgia by comparison to the drama of the ritualized school, universally understood and recognized, albeit only longed for in my cases and places.

Conclusion: The Coca-Cola Pitch

The final season of *Mad Men* sees a continuation of Don’s character arc from the end of season six. While his personal life continues downward (Don and his second wife, Megan, eventually divorce), he works hard to recapture his status in his professional one. The details of both his personal and professional lives are not entirely relevant to this paper, save that after some maneuvering, Don finds himself back at work. The difference is that due to some changes at the firm, he is no longer a big fish in a small tank, but rather a relatively small fish at a larger corporation (McCann Advertising) that has bought out the smaller firm. As a result, Don finds himself conflicted because while he is back at his job, he finds life at a larger firm to be unfulfilling when he attends a business meeting with all the other creative directors at McCann. Don is no longer special, but now just one of many. As the researcher tasked with introducing research about the target audience of a new “light” beer drones one, Don gets up and walks out to start another mission to find meaning in his meaningless life. When the CEO of McCann asks Don’s co-worker who knows him best, Roger Sterling, “Where the hell is Don? He walked out of

a meeting on Wednesday and hasn't come back," Roger replies with a shrug, "He does that."

As the last few episodes progress, Don continues a downward spiral and finds himself, after a trek across country, at a new-age retreat. At one point, Don is so downtrodden he seems to consider suicide, but after attending a self-help session he starts to turn his life around. In the series' final scene we see Don on a cliff in a meditative pose and he serenely chants—seemingly at peace with the world. As the camera zooms in, Don slightly smiles. If the series ended here, one could make an argument that Don has embraced his artistic side, refusing to use such qualities within the larger capitalist machine. However, the episode is not over. As the scene fades out on Don, we hear music and the episode ends with the "I'd like to buy the world a Coke" ad. The implication that Don's new found insight and inner peace has led to him create one of the most famous ad campaigns in marketing history. His quest for inner peace did not pave the way for an escape from his professional life, but rather a triumphant return.

This final scene exemplifies how thinking of one's life in the mode of an artist might not offer escape from a system of suffering. If Don's example is any indication, the embrace of the artistic might make one further susceptible to stay in such a place. jagodzinski (2016) deals with such a possibility in his critique of Slattery's (2012, 2016) work around postmodern aesthetics. While jagodzinski's piece deals with larger contexts of globalized capitalism as it relates to the differences he sees between Slattery's use of the term, proleptic, and his own interpretation of said term within a larger eschatological framework, I want to focus on his secondary focus, "to query art (or arts) by those who support arts based research as it is hegemonically and anthropocentrically defined as a cure to what is set up as a failing educational system of assessment and accountability" (p. 10). Instead of arts based research, I wish to examine the heretofore discussed scenes from Don Draper's life and the "teacher-as-artist" in this similar light. The link can be seen in the following quote from jagodzinski in which he first troubles how moments of spiritual awakening, either through religion or aesthetics, is problematic precisely because it has become so accepted in a capitalist globalized world:

The worry here is that this 'born again' phenomenon has become globalized. Its viral spread through social media can also easily be interpreted as proleptic eschatology: here the future is seemingly open (in utopian terms), there is hope, there is a centering of identity (I belong), and a jouissance of being alive despite living in a 'corrupt' and unjust world, as when Catholic youth meet in religious jamborees to 'see' the Pope. They seek immediate experience and the enjoyment of religious fervour. Time stands still; it is an event. (p. 12)

Jagodzinski could easily be talking about Don in the final scene of *Mad Men*. By mapping on the experience of being an artist onto an already corrupted spiritual salvation, jagodzinski posits that art as rebellion only furthers the aims of globalized capitalism. He writes:

My point however, is that this exclusive exceptional smooth space of artistic rebellion, which is disruptive in its resistance, simply supports capitalism's 'creative destruction'. Capitalism has no program, no social or political project beyond producing, circulating and accumulating capital. It is schizophrenic as Deleuze and Guattari put it. It has to absorb and integrate all new forms of dissent for continuous growth. (p. 19)

Overall, a teacher envisioning their job as "artist" could have pedagogical and curricular benefits for her students, but as a means to create sanctuary in the larger neoliberal landscape of high-stakes standardized testing and accountability through an act of artistic rebellion, little faith or hope should be placed in the smoky haze of American despair.

Note

¹ Although, Althusser himself leaves room for a small possibility due to the duality of teachers.

References:

- Althusser, L. (2006). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses (notes towards an investigation). *The anthropology of the state: A reader*, 9(1), 86-98.
- Apple, M. W. (2001). *Educating the "right" way: Markets, standards, God, and inequality*. New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Ayers, W. (2010). *To teach: the journey of a teacher*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Barad, K. M. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Buzzanell, P. M., & D'Enbeau, S. (2013). Explicating creativity and design: The nature and meaningfulness of work in Mad Men. *Western Journal of Communication*, 77(1), 54-71.
- Caputo, J. D., & Derrida, J. (1997). *Deconstruction in a nutshell: A conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York, NY: Fordham University Press.
- Coates, T.-N. (2015). *Between the world and me*. New York, NY: Spiegel and Grau.
- Coole, D. H., & Frost, S. (2010). Introducing the new materialisms. In D. H. Coole & S. Frost (Eds.), *New materialisms: Ontology, agency, and politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Dewey, J. (2005). *Art as experience*. New York, NY: Berkley Publishing Group.
- Dewey, J. (2008). *Experience and education*. New York, NY: Touchstone.
- Dewey, J. (2013). My pedagogic creed. In D. J. Flinders & S. J. Thornton (Eds.), *The curriculum studies reader* (pp. 167-181). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts, and social change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Grossberg, L. (1996). On postmodernism and articulation: An interview with Stuart Hall. In S. Hall, D. Morley, & K.-H. Chen (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Grossberg, L. (2010). *Cultural studies in the future tense*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Grumet, M. R. (1988). *Bitter milk: Women and teaching*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Hall, S. (1996). Cultural studies and its theoretical legacies. In S. Hall, D. Morley, & K.-H. Chen (Eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical dialogues in cultural studies*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hooks, B. (2014). *Teaching to transgress*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Huddleston, G. (2016a). The zombie in the room: Using popular culture as an apparatus. In N. Snaza, D. Sonu, S. Truman, & Z. Zaliwska (Eds.), *Pedagogical matters: New materialisms and curriculum studies*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Huddleston, G. (2016b). A Dark Knight for public education: Using Batman as an apparatus of diffraction with neoliberal education reform. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*, 38(5), 468-489.
- Huddleston, G. (2017). Welcome to Zombie City. In N. Ares, E. Buendía, & R. J. Helfenbein (Eds.), *Deterritorializing/reterritorializing: Critical geography of educational reform*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Jackson, A. Y., & Mazzei, L. A. (2011). *Thinking with theory in qualitative research: Viewing data across multiple perspectives*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- jagodzinski, j. (2016). A parallel universe: The keynote I did not give. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 31(2).
- Johnson, R. (1996). What is cultural studies anyway? In J. Storey (Ed.), *What is cultural studies: A reader*. London, UK: Arnold.
- Kliebard, H. M. (2004). *The struggle for the American curriculum, 1893-1958*. New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Puar, J. K. (2007). *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Rocha, S. D. (2015). *Folk phenomenology: Education, study, and the human person*. New York, NY: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Slattery, P. (2012). *Curriculum development in the postmodern era: Teaching and learning in an age of accountability*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Slattery, P. (2016). Toward proleptic experience in arts-based educational research and practice. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 31(2).
- Spivak, G. C. (1993). *Outside in the teaching machine*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Spivak, G. C. (2012). *An aesthetic education in the era of globalization*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Taubman, P. M. (2009). *Teaching by numbers: Deconstructing the discourse of standards and accountability in education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Tyack, D. B., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia: A century of public school reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.