

Flâneurs, Urban Planning and Disembodiment: Communities and Space in TV Series

Carmen M. Méndez García

Universidad Complutense de Madrid

cmmendez@ucm.es

Communities and individualism in the US

- Hillis Miller, *Communities in Fiction*, 2014
- Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, 1973
 - “A sense of common identity and characteristics,” and “the body of direct relationships” as opposed to “the organized establishment of realm or state.”
 - A community is “relatively small,” with a “sense of immediacy or locality.”
 - Warmth and mutuality of a true community depends on the ways one knows one’s neighbor, “in kindness and mutuality”.
 - Social placement exposes the individual entirely to other people, with no corner of private subjectivity hidden away from them.
 - Class: Williams understands that a true community must also be classless. Class structures, particularly those generated by capitalism, destroy community

Mad Men (Matthew Weiner, AMC, 2007-2015)

- March 1960 - November 1970
- Don Draper as flâneur / observer / detachment
- "'stroller, idler, walker."
- A well-dressed man, strolling leisurely / in permanent movement
- Aloof, always alone in the crowd
- Indolence as a mask
- A "cool but curious eye" that studies the constantly changing spectacle that parades before him (Rignall 112)

[Image removed from the slide: promotional poster for season 6 of Mad Men, showing Don Draper on Madison Avenue, walking away from a man who also seems to be Don Draper]

Mad Men (Matthew Weiner, AMC, 2007-2015)

- Donald Draper as a nomad, moving along smooth spaces (vs. striated spaces, Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1987)
- Observing (vs. Belonging in) different communities
 - Countercultural communities (beatniks, hippies / Hollywood)
 - Suburban communities / problem with no name
 - Professional communities

[Images removed from the slide: Don taking a hit off a hookah (Season 6, episode 10, "A Tale of Two Cities"; Roger visits his son Margaret ("Marigold") in a commune (Season 7, episode 4, "The Monolith")]

Mad Men (Matthew Weiner, AMC, 2007-2015)

- Evolution in space and communities
 - from post-war WWII placidity to the countercultures
 - from us vs. them to Coca-Cola's "I'd like to teach the world to sing"

[Images removed from the slide: Don in his suburban home with his family on Season 1; Don in a meeting at work; Don meditating in the series finale (Season 7, episode 14, "Person to Person")]

Show Me a Hero (David Simmons, HBO, 2015)

- 1987 – 1994
- Federal courts order public housing be built in the white, middle class side of Yonkers, NY.
- Trying to remedy, through urban planning, decades-long housing segregation.

[Image removed from the slide: promotional poster for the premiere of Show Me a Hero]

Show Me a Hero (David Simmons, HBO, 2015)

- Urban planning and the artificial reshaping of communities
- Communities and spaces of dissent / agreement / assent

[Image removed from the slide: meeting of city officials and urban planners in Show Me a Hero]

Show Me a Hero (David Simmons, HBO, 2015)

- Race
- Sameness and difference in the community
(white class vs. public housing)

[Two images removed from the slide: meeting of black and latino families being relocated in Yonkers with Mary Dorman sitting among them; Council meetings drowned out by the screams of an angry mob]

- Major is shunned from the community who voted for him, seen as responsible for the dissolution of the stable community after the entrance of the racial Other.
- The Tragedy in the title, show me a hero and I will write you a tragedy, by Fitzgerald, emphasizes the failure of heroic individualism, but also what is perceived as a betrayal by the community, breaking the “us vs. them” mentality that is the safety but can also be the burden of the community.
- Also, there not clear sense of community at the end of the series, due to changes imposed from above and through objective urban planning, so the new community will have to settle itself.
- This is not clearly celebrated, at least in the timeframe of the series: we only see very timid possibilities that the new, redefined community will somehow survive through the good will of individuals bent on redefining that community.

Sense8 (Wachowski Sisters, Netflix, 2015-)

- 2010s
- “Sensates”: 8 individuals from 8 different cultures , who suddenly awake to experience what they first perceive as dreams or visions, then finding themselves growing mentally, emotionally, and sensually connected without the use of any devices, yet able to use each other's skills and abilities.

[Image removed from the slide: promotional poster for season 1 of Sense8]

Sense8 (Wachowski Sisters, Netflix, 2015-)

- Globalization
- Different cities (San Francisco, Mexico City, Chicago, London, Berlin, Nairobi, Mumbai, Seoul)
- Disembodiment

[Image removed from the slide: promotional poster for season 1 of Sense8, portraying the 8 "sensates" and a world map showing their 8 cities of origin, the main locations for the show]

Sense8 (Wachowski Sisters, Netflix, 2015-)

- Web > Transcending space
- Ethnic/gender diversity – disembodiment as “post-racial” / “post-gender”?

[Image removed from the slide: composite image of the 8 main locations for season 1 of Sense8, with a recognizable landmark from each of them]

- Interplay of space and communities in different moments of recent American history
- Difference in the treatment of motion through space or the use of place as a locale for community:
 - Constant motion in *Mad Men*
 - *Show Me a Hero* never leaves Yonkers
 - *Sense8*: displacement as instantaneous and beyond the borders of nations.
- Comments on Race and community
 - *Mad Men* issues of race are rarely raised
 - race as central in *Show Me a Hero*.
 - *Sense8*: post-racial, post gender, post globalization

- All These shows offer interesting Reflections on how communities were or can be built in America or even globally, challenging Williams idea of size and locality.
- They do, however, seem to resist what Williams called the “organized establishment of realm or state” and they seem to insist on “kindness and mutuality”.
- These shows Also make us think about how successful, nurturing communities may necessitate individual negotiation of spatiality and belonging (in *Mad Men*), a collective move beyond sameness, exemplified in racial conflict and codified in urban planning in *Show me a hero*, or through the sci-fi utopia that is *Sense8*'s possibility of a postnational, postracial, postgender community.