Reconstructing the 1980s on Contemporary American Television

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the reconstruction of the 1980s in nine American television programmes produced during the 2010s. It argues that recurring preoccupations with intimacy, identity politics, and performativity across vastly different programmes highlight continuities and tensions between past and present social issues in the USA. To do this, it asks how the formal and stylistic conventions of television contribute to contemporary depictions of the 1980s' cultural heritage in America. By using an interdisciplinary approach, the thesis synthesises the close textual analysis of a wide range of recent programmes (*The Americans*, *Red Oaks*, *Deutschland 83*, *The Carrie Diaries*, *Glow*, *Halt and Catch Fire*, the *Black Mirror* episode 'San Junipero', *The Goldbergs*, and *Stranger Things*) with the analysis of 1980s and 2010s political contexts. The thesis begins by exploring the rising popularity of the 1980s in American television during the 2010s, highlighting key areas of comparison between the two decades, such as escalating racial and gender divides and similarities between Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump's presidential campaigns. Chapter 1 situates the thesis within scholarship on media representations of the past, specifically regarding the parallels between the British heritage debate and scholarship on screening the American past. Chapter 2 analyses the performative construction of an American national community through shared historical myths pertaining to Reagan's image, the English language, national symbols, and whiteness. Chapter 3 examines shifts and debates in feminist thought since the 1980s to explore why two programmes produced just five years apart use their 1980s setting in contrasting ways to explore white and black women's experiences of privilege and prejudice, respectively. Chapter 4 reflects on historical developments in representations of sex and sexuality in American media to suggest that the 1980s becomes emotionally resonant for contemporary viewers through haptic images, immersive soundtracks, and references to the style of MTV. Lastly, Chapter 5 engages with Cold War-era anxiety about nuclear war in relation to television's role in creating culturally significant images, the dissolution of the nuclear family, and a nostalgic return to 1980s childhood. The thesis concludes that the popularity of the 1980s in the 2010s is prompted by socio-political parallels that go beyond surface-level references to reveal the ways in which we negotiate social issues today. By using cultural and aesthetic codes of the 1980s, contemporary television engages with turbulent shifts in American society throughout the 2010s, making a case for reading the case studies as exponents of the lasting impact of the 1980s.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Anna Varadi

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INTRODUCTION

'It's 1984. Ronald Reagan and shoulder pads were all the rage.'
The Carrie Diaries 1.02

On 3 June 2020, the BBC reported that journalists in America were being attacked by police during the Black Lives Matter protests spurred by the murder of an African American man, George Floyd, by a white police officer (see BBC News 2020). The reporter for this news item, Ros Atkins, remarked that the actions of Donald Trump's government place 'a question mark by Ronald Reagan's idea that American democracy is a beacon to the world'.[1] Yet, this report does not consider the extent to which social issues at the centre of public debate in the Trump era can actually be linked to the Reagan era (1980-1989). As Reagan is said to have 'contributed to the racial polarization of American party politics' (Mayer 2007: 86), today's racial tensions are not solely in response to the Trump administration. Throughout the 2010s, debates about white supremacy and racism, as well as social issues such as intersectional feminism, LGBTQ rights, and geopolitical conflicts surrounding nuclear armament have recalled the political and cultural debates of the 1980s. Alongside these socio-political resonances, there has also been a marked increase of interest in the 1980s during the 2010s with over a dozen fictional television programmes reconstructing 1980s America.[2] These programmes capture, interpret, and help to canonise the cultural heritage of the 1980s through the medium of television in order to reflect upon and understand contemporary issues.

This thesis investigates the growing interest in the aesthetics and politics of the 1980s in contemporary television programmes to argue that the 1980s is vital to America's cultural heritage. A wide range of programmes during the 2010s depict this decade through a nuanced interplay between politics, popular culture, aesthetics, and identity. The thesis contributes to the field of television studies in its investigation into why and how the 1980s dominates the American media landscape of the 2010s, a subject unexplored in the literature to date. It also

[1] In his 1988 'Farewell Address to the Nation', also known as the 'Shining City on a Hill' speech, Reagan states that the USA is 'still a beacon, still a magnet for all who must have freedom, for all the pilgrims from all the lost places who are hurtling through the darkness, toward home.'

[2] These programmes include *The Carrie Diaries* (The CW, 2012-2014), *The Americans* (FX, 2013-2018), *The Goldbergs* (ABC, 2013-), *Halt and Catch Fire* (AMC, 2014-2017), *Red Oaks* (Amazon Video, 2015-2017), *Dead of Summer* (Freeform, 2016), *Stranger Things* (Netflix, 2016-), the *Black Mirror* (Channel 4, 2011-2014; Netflix, 2016-) episode 'San Junipero' (3.04), *Glow* (Netflix, 2017-), *Snowfall* (FX, 2017-), *Young Sheldon* (CBS, 2017-), *Pose* (FX, 2018-), *Black Monday* (Showtime, 2019), *Mixed-ish* (ABC, 2019-), and *American Horror Story: 1984* (FX, 2019). Central narrative arcs in *This is Us* (NBC, 2016-) and *Why Women Kill* (CBS All Access, 2019-) also depict the 1980s.

extends debates within the field that look at media representations of the past. The precise contribution this thesis makes to existing scholarship is detailed extensively in the Literature Review (see Chapter 1). I argue that it is possible to synthesise theories of heritage, usually read in a British context, and the American past. By applying the term 'cultural heritage' to the analysis of American period television, this thesis situates its case studies (outlined below) within an ever-expanding scholarly field.

More specifically, the thesis examines recurring preoccupations with identity politics, intimacy, and performativity across nine vastly different contemporary TV programmes, listed here chronologically: *The Carrie Diaries* (The CW, 2012-2014), *The Americans* (FX, 2013-2018), *The Goldbergs* (ABC, 2013-), *Halt and Catch Fire* (AMC, 2014-2017), *Red Oaks* (Amazon Video, 2015-2017), *Stranger Things* (Netflix, 2016-), the *Black Mirror* (Channel 4, 2011-2014; Netflix, 2016-) episode 'San Junipero' (3.04), and *Glow* (Netflix, 2017-). In its analysis, the thesis highlights continuities and tensions between past and present social issues in the USA. It asks how the formal and stylistic conventions of television contribute to the reconstruction and enduring remembrance of 1980s America, reading 2010s TV programmes in light of political and cultural history, as well as television history itself. Engagement with television from the past and depictions of the past on television both teach us about television's history. Amy Holdsworth (2011: 5) asserts that by 'paying attention to the way in which past television is re-contextualised, through textual, generic, personal and institutional practices', television scholars 'might begin to investigate the construction of television's own memory cultures and our engagement with them.' Through an interdisciplinary theoretical framework in conjunction with close audiovisual analysis, the thesis unpicks the role of television's 'memory cultures' in the construction of American memory cultures pertaining to twentieth century history. It argues that, by engaging with cultural and aesthetic codes of the 1980s, contemporary television addresses turbulent shifts in American society throughout the 2010s, dealing with nationalism, race, feminism, LGBTQ rights, the nuclear family, and war. As the thesis understands present-day America through the analysis of representations of the American past on TV, it also deals with the experience of nostalgia. Hence, the thesis' discussion of 1980s cultural heritage addresses the evocation of nostalgic emotions in Chapters 4 and 5.[3] Close textual analysis shows that the 1980s is a formative decade in living American memory because its themes are closely related to contemporary issues faced by Americans, as illustrated in the opening of this Introduction.

[3] Key terms such as 'heritage' and 'nostalgia' are defined and contextualised in the Literature Review.

The analysis throughout the thesis demonstrates that programmes foreground their contemporary interpretation of the 1980s' cultural heritage through self-aware moments, drawing attention to the reconstruction of the historical period via the stylisation of the mise-en-scène, meta-narratives about performance and costuming, intertextual references to 1980s popular culture, the inclusion of analogue TV sets and archival television footage, and, in some cases, satire. Although the programmes discussed in this thesis are set in the 1980s and depict this through, for example, costume, music, technology, and politics, they each evidence a consciousness of their own constructedness. In other words, the hyperbolic stylisation of the 1980s emphasises the programmes' awareness of their artificiality as the past is rendered through fictional representations. In so doing, these programmes convey a politicised standpoint towards 1980s American history, drawing viewers' attention towards the partisan political objectives that shape definitions of cultural heritage.

Methodology

Contemporary TV programmes primarily reconstruct the cultural heritage of the 1980s through visual signposts, both explicit (e.g. costume, analogue technology, archival broadcast footage) and implicit (e.g. colour scheme, interetextual citations of 1980s media). The thesis takes the close textual analysis of television mise-en-scène as its basis for examining portrayals of 1980s America. It frames this analysis within political and industrial contexts, evidencing how the detailed analysis of sequences brings to light the importance of the 1980s' cultural heritage today. The methodology supports the thesis' investigation into how television's distinctive historical, aesthetic, and narrative features contribute to the portrayal of the 1980s. In his seminal 1974 study, *Television: A Popular Art*, Horace Newcomb (245) foregrounds intimacy, continuity, and history as quintessential features of television.[4] He identifies these features in relation to, for instance, the television screen's smallness (at the time of his research) and the domestic role of television inside the home.[5] This thesis examines such medium specific attributes of television including the emphasis on intimacy, long-form storytelling, and the ways in which TV enables its viewers 'to work through the major public and private concerns of their society' (Ellis 2002: 74). The analysis contextualises Newcomb's (1974) observations in relation to American television in the 2010s, whilst maintaining an

[4] In its engagement with scholarship on television and television history, the thesis takes an Anglo-American perspective; the same perspective as that of the scholars cited throughout. Hence, an awareness of the fact that technological and cultural specificities of the medium, and scholarly theories about them, might significantly differ in other national and geographical contexts needs acknowledgement.

[5] See Silverstone's (1994) work in *Television and Everyday Life* for more on the domestic context of TV.

awareness of the substantial changes in the production, distribution, and consumption of television that have taken place since Newcomb's study, such as the changing size and image quality of TV screens, digital recording technology, and the introduction of cable and streaming. Expanding upon Newcomb's ideas, Amanda D. Lotz (2007: 256) argues that 'the same aesthetic elements that Newcomb outlines continue to characterize television storytelling – and in some cases are even more pronounced now.'[6] To account for changes in television production and distribution since the 1980s, some of which have made television's emphasis on intimacy and continuity 'more pronounced', this thesis looks at programmes produced for networks (ABC, The CW), basic cable channels (FX, Sundance TV, AMC), and streaming services (Amazon Video, Netflix). In so doing, it follows Michael Z. Newman and Elana Levine's (2012: 3) imperative that seeks to dismantle hierarchies and 'prevailing structures of power' within the discourse about television's cultural value. Newman and Levine (Ibid.) challenge the fact that 'some genres, instances, technologies, and experiences of television' are positioned 'below their legitimated counterparts'. This thesis gives equal weight to dramas, comedies, a teen programme, and science fiction, which aired in various distribution contexts. It recognizes and explores the impact of technologies and genre tropes on the reconstruction of the 1980s, without 'legitimating' (Ibid.) the types of television that have often been prioritised and linked to notions of quality in television scholarship.[7]

The thesis is original in its understanding of American heritage through the detailed analysis of television scenes. In so doing, each chapter engages with the style and tone of the television programmes analysed and therefore considers these aspects as 'fundamental' (see Gibbs 2002: 3) to the making and viewing of these programmes. John Gibbs and Douglas Pye (2005: 11) suggest that film style 'is more than an accumulation of material decisions, it is a web, a texture, a pattern, or, more mechanistically, a system. […] It is patterned, systematised decision making that achieves significance.' Expanding Gibbs and Pye's remarks to the analysis of television, this thesis argues that 'material decisions' about the audiovisual texture and patterns of the fictional 1980s in contemporary TV programmes are just as significant as the cultural and historical signposts that these programmes incorporate. Indeed, by paying close attention to small textual details that are not usually discussed due to their brevity – such as a one-second pan to a photograph of Reagan (Chapter 2) or a fleeting close-up of a teen

[6] Brunsdon (1997) and Creeber (2001) have also developed Newcomb's work.
[7] For a detailed account of issues of legitimation and quality in relation to the field of television studies, see chapter 8 in Newman and Levine (2012: 153-171). For debates about 'quality television' more broadly, see also Brunsdon (1990, 1997), Cardwell (2007), and McCabe and Akass (2008).

girl's nail polish (Chapter 3) – each chapter addresses the significance of the mise-en-scène for the remediation of the 1980s. The analysis of texture in relation to the reconstruction of the 1980s on contemporary television is an important method that is used throughout the thesis. For Lucy Fife Donaldson (2016: 5-6), television is a 'strongly textured medium' which is 'created and perpetuated through a process of layering, where the fine detail of the narrative (the moment) contributes to the pattern of the overall fabric'. It is this 'layering' that the close textual analysis in each chapter unpicks in order to understand how the representation of the 1980s speaks to its cultural heritage today. As well as texture and style, tone and point of view inform how viewers take in what they see and hear. Pye (2007: 30) understands tone as the text's 'attitude' towards its subject matter and audience. This 'attitude' is expressed, for instance, through point of view which Pye (2000: 12) defines in terms of five axes: spatial, temporal, ideological, evaluative, and cognitive. The evaluative and cognitive points are most relevant to this thesis as it explores how the programmes in question encourage the viewer to 'take a more complex and problematic view of the nature of and relationship between the competing values dramatized in the narrative' and to analytically engage with the programmes in order to understand why it is important that characters and viewers have access to different amounts of information at a given time (Ibid.: 11). This notion of point of view is particularly relevant to television studies because the predominance of long-form narrative structures and ensemble casts renders the point of view itself subject to change more than in film. As Glen Creeber (2001: 443) suggests in his work on continuity and memory in television drama, 'the overall structure and flexibility' of long-form television storytelling 'allows far greater room for different narrative levels to operate within a single, but episodic narrative structure.' Exemplified here through the synthesis of Pye's (2000) and Creeber's (2001) comments, the thesis applies critical and theoretical frames from film studies to its analysis of television programmes, paying close attention to the conceptual adjustments necessary due to the differences between the two media.

Close analysis of television programmes' aesthetic evidences how these programmes foreground the stylisation of the American past to draw attention to their contemporary reinterpretations of the 1980s. In order to provide adequate analytical detail, the chapters focus on select moments from episodes, rather than providing a survey of all contemporary programmes set in the 1980s. Many of the sequences analysed throughout the thesis are from pilot episodes (as well as a standalone episode from an anthology series, in the case of 'San Junipero'). This is because pilots are central to the world-building of television programmes, setting up each programme's audiovisual style and tone in relation to the reconstruction of the

1980s. As Jonathan Bignell (2009: 6) notes, the 'rapid definition [of style] early on in a programme [is] a marker of the programme's distinctive identity'. According to Bignell (Ibid.), this early demarcation of style 'becomes a kind of glue, a differentiating marker, an ideological function and a unifying mechanism' for programmes. Whilst Bignell writes specifically in the context of police drama such as *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984-1990), discussed in Chapter 4, his arguments about the 'initiatory functions' of pilots apply to the majority of television genres and formats.[8]

The thesis examines how medium specific features of television enrich the depiction of the past, particularly the 1980s. Research on television's aptness for the fictional reconstruction of heritage is discussed in detail in the Literature Review. Television is not only suited to fictionalise narratives about history but also plays a central role in creating these narratives. Observing that 'the technical and stylistic features of television as a medium strongly influence the kinds of historical representations that are produced', Gary Edgerton (2000: 7) states that 'television is the principal means by which most people learn about history today.' He (Ibid.: 8) cites television's capacity for intimacy, as per Newcomb (1974: 245), as a key component of the production of historical representations; a suggestion that the thesis develops through its focus on intimacy in relation to the portrayal of the past. Edgerton (Ibid.: 9) goes on to argue that 'TV producers and audiences are similarly preoccupied with creating a "useable past"', meaning that 'stories involving historical figures and events are used to clarify the present and discover the future.' The thesis considers the power of television to 'clarify' and redefine the American present during the 2010s by depicting the 1980s, and, in the process, canonising its cultural position.[9]

The thesis addresses the impact of television images on the production of historical narratives by engaging with contemporary programmes' intertextual references to and diegetic insertions of 1980s television. Invoking Jean Baudrillard's (1994 [1981]) theory of the simulacrum, Andrew Hoskins (2001: 336) describes 'the pervasiveness of TV as the original site of a public/collective/global viewing', suggesting that television often produces historical accounts of 'public/collective/global' events as opposed to simply transmitting these events. Thus televised geopolitical events are often remembered as at least partly based on the television images that originally brought them into people's homes, a concept explored in

[8] This thesis analyses several pilots due to their essential role in establishing programmes' style and tone. Chapters also discuss later episodes from programmes, acknowledging how style and tone change and become more muted, intense, or self-aware through the course of a long-form narrative.

[9] As the Literature Review in Chapter 1 explores, resonance between present-day social issues and the portrayal of the past is a predominant characteristic of period drama.

more depth in the subsequent chapters. Mary Ann Watson (2008: 7) explicitly connects the televised creation of historical memories to definitions of American identity when she writes that: 'in the second half of the 20th century, TV has been the primary means by which Americans have defined themselves and each other.' Watson's comments are imperative to the thesis as they articulate a connection between recent history, media representation, and American identity: the core themes of this study.

A preoccupation with the historical significance of the television image similarly characterises 1980s discourse about TV (see O'Connor 1983) as well as discourse about 1980s TV (see Feuer 1995). In *Seeing Through the Eighties: Television and Reaganism*, Jane Feuer (1995: 12) argues that during the 1980s 'television and Reaganism formed mutually reinforcing and interpenetrating imaginary worlds.' She (Ibid.: 2) states that fictionalised images pervade the 1980s media landscape and that 'these fictions had political effectivity in shaping the popular consciousness of the decade'. Expanding upon Feuer's argument, the thesis explores the 'effectivity' of 1980s television images in 'shaping' political and cultural memories of the 1980s, as the decade is now reconstructed through the medium of television. In contrast to the 'mutually reinforcing' (Ibid.: 12) relationship between television and Reaganism, contemporary programmes present the 1980s with a self-reflexivity that encourages parallel critiques of Trumpian politics. The analysis throughout the thesis refers to 1980s television trends and TV programmes comparatively to substantiate claims about contemporary television representations of the 1980s. To do so, the thesis makes use of archival research conducted at the Paley Center for Media, New York. The archival research shows that the mise-en-scène of the case studies frequently emphasises programmes' awareness of television's role in shaping the cultural heritage of the 1980s. More specifically, the signposting of and structured references to television history and American politics evident in the case studies speak to each programme's intention to create a critical position for viewers. At other times, programmes produce a space for critical reflection more implicitly through their affect and tone; something the analysis in subsequent chapters considers at length through the citation of Pye (2000, 2007) and Creeber (2001), for example. The reappearance of similar audiovisual stylisations across different programmes supports the thesis' argument that a versatile range of contemporary TV shows reconstruct the 1980s as part of a wider cultural trend.

Reading the 1980s as a Decade

Films, music, fashion, and television all exemplify and create widespread cultural trends within society. In the USA during the 2010s, *Ready Player One* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 2018), Janelle Monáe's album *Dirty Computer* (2018), and Balenciaga's Spring 2017 collection, for instance, all deliberately evoke the 1980s. Nowhere is the resurfacing of 1980s America more prominent than in fictional television programmes.[10] As suggested above, this is largely due to the fact that the television medium enters into a dialogue with the reconstruction of history and the representation of national and personal politics. Yet, in public discourse and the media the 1980s is often conceived of retrospectively as a decade that is a coherent sum of its signposts (e.g. 'Ronald Reagan and shoulder pads'; see epigraph). The decade itself, however, is more than the sum of its parts. Its cultural heritage exceeds the boundaries of a unified set of signifiers from the time period between 1 January 1980 and 31 December 1989. For Thompson (2007: 4), this creates a double bind as he argues that whilst Reagan does not define the 1980s, his presidency occupies the decade (he was elected in 1980 and sworn out in January 1989) and therefore the 1980s cannot be defined without considering Reagan's presence in it.[11] Thompson (Ibid.: 5) then states that 'decades [such as the 1980s] gain a sense of consistency only retrospectively'. His use of 'consistency' refers to the cultural signposts of a decade, for example, the Korean War, rock and roll, and poodle skirts of the 1950s. This thesis analyses the way in which several contemporary television programmes 'gain a sense of consistency' for the 1980s through their dramatization of signposts such as the Cold War, neon clothing, and MTV.

In its reading of representations of 1980s America, the thesis considers three central research questions: (1) In what ways do representations of the 1980s on a wide range of American television programmes relate to the socio-political context of the 2010s?; (2) What aspects of the 1980s do programmes single out as contributing factors to the cultural heritage of this decade, and how do they depict this heritage?; and (3) How do the medium specific features of television contribute to contemporary understandings of 1980s America? By answering these questions through the analysis of the case studies, this thesis makes the claim

[10] The success of a wide range of fictional TV programmes set in the 1980s characterises American popular culture in the 2010s, especially compared to short-lived early 2000s programmes that reconstructed the 1980s, such as *Freaks and Geeks* (NBC, 1999-2000), *That '80s Show* (Fox, 2002), and *Do Over* (The WB, 2002). The successful sitcom *Everybody Hates Chris* (UPN / The CW), which ran from 2005 to 2009, is an exception. This programme falls out of the scope of this thesis because of its air dates. *Everybody Hates Chris*, though a precursor of the programmes analysed in this thesis, was neither part of a popular television trend when it aired, nor does it address the cultural and political context examined here.

[11] Thompson (2007: 4) defines this as a 'temporal neatness'.

for 1980s America as a 'consisten[t]' (Thompson 2007: 5) signpost of American cultural heritage. The case studies are chosen because of their relevance not only to the 1980s, but specifically to the Reagan era. Hence, television shows set from January 1989 are not considered.[12] This is because of the obvious and deliberate parallels between Trump's administration and that of Reagan, epitomised in Trump's recycling of Reagan's 1980 campaign slogan: 'Make America Great Again'.

As television style and narrative changed during the 1980s, the thesis' methodology of close textual analysis supports a reading of the 1980s as a decade retrospectively constructed on television.[13] In his seminal work on televisuality, John T. Caldwell (1995: 5) observes that during the 1980s television 'retheorized its aesthetic and presentational task' so that 'style itself became the subject' of many TV programmes. He (Ibid.: 4, 5) states that much of 1980s television is characterised by 'an extreme self-consciousness of style' and 'a display of knowing *exhibitionism*', as programmes foreground their own audiovisual construction (emphasis in original). It is therefore necessary to explore how contemporary TV programmes set in the 1980s engage with the fact that, as Caldwell (Ibid.: 6) states, '[t]he *presentational status* of style changed' on television during the 1980s (emphasis in original). Whilst I do not follow Caldwell's (Ibid.) distinction between 'cinematic' television style and 'trash' television, it is imperative to consider his work on televisuality during the 1980s, especially the influence of MTV on 1980s television style. In particular, the detailed analysis of MTV aesthetics in Chapter 4 unpicks how contemporary programmes draw on 1980s televisuality, reflecting Caldwell's (Ibid.: 13) claim that the look of MTV 'popularized a mode of production that changed the very way television was produced beginning in 1981.' Hence, the thesis argues that contemporary programmes rely on the legacy of 1980s television to depict parts of the decade's cultural heritage relevant for today's viewers.

Though contemporary programmes acknowledge conventions of 1980s televisuality and broadcast history, it is important to the thesis' argument that they are produced and distributed in the 2010s. This contemporary production context impacts their style and narrative as high-definition digital aesthetics and online streaming platforms make the image sharper and larger, allowing more detail to be detected. This is crucial to the methodology of the thesis which engages with detailed close analysis in order to draw out the parallels between the 1980s and today. Moreover, as stated above, whilst programmes in the 1980s often echoed

[12] These programmes are *Dead of Summer* and *Young Sheldon*.
[13] See Newman (2006) and Mittell (2006) on the emergence of narrative complexity and increased serialisation on television in the early 1980s.

the Reagan administration's political rhetoric (see Feuer 1995), the programmes examined here are more politically critical in their engagement with the establishment and hegemonic power structures. These programmes' presentness is therefore just as important as their pastness.

Scope and Case Studies

The thesis explores why the cultural heritage of the 1980s matters in America today by analysing television programmes that reconstruct the 1980s as part of a prominent 2010s cultural trend.[14] There has been no scholarly engagement with the reconstruction of 1980s America as a cultural and, significantly for the purposes of this study, a televisual phenomenon to date. There is some scholarship on a few individual programmes, often taking a thematic approach without attending to the programmes' 1980s setting. Here, it is important to outline the breadth of this work in relation to the thesis' case studies to demonstrate how the analysis in subsequent chapters expands upon and contributes to the field. Hence, the thesis analyses the 1980s' audiovisual reconstruction and highlights linkages between nine programmes released between 2012 (Barack Obama's second presidential term) and 2017 (Trump's first year in office). Looking back at this period, it becomes clear that shifts in people's thinking did not suddenly take place when Trump was elected, but gradually developed during the years leading up to his presidency. Seven out of the nine case studies, therefore, premiered between 2013 and 2016; a three-year period of partisan political escalation in the USA when left- and right-wing movements both expanded. These programmes are analysed in Chapters 2, 4, and 5. In Chapter 3, the comparison between the two remaining case studies, from 2012 and 2017, highlights marked shifts in feminist thought and media representation from the early to the late 2010s. Before moving into the chapter outlines for the thesis, it is necessary to cover a more detailed summary of this thesis' critical approach to the specific case studies.

Red Oaks is a coming-of-age comedy set over the course of three summers from 1985 to 1987, produced for Amazon's streaming platform. It explores the life of university student and aspiring filmmaker, David (Craig Roberts), as he copes with his mother's lesbianism and parents' divorce. He takes a summer job at the affluent Red Oaks country club in New Jersey

[14] The thesis does not address contemporary revivals and reboots of popular 1980s programmes such as *Dallas* (CBS, 1978-1991; TNT, 2012-2014), *Dynasty* (ABC, 1981-1989; The CW, 2017-), *MacGyver* (ABC, 1985-1992; CBS, 2016-), and *Magnum P.I.* (CBS, 1980-1988; 2018-) because the action is relocated to present-day America. It is important to note that these programmes exemplify the widespread commercial appeal of the 1980s on American TV today, but they do not reconstruct this historical period through its political, cultural, and aesthetic markers.

where he falls in love with the club president's daughter Skye (Alexandra Socha). *The Carrie Diaries*, a teen comedy-drama prequel to *Sex and the City* (HBO, 1998-2004) on The CW network, depicts Carrie Bradshaw (AnnaSophia Robb) in the mid-1980s as a teenager from Connecticut who starts an internship at a fashion magazine in Manhattan. *Halt and Catch Fire*, a basic cable drama centring on the growing computer industry from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, initially focuses on Joe's (Lee Pace) life as a male computer engineer who wants to innovate personal computing. It then shifts attention to female computer engineers Cameron (Mackenzie Davis) and Donna (Kerry Bishé) as they develop their gaming and social networking start-up. *The Goldbergs* is a network sitcom that depicts the everyday life of the Goldberg family throughout the 1980s. It is narrated retrospectively by the Goldberg's youngest son Adam (played as a teen by Sean Giambrone; voiceover by Patton Oswalt) and is based on the programme creator Adam Goldberg's childhood memories from the 1980s. There is no scholarship on the reconstruction of the 1980s in any of these programmes, and close to no scholarship on any other aspect of them.[15] Hence, the analysis of these programmes diversifies the field of television studies by the mere fact that it highlights the pervasiveness of the 1980s in the 2010s' media landscape across a variety of genres and distribution contexts. Each chapter of the thesis analyses one of these four programmes to identify ways in which they address present-day social issues through their portrayal of 1980s America. Studying these programmes illustrates the unexplored versatility of contemporary television depictions of the 1980s.

The Americans is a basic cable spy drama about two Soviet KGB spies, Philip (Matthew Rhys) and Elizabeth Jennings (Keri Russell), who live undercover in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., during the 1980s. They balance family life with espionage when posing as an American married couple with their two children, Paige (Holly Taylor) and Henry (Keidrich Sellati). 'San Junipero', an episode from the dystopian anthology series *Black Mirror*, is about two aging women, Kelly (Gugu Mbatha-Rawe) and Yorkie (Mackenzie Davis), who use virtual reality technology to enter a simulation of the 1980s beach town San Junipero in young, healthy bodies. They fall in love inside the simulation and choose to be forever uploaded into the virtual reality to live there together after they die. *Glow*, a streaming comedy-drama based on the 1980s women's wrestling programme *Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling* (syndication, 1986-1990), depicts the casting and filming of a similar, racially

[15] Graziano and Ferreri (2014) discuss the symbolism of internships for young women in *The Carrie Diaries*, and Callens (2016) investigates the representation of masculinity in *Halt and Catch Fire*. There are no publications on *Red Oaks* or *The Goldbergs* to date.

diverse wrestling show directed by a white male director, Sam (Marc Maron). *Glow* first centres on the rivalry between two white friends, Debbie (Betty Gilpin) and Ruth (Alison Brie), then portrays the experiences of and discrimination faced by African American, South Asian, and South East Asian women through the characters Cherry (Sydelle Noel), Tammé (Kia Stevens), Arthie (Sunita Mani), and Jenny (Ellen Wong), respectively. The thesis also discusses these programmes, which have been covered by a handful of scholars. Each subsequent chapter compares one of these programmes to one or two of the other six case studies to highlight resonances between representations of 1980s America across a range of different TV shows in the 2010s. Existing scholarship on *The Americans*, 'San Junipero', and *Glow* maintains a case-by-case focus. Nonetheless, it addresses aspects of reconstructing the 1980s that are analysed throughout this thesis such as Cold War politics and nuclear war in *The Americans* (see Kaklamandiou 2016), nostalgia and Reagan-era patriarchy in *Glow* (see Gauthier 2019; Freeman 2019), and 1980s pop culture references in 'San Junipero' (see Daraiseh and Booker 2019). Even though some scholars approach the presentation of social issues, their research focuses on thematic readings of programmes without attending to 1980s period detail. For example, Smita A. Rahman (2018), Marsha F. Cassidy (2020: 32-38), and Philip Drake (2016) analyse parenthood, sex, and actors' performance of national identity in *The Americans*; Caetlin Benson-Allott (2017) and Elizabeth Alsop (2019) discuss race and feminism in *Glow*; and Eleanor Drage (2018) investigates virtual transgressions between gender and racial boundaries in 'San Junipero'; but none explore the resonances with 1980s America in substantial detail. Expanding upon this existing scholarship, the thesis argues that political and aesthetic signposts of the 1980s are integral to programmes' thematic engagement with issues such as race, gender, sexuality, and the family.

Stranger Things is a science fiction horror series about a group of pre-teen boys, Mike (Finn Wolfhard), Lucas (Caleb McLaughlin), and Dustin (Gaten Matarazzo), from the small town of Hawkins, Indiana, who search for their friend, Will (Noah Schnapp), who is kidnapped by a monster. They are aided in their quest by a girl with telekinetic powers, known as Eleven (Milly Bobby Brown), who is hunted by the Government and linked to the monster. Through its detailed discussion of the programmes outlined thus far, the thesis calls into question the monopoly of *Stranger Things* as the only contemporary programme set in the 1980s to receive extensive scholarly attention. The disproportionate amount of scholarly attention on *Stranger Things* reflects contemporary cultural, industrial, and academic developments. This includes the programme's global commercial success, spurred on by its branding and marketing as a nostalgic return to 1980s youth culture; the rapid growth of scholarly interest in streaming

television throughout the late 2010s; and longstanding scholarly trends that favour glossy, high-budget period productions which make a claim for their portrayal of authentic historical detail (as discussed in the Literature Review). *Stranger Things*' specific brand of nostalgic intertextual references to 1980s films and television is explored by Sam Higgs (2019), Joseph M. Sirianni (2019), and Kayla McCarthy (2019), amongst others. Whilst these accounts pay attention to the recycling of 1980s media images, a focus point of this thesis, they prioritise a kind of treasure hunt for intertextual citations, binding their analysis to nostalgic reminiscing about 1980s popular culture. As Chapter 5 of this thesis suggests, *Stranger Things* frequently uses its 1980s setting to unpick the contemporary political and cultural impact of the Reagan era. Hence, the thesis develops the work of Rose Butler (2017), Tracey Mollet (2019a, 2019b), and Megan Fariello (2019), who discuss *Stranger Things*' portrayal of social issues related to conservative political leadership, parenthood, and technological advancement. Due to its political overtones and its careful reconstruction of 1980s period aesthetics, *Stranger Things* is read alongside other contemporary programmes. Thus it is necessary to restate that the thesis makes a case for framing the programme as part of the 2010s televisual trend focused on 1980s America, not the sole example of this trend.

Programmes that are set outside of America, even if they reconstruct the 1980s and they are (co)produced for American television, are not considered.[16] The only exception to this is *Deutschland 83*, a German-American coproduction about an East German man, Martin (Jonas Nay), whose aunt Lenora (Maria Schrader) recruits him to spy on the West German military in 1983. Whilst this programme reconstructs 1980s Germany, it is examined in Chapter 2 to provide an outsider perspective, or counterpoint, to the subjective portrayal of American national identity and Reagan's presidential image. Indeed, this perspective is acknowledged in the aesthetic of the programme. The thesis illustrates the ways in which *Deutschland 83*'s foregrounding of Cold War politics, analogue technology, and the idea of home, explored by Lars Koch (2016), Louis Bayman (2016), and Christian Hissnauer (2016), compares to the programmes set in the USA. In so doing, the thesis examines the impact different national points of view have on our understanding of the cultural heritage of 1980s America.

Several further programmes set in the 1980s have started airing on American TV since 2017, including *Snowfall* (FX, 2017-), *Pose* (FX, 2018-), *Black Monday* (Showtime, 2019-),

[16] These include *Narcos* (Netflix, 2015-2017), set in 1980s Colombia, *Comrade Detective* (Amazon Video, 2017), set in Romania under Soviet occupation, and *Chernobyl* (HBO / Sky Atlantic, 2019), depicting the 1986 Ukrainian nuclear disaster.

Mixed-ish (ABC, 2019-), and *American Horror Story: 1984* (FX, 2019).[17] These programmes are not considered in depth because they aired outside of the political remit of this study, that is, during Obama's late and Trump's early presidency. Moreover, rather than focusing on the earlier or later half of the decade only, the case studies examined in subsequent chapters span the scope of the 2010s. The number of case studies is capped at nine to ensure that each chapter thoroughly considers the stylised presentation of 1980s period detail across a diverse selection of sequences. All programmes analysed in the thesis have two or more seasons, with *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs* airing six and seven seasons respectively, by the time of the thesis' completion. All programmes, except *The Carrie Diaries*, continued to release new episodes during the research period for this study. The continued release of new episodes and new programmes evidences the unwavering popularity of the 1980s on American television today, calling for the definition of clear research parameters early on in the project. In short, the decision to focus on programmes between 2012 and 2017 reflects the thesis' argument that the cultural heritage of the 1980s emerged as a vital component of American identity *throughout* the 2010s, leading up to the election of Trump.

Chapter Outline

The thesis is structured to facilitate the gradual development of the various strands of the argument, starting with a detailed review of the relevant literature in Chapter 1, then setting up important concerns about American national identity in Chapter 2, and returning to these ideas about America in relation to the thesis' themes in the remaining chapters. Each chapter compares a case study with a satirical or meta-textual tone to programmes with a different tone. This approach enables a parallel investigation into the self-aware and performative stylisation of the 1980s on television today to take place. The only case study that recurs in three chapters is *The Americans* because of its direct applicability to all of the thesis' overarching thematic concerns. Comparably, all programmes share subtle connections with the themes of each chapter; something the analysis provides scope for by referencing overlapping concepts across the thesis. This is facilitated by the detailed analysis of sequences

[17] Out of these programmes, only *Pose* has received scholarly attention to date. Shacklock (2019) focuses on LGBTQ characters and 'queer kinesthesia' in *Pose*, and Pensis (2019) discusses its representation of transgender women of colour and sex work. Pensis notes the contemporary political relevance of portraying trans experience, mentions references to Trump in *Pose*, and analyses the symbolism of 1980s songs in relation to the programme's narrative. Whilst their analyses acknowledge the period setting, neither Shacklock nor Pensis attend to *Pose*'s reconstruction of the 1980s.

from each programme that highlight the programme's resonances with the political themes of the corresponding chapter.

Chapter 1, 'Towards an American Televisual Heritage: New Directions for Theorising the Past on Screen', provides a literature review that situates the thesis within scholarship on media representations of the past. It covers definitions of heritage and the British heritage debate, medium specific attributes of television that facilitate the portrayal of cultural heritage, historical authenticity in period drama, and media depictions of American history. It relates this research to interdisciplinary perspectives on the core themes of subsequent chapters: national identity, race, feminism, sensory nostalgia, and the effect of the Cold War on children. The chapter proposes that there are significant parallels between scholarship on British heritage film and television and scholarship on screening the American past which does not use the term 'cultural heritage'. Thus the chapter establishes a new perspective for the analysis of American history; one that supports a reading of 1980s cultural heritage in terms of its contemporary relevance in the USA.

Chapter 2, '"Ronald Reagan is a cowboy": the Imagined American Community in Television Programmes set in the 1980s', analyses the performative construction of an American national community through shared myths pertaining to Reagan's image, the figure of the cowboy, the English language, national symbols such as the American flag, and whiteness in *The Americans* and *Red Oaks*. It frames its analysis with Benedict Anderson's (2006 [1983]) theory on imagined communities and Tim Edensor's (2002) reading of national identity as performance in order to discuss how the case studies position Jewish Americans, Russian immigrants, and the LGBTQ community in relation to normative ideas about what it means to be American. The chapter also unpicks the centrality of whiteness to definitions of American identity, drawing on Feagin's (2010) theories about the white racial frame in the USA. It compares its case studies to *Deutschland 83* to highlight the ways in which national context effects the reconstruction of the past on television.

Chapter 3, 'Material Girls: Feminism and Race in Contemporary Depictions of 1980s America', outlines the shifts and debates in feminist thought since the 1980s to explore why *The Carrie Diaries* and *Glow*, produced just five years apart, use their 1980s setting in contrasting ways, portraying white and black women's experiences of privilege and prejudice, respectively. Drawing on Keller and Ryan's (2018) work about contemporary 'emergent feminisms', the chapter argues that throughout the 2010s the American media landscape shifted from predominantly postfeminist portrayals of women (as theorised by Rosalind Gill [2007, 2016], amongst others) to engagement with more explicitly political feminist issues.

This shift has had a significant impact on present-day reinterpretations of the 1980s, which changed from depicting this decade as a white neoliberal utopia to portraying it as a time of patriarchal oppression that allows white women a degree of liberation that is not equalled in the rights of African American women.

Chapter 4, 'Feel It *on* the Air Tonight: Sensory Affect, Sexuality, and the MTV Aesthetics of the 1980s', reflects on historical developments in representations of sex and sexuality in American media to suggest that the 1980s becomes emotionally resonant for contemporary viewers through haptic images, immersive soundtracks, and references to the style of MTV. It discusses why representing the LGBTQ community and the 1980s AIDS epidemic continues to be relevant today. To do so, it analyses *Halt and Catch Fire*, 'San Junipero', and a key sequence from the pilot of *The Americans*, expanding upon Julia Keblinska's (2017) notion of sensory nostalgia on television, Linda Williams' (2008) theories about screening sex, and Kay Dickinson's (2003) work on MTV aesthetics. Thus the chapter addresses how programmes evoke an emotional and, at times, nostalgic response by referencing 1980s television and pop music.

Chapter 5, 'Nuclear Apocalypse, Nuclear Family: Televised Images of the Cold War and 1980s Childhood', engages with Cold War-era anxiety about nuclear war in relation to the dissolution of the nuclear family and a nostalgic return to 1980s childhood. It examines *The Goldbergs*, *The Americans*, and *Stranger Things* to highlight television's role in creating culturally significant images, as theorised by Daniel Marcus (2004) and Alison Landsberg (2015). The chapter analyses the use of 1980s analogue TV sets and archival broadcast footage in *The Goldbergs* and *The Americans*, focusing on their engagement with the 1983 nuclear disaster television movie *The Day After* (ABC). It pays close attention to the framing of the Cold War as a threat against childhood innocence; it explores how genre conventions of the espionage thriller (*The Americans*), the sitcom (*The Goldbergs*), and science fiction (*Stranger Things*) contribute to the depiction of past and present political fears alongside the evocation of nostalgia for childhood associated with the 1980s. The chapter illustrates how reconstructions of the 1980s connect viewers' personal, emotional response to watching the past to public memories of geopolitical issues.

The Conclusion reflects on how each of the contemporary television programmes examined in the previous chapters speaks to and emphasises the centrality of the 1980s' cultural heritage to American identity in the 2010s. It consolidates the thesis' argument that the 1980s gained cultural significance during the 2010s, especially on television, due to significant parallels between social issues in the Reagan and Trump eras. Considering that the

research for this thesis took place parallel to the release of the television programmes and to the unfolding of political events that are analysed throughout, the Conclusion takes stock of the latest developments in American media and politics in order to assess the currency and longevity of this television trend. It highlights how this thesis not only contributes to the field of television studies by providing close textual analysis of programmes set in the 1980s, but also develops interdisciplinary discussions of race relations, gender equality, and sexuality as experienced in the 1980s and today, thereby contributing to research into recent socio-political history, gender, race, and queer theory, and ideas of heritage as understood through media. Its engagement with nostalgia also expands upon readings of heritage and the remediation of the past as explored in the field of cultural studies and in scholarship on period drama.

CHAPTER 1

Towards an American Televisual Heritage: New Directions for Theorising the Past on Screen

> 'the 1980s is a period of study that still lacks the kind of critical heritage decades like the 1950s and 1960s have established'
>
> Thompson (2007: 36)

Critical engagement with the ways in which the past is reconstructed and remediated is a significant area of scholarly enquiry within film and television studies. Discussions about the uses of the past on screen are extensive and are often concerned with debates about heritage and/or nostalgia; many of these trends in scholarship emerged in relation to period dramas in the United Kingdom during the 1980s. This thesis takes as its starting point Thompson's (2007: 36) claim that 'the 1980s [in America] is a period of study that still lacks the kind of critical heritage decades like the 1950s and 1960s have established', adding that his work on American culture during the 1980s 'might provide a constructive starting point' for more nuanced discourse about the historical significance of this decade. The thesis responds to Thompson's call to examine the cultural heritage of the 1980s. The programmes examined throughout subsequent chapters, produced during the 2010s, establish a new reading of American history by re-prioritising the historical importance of the 1980s in relation to present-day America.

This literature review illustrates how the thesis expands upon existing scholarly debates and outlines relevant scholarship that informs the analysis, identifying connections between different multi-disciplinary areas of enquiry and gaps in knowledge. The chapter discusses debates surrounding British heritage cinema to define the ways in which contemporary American television programmes foreground the cultural heritage of the 1980s. It highlights how historical authenticity has been constructed as an arbitrary measure for the quality of fictional depictions of the past. It then explores the applicability of the heritage debate to the analysis of television and moves beyond the British media landscape to engage with American history. Hence, the chapter investigates how television's medium specificity and mise-en-scène heighten the affect of the reconstructed past. The chapter draws attention to links between scholarship that engages with media depictions of American history, the heritage debate, and the socio-political issues explored throughout the thesis. In its engagement with how these issues resonate with today's audiences, the thesis also considers the concept of nostalgia. The final section outlines the multi-disciplinary approaches towards

national identity, race, feminism, sensory nostalgia, the Cold War, and childhood taken in subsequent chapters. It synthesises this research with the thesis' focus on the 1980s to make a case for specific aspects of the 1980s as central to its heritage.

What is Heritage?

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2011: 5) defines heritage as valued cultural objects and traditions 'providing a link from our past'. This implies a degree of agency so that heritage lives through objects and traditions left over from the past, to be discovered and used in the present. As this thesis will show, the cultural heritage of a given historical period is constantly reinterpreted depending on the political, social, and cultural needs of the present. UNESCO (2003: 5) also states that intangible cultural heritage is 'transmitted from generation to generation', providing people 'with a sense of identity and continuity'. The notion that heritage provides society with 'identity' and 'continuity' reinforces the importance of an enduring national and personal identity. For Newcomb (1974: 245), 'intimacy' and 'continuity' are the most significant aspects of television (see Introduction). Though 'intimacy' carries different connotations to 'identity', to a certain extent, these terms overlap. In his work on historical memory in television drama serials, Creeber (2001: 443) suggests that long-form narratives make use of emotional closeness and feelings of affection in order to connect '*micro-personal*' (domestic) and '*macro-social*' (institutional) issues (emphasis in original). By reading identity through one's domestic, sexual, and psychological states, the thesis uses this layered notion of identity/intimacy to unpick present-day understandings of cultural heritage. Hence, the emotional charge elicited via intimate, '*micro-personal*' representations of the 1980s requires a consideration of '*macro-social*' concerns in the USA. Rodney Harrison (2009: 10) states that 'for every object of tangible heritage there is also an intangible heritage that '"wraps" around it'. The layered significance of objects is relevant, for example, to *The Americans*' and *Red Oaks*' use of costume to symbolise Reagan-era identity politics, both in terms of national identity and selfhood (discussed in Chapter 2).

Before defining and outlining the heritage debate in relation to the American past and its representation on television, it is important to note that, in spite of Belén Vidal's (2012b: 9) acknowledgement that the heritage film is a 'flexible critical category', this 'flexibility' seldom extends beyond a British context. Outside of this context, studies of heritage film and television have focused on European heritage cinema (see Cooke and Stone 2016), Flemish heritage and television drama (see Dhoest 2010), East Asian film and cultural heritage (see

Yau Shuk-ting 2011), and African heritage in Ghanaian cinema (see Meyer 1999). This scholarship broadens the critical lens of heritage so that it reaches new national settings. The near complete absence of the critical consideration of American heritage raises questions about the focal points of scholarship on media representations of the American past. In fact, as this thesis details, there are significant thematic crossovers between this scholarship and the heritage debate. This illustrates that the exploration of the cultural heritage of the USA is not an altogether new field of study, rather, it requires a combination of the research into media representations of the American past and of the scholarship on heritage drama.

The Heritage Debate

By developing the heritage debate, this discussion reconceptualises how we understand fictional portrayals of cultural heritage in America today. The heritage debate began in response to the commercial success of several British period dramas released during the 1980s.[18] In its engagement with this debate, this thesis mainly looks at Andrew Higson (2006 [1993]), Claire Monk (1995, 2002), and Vidal's (2012a, 2012b) definitions of heritage as depicted on film and television. Prompted by Higson's (2006 [1993]) work in 'Re-presenting the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film', many scholars have expanded upon and challenged Higson's ideas, including Higson himself (2016 [1996], 2003, 2014) and, most prominently, Monk (1995, 2002).[19] In his 2003 study, Higson (11) states that 'the heritage film label is of course a critical invention […] emerging in a particular cultural context to serve a specific purpose', that is, the depiction of pre-war historical periods, such as the Edwardian era, in British 1980s period dramas. This should not prevent other works and contexts from being examined with reference to the heritage debate's key terms and theories, as this thesis illustrates in relation to portrayals of 1980s America.

For Higson (2006 [1993]: 95-6), the heritage films of the 1980s epitomise the so-called British heritage industry: the widespread commercialisation of historical objects and traditions under Margaret Thatcher's government.[20] Higson (Ibid.: 93) adds that in heritage films the 'particular representation of the national past is in many ways symptomatic of cultural

[18] The 1980s heritage films and TV programmes include *A Room with a View* (dir. James Ivory, 1985), *Chariots of Fire* (dir. Hugh Hudson, 1981), *Maurice* (dir. James Ivory, 1987), *A Passage to India* (dir. David Lean, 1985), *The Jewel in the Crown* (ITV, 1984), and *Brideshead Revisited* (BBC, 1981).

[19] See Monk (1995, 2002) for a detailed discussion of the British heritage debate during the 1990s, or Vidal (2012b: 8-20) for a more recent perspective on the debate. This chapter addresses relevant theories in heritage scholarship to highlight how these relate to the issues explored throughout the thesis.

[20] For a study on the origins of the heritage industry see Hewison (1987), whose work is central to Higson's discussions on heritage. Samuel (1994: 242) stresses that 'in a consumer-led society, in which everything has its price, and market values are unchallenged, [heritage] "traffics" in history and "commodifies" the past.'

developments in Thatcherite Britain.' Hence, Higson (Ibid.: 100) identifies that heritage films use the past as 'a space for playing out contemporary anxieties'. This thesis engages with this idea at length. However, whilst Higson's argument focuses on 'contemporary anxieties' of those in power, specifically Thatcher's government, it is also important to consider how film and television use the past as a space to explore social issues affecting underrepresented and marginalised groups. This is discussed in more detail in relation to Monk's (1995) work below. Contemporary television representations of 1980s America are not 'symptomatic' (Higson 2006: 93) of the Trump era in the sense that they do not reinforce the Trump administration's ideology; instead, they often challenge it.[21] The way in which such representations of cultural heritage engage audiences in the 1980s and today recalls the way in which the television medium enables viewers 'to work through the major public and private concerns of their society' (Ellis 2002: 74; see Introduction), making television a powerful medium for the reconceptualization of a nation's cultural heritage.

In particular, the thesis considers how Higson's work (2006 [1993]) singles out nostalgia and national identity as central to representations of heritage. Higson (Ibid.: 93) suggests that the heritage films of the 1980s present a nostalgic look at a wealthy and privileged or, occasionally, a 'picturesque[ly]' poor British past in order to reinforce conservative political ideologies. He claims that the aesthetic construction of heritage films leads to an idealised portrayal of history that overshadows social critique. He (Ibid.: 93, 91) observes that the 'tension between visual splendour and narrative meaning' creates a past that 'is displayed as visual spectacular pastiche, inviting a nostalgic gaze that resists the ironies and social critiques so often suggested narratively by these films.' Higson's insistence that the construction of the mise-en-scène overwhelms the possibility of social critique has been contested by Monk (1995), amongst others (explored in detail below).[22] Debates about the role of aesthetics are key to this thesis' close textual analysis of scenes that engage with representations of heritage. In Chapters 2 and 3, for instance, the thesis explores how national identity, race, and gender are circumscribed by a set of aesthetic codes that inform viewers' understanding of the 1980s' heritage in the USA.

It is clear from Higson's early work that national identity is a core concern for fictional engagement with cultural heritage. He (2006 [1993]: 104) argues that heritage films 'strive to

[21] As stated in the Introduction, this challenge is frequently conveyed through the self-conscious stylisation of the television mise-en-scène.
[22] Light (1991), Dyer (1996, 2002), and Williams (2005) have also contributed to the critique of scholarship on heritage film.

recapture an image of national identity as pure, untainted, complete, and in place'. Higson's (2003: 27) later work similarly claims that heritage films 'focus on a highly circumscribed set of traditions, those of the privileged, white, Anglo-Saxon community' in the UK.[23] This thesis uses the question of national identity as a springboard for its investigation into the political and cultural significance of the 1980s in contemporary America. In Chapters 2 and 3, it suggests that *The Americans*, *Red Oaks*, *The Carrie Diaries*, and *Glow*, focus on characters who stretch the boundaries of American identity, as it is defined in the Reagan and Trump eras. These programmes do not return to the 1980s to depict past national identity as 'pure, untainted, complete, and in place' (Higson 2006 [1993]: 104). Instead, they reconstruct the cultural heritage of the 1980s in ways that draw attention to the hierarchical position of certain identity categories throughout history (citizenship status, whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality), and expose the performative construction of identity in characters who are 'privileged, white, [and] Anglo-Saxon' (Ibid. 2003: 27). In so doing, the thesis engages with Monk's (1995) critique of Higson's ideas.

Monk (1995) offers a different reading of heritage films, focusing on their portrayal of liberal social issues and marginalised identity politics in a more pluralistic way. She (Ibid.: 122) states that work by Higson, as well as similar arguments by Cairns Craig (1991) and Tana Wollen (1991), 'fail to engage with the essentially hybrid and impure nature of the heritage film texts – their mixture of conservatism *and* progressiveness' (emphasis in original). She (Ibid.) emphasises that the limitation of Higson's work is not necessarily its ideological focus; rather, it is the assumption that conservative political meanings about national identity are the only meanings available to audiences. Monk (Ibid.: 120) argues that the close reading of race, sexuality, and identity in heritage films such as *A Room with a View* (dir. James Ivory, 1985) and *Maurice* (dir. James Ivory, 1987) reveals how:

> Above all, they are films in which identity is repeatedly a central theme, explored in terms of an oscillatory search for a true (inner) self and authentic sexuality. […] Such themes could hardly be further from the ideology and content attributed to the 'heritage films' by the anti-heritage critics.[24]

Thus Monk's interpretation of heritage texts as 'hybrid' (Ibid.: 122) and focused on the '(inner) self' (Ibid.: 120) facilitates this thesis' analysis of both the political and private heritage of 1980s America. This double engagement highlights how cultural heritage constitutes both

[23] Higson (2016 [1996]: 235) refers to American heritage films such as *Little Women* (dir. Gillian Armstrong, 1994) and *The Age of Innocence* (dir. Martin Scorsese, 1993), but does not examine what constitutes the heritage of either the American Civil War era (*Little Women*) or the Gilded Age of the 1870s (*The Age of Innocence*).
[24] Dyer (2002: 204-228) similarly discusses the interconnectedness of 'homosexuality and heritage'.

public and personal issues; mirrored in the way in which television brings world events into the home (see Silverstone 1994). Monk (2002: 188) adds that 'the "heritage" *mise-en-scène* is only one element of, and potential site of, pleasure among many, including the pleasures of narrative, character, performance, humour, sexuality and so on.' Even though Monk does not expand her analysis of heritage to include how these facets might function outside of British heritage film, her work is central to this thesis' understanding of how the theories of the heritage debate apply to new and unexplored historical contexts, media, and social issues.

This is not to say that the thesis simply contests Higson's scholarship in favour of Monk's. In response to Monk (1995), Higson (2016 [1996]: 241-242) concedes that 'the [heritage] films are ambivalent enough to be read in both ways', acknowledging progressive themes whilst not dismissing the importance of national identity. In contrast to Higson's suggestion that the heritage films of the 1980s can be read in two separate ways, however, this thesis reads the '(inner) self' (Monk 1995: 120) of characters in the programmes examined in the subsequent chapters in conjunction with political and national themes. In short, it argues that self-aware televisual reconstructions of 1980s heritage highlight how American politics impacts identity politics. In so doing, these programmes contest the conservative legacy of the Reagan era in contemporary political thought; a critique that speaks to the progressive socio-cultural perspective of many American television programmes throughout the 2010s.[25]

Vidal's (2012a, 2012b) more recent developments broaden the ways in which the representation of heritage can be conceptualised. In her work on heritage film, nation, and genre, Vidal (2012b: 4) argues that:

> the heritage film is a hybrid genre with porous borders, a genre that is becoming less consensual and more political through its own staunch preference for emotional histories, and also more adventurous in its continuous incorporation of a popular historical iconography informed not only by literature or painting, but also by fashion, popular music and television.

Her observations about the 'porous borders' of heritage film anticipate the possibility of applying this critical frame beyond its existing contexts. In particular, her suggestion that heritage film is predominantly concerned with 'emotional histories' resonates with this thesis' focus on the affect that politics has had on the individual throughout American history. In contrast to Higson's (2006 [1993]: 91) view that the iconography of heritage film facilitates its nostalgic politics or Monk's (1995: 122) suggestion that one should look beyond the

[25] Parallel to this progressivism in a wide range of 2010s TV programmes (e.g. *The Fosters* [ABC Family / Freeform, 2013-2018], *The Handmaid's Tale* [Hulu, 2017-], and the case studies of this thesis), popular American talk radio has espoused conservative standpoints throughout the 2010s (see Hemmer 2016).

aesthetics of heritage film in search of progressive themes, Vidal (2012b: 4) outlines the possibility for 'adventurous' interplay between the iconography of twentieth-century popular culture and the representation of a 'more political' past.

Elsewhere, Vidal (2012a: 29) details the central role of aesthetics for depictions of the past, reading a cycle of period films since the 1990s as 'mannerist' because of their 'self-conscious stylization'.[26] Importantly, Vidal (Ibid.) states that aesthetic hybridity is not simply 'a property of a cycle of films but […] a deliberate *attitude* towards the transmission of the past' (emphasis in original). This thesis explores the aesthetic hybridity between 1980s media – particularly political adverts, popular and little-known television programmes, music videos, and archival broadcast footage – and contemporary television style in the programmes examined and asks what this tells contemporary audiences about the heritage of 1980s America. Vidal (Ibid.: 65) observes that mannerist period films focus on the house (in Vidal's examples the country manor) as a symbol of home that 'encapsulates the rituals and mores of the past' and highlights themes of intimacy. As the analysis in Chapters 2 and 5 illustrates, ideas about home, ritual, and the suburban house similarly foreground present-day engagement with themes of intimacy and the 1980s. Vidal (Ibid.: 111) adds that mannerist films use 'painterly' or 'photographic' reference points that constitute 'visual citations' from the nineteenth or early twentieth century to structure their aesthetic reconstruction of these historical periods. Drawing on Vidal, Chapters 4 and 5 examine the ways in which televisual and videographic citations structure the return to the 1980s, as these were the predominant forms of media which captured the aesthetics of the decade.

Heritage and Television

As illustrated above, the heritage debate prioritises discussions of cinema as opposed to television. Through the close analysis of nine case studies, this thesis calls attention to the television medium's aptness for constructing narratives about cultural heritage. When Higson (2006 [1993], 2014) and Wollen (1991) refer to TV programmes, specifically *Brideshead Revisited* (BBC, 1981) and *The Jewel in the Crown* (ITV, 1984), they read them as belonging to the same aesthetic and political genre as heritage films. By contrast, Richard Dyer (1996: 226) pays attention to television's structural implications on the portrayal of heritage when he

[26] These films include *The Age of Innocence*, *The Portrait of a Lady* (dir. Jane Campion, 1996), *The House of Mirth* (dir. Terence Davies, 2000), *Pride and Prejudice* (dir. Joe Wright, 2005), and *Atonement* (dir. Joe Wright, 2007). Vidal's (2012a: 89-102) analysis of *The Age of Innocence* considers an American historical context but does not address the cultural heritage of the period depicted in the film.

proposes that 'the formal organization of [*The Jewel in the Crown*] as a serial television narrative' supports the programme's extended engagement with British history. He (Ibid.: 225) suggests that the programme's long-form narrative emphasises issues relating to femininity and whiteness in order to unpick the decline of the British Empire. Elsewhere, Dyer (1995: 205) explains the process of such contemporary engagement with contentious historical subject matter by claiming that heritage programmes provide 'a space for marginalised social groups, a sense of putting people back into history'. Dyer's comments underpin this thesis' discussion of 'the formal organisation' of television programmes in relation to the depiction of 'marginalised social groups' such as immigrants, African Americans, and the LGBTQ community.

When Vidal (2012b: 29) addresses heritage and television, she highlights television's important role in the 'continuing success of heritage films in the 1990s and 2000s', seen, for instance, in the commercial popularity of the BBC's adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (1995). Vidal's (Ibid: 35) focus on 'television's contribution to the formation of Britain's heritage film culture' positions TV as a supplement to heritage cinema, an advantageous economic opportunity to generate widespread interest in the British past and to enable the continuing production of heritage films. Her (Ibid.: 29-35) analysis of heritage television nonetheless reinforces the importance of paying attention to medium specificity. Here, Vidal draws on Sarah Cardwell's (2002) work on television adaptations of classic novels.[27] Cardwell (Ibid.: 97) proposes that classic novel adaptations 'actively construct meanings through the televisual synthesis of represented past and contextual present'. She (Ibid.: 77-104) formulates a list of medium specific televisual attributes that augment the reconstruction of the past. For instance, Cardwell (Ibid.: 84) reads television images as 'tenseless', neither past nor present. She observes how, whilst live broadcast transmissions suggest 'presentness', viewers can 'manipulate' this present tense via home recording technologies, 'detach[ing]' images 'from their regular temporal flow'. This 'temporal clash' (Ibid. 97) makes television a compelling mode for depicting the past.[28] Cardwell (Ibid.: 88) also argues that viewers' awareness of actors performing on their TV screens aids the nuanced interrogation of the relationship

[27] Cardwell (2002: 129) uses the term 'classic-novel adaptation' to foreground issues that arise when translating novels to the screen. She (Ibid. 118) refers to heritage film as a genre that is specific to the cycle of films analysed by Higson.

[28] As Cardwell's remarks are from 2002, her ideas refer to television consumption practices before the streaming era. The analysis throughout each chapter considers the impact of digital technology and streaming on the ways in which 2010s television programmes depict the past, especially regarding the case studies that were originally released on streaming platforms: *Red Oaks*, *Glow*, the 'San Junipero' episode of *Black Mirror*, and *Stranger Things* (see Introduction).

between historical realism and contemporary contexts of reception. The consideration of televisual characteristics is important in this thesis' analytical approach towards reconstructions of 1980s American heritage. As the subsequent chapters illustrate, the portrayal of this decade from a contemporary perspective relies on the hybrid aesthetics (Vidal 2012a: 29) and 'temporal clash' (Cardwell 2002: 97) of television styles/images from the past as well as the present. The programmes examined foreground performativity to engage with identity politics (following on from Dyer [1995, 1996]) amidst a 1980s setting in ways that contemporary television audiences can understand as relevant to the present.

A Note on Historical Authenticity

The term 'heritage' is more often applied to analyses of films and TV programmes set in a distant past, prior to the 1940s, prompting the question: at what temporal distance is a historical period considered part of a nation's cultural heritage? Vidal (2012b: 18) stresses that 'the terms "present" and "past" are continuously shifting, since contemporary identities evolve in connection with a changing sense of historicity.' This underscores how interpretations of history regularly readjust, bringing new facets of the past into focus, and supporting this thesis' enquiry into the emergence of the 1980s' heritage on American television during the 2010s. To return to the epigraph to this chapter, if the 1980s 'still lack[ed] the kind of critical heritage decades like the 1950s and 1960s have established' in 2007 (Thompson 2007: 36), this heritage has now been at least partially defined through the media.

Vidal's (2012b: 18) point that definitions of the past 'evolve' calls into question longstanding scholarly preoccupations with the historical authenticity of heritage film and period drama more broadly. To explore the search for historical truth, Vidal (2012b: 101-102) draws on Dyer's (2007) concept of pastiche in relation to the depiction of American history as a counterpoint to heritage films' attention to authenticity, stating:

> the deliberately artificial reconstruction of 1950s America in *Far from Heaven* (Todd Haynes, 2002) can be considered a departure from the compromised investment in authenticity (whether literary, historical or both) deployed by the heritage film (see Dyer 2007). […] The pastiche of a genre embedded in film history allows the film to explore a historical structure of feeling.

In this context, Dyer's notion of pastiche refers to the amalgamation of audiovisual signposts that shape how a specific historical period is remembered. Dyer (2007: 133) proposes that pastiche is 'inescapably historical in two senses: it always references something before it and it always signals the fact (if it did not, it would not be pastiche).' Moreover, he (Ibid.: 137)

argues that 'aesthetic and political value' are 'the point' of pastiche. Thus films and television programmes that self-consciously emphasise the 'artificial reconstruction' of a historical period, as per Vidal (2012b: 101), foreground the 'aesthetic and political value' (Dyer 2007: 137) of this period independent of the portrayal's factual accuracy. Still, Vidal's (2012b: 101-102) approach relies on the separation of analysing heritage, which she refers to in relation to the heritage film genre, and analysing 'structure[s] of feeling', that is, emotional responses to the past that signal their own constructedness via pastiche. This separation between the representation of heritage and self-consciously stylised historical pastiche along a spectrum of authenticity/inauthenticity is problematised when considering Harrison's (2009) definition of cultural heritage. Harrison (Ibid.: 1) states that 'heritage is *not* about truth or authenticity but about deliverable political objectives – about […] the construction of myths of origin, identity and moral example' (emphasis in original). Thus the 'political objectives' which Dyer and Vidal attribute to the artificial foregrounding of past aesthetics in fact underpin the primary cultural function of heritage, regardless of historical 'truth or authenticity' (Ibid.).

This is not to say that pastiche is the only mode that contemporary TV programmes use to reconstruct the heritage of 1980s America. Chapters 4 and 5 analyse ways in which pastiche and factual inaccuracy inflect references of 1980s media as audiovisual heritage. The thesis as a whole is more concerned with the interplay between present-day interpretations of 1980s history and self-reflexive televisual depictions of this decade. Pam Cook's (2005: 199) work on history and nostalgia in the cinema, which also focuses on *Far from Heaven*, outlines a transitional approach for the analysis of historical subject matter in relation to authenticity/artificiality:

> I have tried to navigate a path between opposing positions: those which mourn the loss of authentic histories, seeing in the growth of irony and pastiche a decline in our access to the truth, and those which celebrate the value of dissolving boundaries between truth and fiction […]. The former seems too attached to traditional notions of authenticity […] and the authority of historians, while the latter runs the risk of losing sight of the aims and objects of historical enquiry altogether. As with any period of transition, the most productive site for investigation seems to be the nature of the transition itself.

Accordingly, this thesis 'navigate[s] a path' between each examined programme's self-conscious fictional stylisation and their 'historical enquiry' into the significance of the 1980s today. In so doing, it follows Cook's (2016 [1996]: 57) assertion that 'history is always masquerade'. Throughout the analysis of programmes in subsequent chapters, 'masquerade' appears literally, in narratives about false identities and laboriously constructed bodies, as well

as figuratively, through the methodology that untangles the 'masquerade' of 1980s period aesthetics to determine the social and political repercussions of this decade in the USA.

In an American television context, Alison Landsberg (2015: 64) similarly suggests that TV programmes such as the 1960s-set *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015) are 'less committed to rendering factually accurate depictions' of the past than to 'animating the past for millions by accentuating those matters that are most relevant and engaging […] in the present.' She (Ibid.: 63) proposes that these programmes create 'specific scenarios and dialogue that can produce knowledge about the past' so that 'even if the scenario did not literally happen, a fidelity to the spirit of the moment can foster historical understanding'. Here, Landsberg's theories parallel discussions of heritage, such as Harrison's (2009: 1) claim that heritage is '*not* about truth' (emphasis in original). In her earlier work, Landsberg (2004: 2) theorises what she calls 'prosthetic memory': a person's 'deeply felt memory of a past event through which he did not live'. She (Ibid.) connects the formation of these memories to the relationship between different generations, similar to how cultural heritage is 'transmitted from generation to generation' (UNESCO 2003: 5). A consideration of prosthetic memories supports this thesis' investigation into the ways in which younger generations familiarise themselves with the heritage of the twentieth century, which they 'did not live' through (Landsberg 2004: 2), via popular culture iconography. Viewers' potential engagement with the reconstructed past through their prosthetic, rather than real-life, memories further disrupts claims for historical authenticity. In light of the resonances between Landsberg's understanding of television's representation of the past and theories of heritage, it is useful to examine in what further ways scholarship on remediating America's past resembles scholarship on British heritage film and period drama.

Screening American History

Cultural heritage has not been explicitly studied in reseach into American film and television, which more often focuses on pastiche, nostalgia, or the nation's history without referencing heritage. This survey of the existing literature highlights that the analytical preoccupations of the heritage debate – national identity, presentness, progressive social issues, and the importance of style – also characterize the scholarship on American media, whilst raising several important analytical questions specific to the USA. Landsberg (2015: 69) posits that programmes like *Mad Men* return to the past to act as a kind of social history experiment as they 'make visible the contours of life for everyday people as they were shaped or

circumscribed by historical parameters.'[29] Landsberg's ideas resemble those within the heritage debate about the nation's past ('historical parameters') co-existing with representations of an individual's private life ('life for everyday people'). This is supported by her (Ibid.: 7) claim that historical television programmes create an 'affective engagement' between the past and the viewer, foregrounding emotional histories and intimacy; an idea explored throughout the analysis of the thesis' case studies. Landsberg (Ibid.: 67) pays particular attention to the medium specificity of television, arguing that 'long-form drama can allow for narrative complexity that cannot be realized in a single play', so that programmes are able to unpick historical shifts over time. The same argument is made by Dyer (1996: 226) in relation to heritage television.

Akin to the British heritage debate, studies about screening the American past foreground national identity and persistent social issues, such as systemic racism. When discussing the portrayal of African American history from eighteenth century slavery until after the American Civil War (1861-1865) in the miniseries *Roots* (ABC, 1977), Creeber (2001: 449) observes that the programme's long-form television narrative enables a 'multi-generational narrative structure', offering 'a more complex and pluralistic reading of history' than a shorter, feature film depiction might. Monk (1995: 122) advocates for a similarly pluralistic reading of heritage film and television, and this thesis considers the versatile ways in which the 1980s' heritage is understood from a contemporary perspective. According to Creeber (Ibid.: 447), *Roots* 'may not be as historically "accurate" as some critics would have liked, but for an American audience [it] implicitly reveal[s] the relativity of "otherness" and the subjectivity of racism.' As issues of '"otherness"' and 'racism' permeate definitions of America's national heritage, Chapters 2 and 3 analyse the positioning of white immigrant, Jewish, and African American identities in relation to the historical and political contexts of the 1980s and the 2010s. Hence, this thesis also reflects on Trevor B. McCrisken and Andrew Pepper's (2005: 207) claims that Hollywood films challenge 'how to interpret the American past through the increasingly complicated lens of our contemporary political and cultural moment', expanding their observation to consider the reconstruction of heritage on American

[29] *Mad Men* is one of the most widely analysed contemporary programmes that reconstructs the recent, 1960s, American past (see Bevan 2012; Tudor 2012; de Groot 2011; Pierson 2014; Stoddart 2011). The abundance of scholarship on basic cable drama *Mad Men*, which often focuses on style, nostalgia, and/or historical accuracy, is in stark contrast to the absence of engagement with other 1960s-set network television programmes that aired during the 2010s, such as *Pan Am* (ABC, 2011-2012)*, The Playboy Club* (NBC, 2011), or *Aquarius* (NBC, 2015-2016). This exemplifies certain hierarchies in television scholarship with regards to the perceived aesthetic value of historical programmes in different industrial contexts. As Niemeyer and Wentz (2014: 129) note, even though *Mad Men* 'seems to be the paradigmatic example' when analysing television and the recent nostalgic past, it is 'by no means alone' in dealing with these issues.

television. McCrisken and Pepper (Ibid.) survey the portrayal of American history in the cinema, from the War of Independence (1775-1783) to the First Gulf War (1990-1991), structuring their argument around national identity, war, and manifestations of deep-rooted social issues within the USA and between the USA and other nations. Regarding America's history of racism, they (Ibid.: 42) suggest that films that depict the slave trade such as *Amistad* (dir. Steven Spielberg 1997) speak to 'the changed and changing nature of cultural and economic power' and require viewers 'to develop a new critical idiom to come to terms with concepts such as race, racism, national identity and multiculturalism.' A 'new critical idiom' is also necessary for the analysis of contemporary television programmes' presentation of race, gender, and sexuality during the 1980s.

Several scholars detail the importance of specific eras of American history to American identity. This resembles the heritage debate's attention to the Edwardian era and the English Raj. In particular, the American frontier, the Vietnam War (1955-1975), and the political and popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s have all played a significant role in the remediation of American heritage during the 1970s and the 1980s, making them a critical point of comparison to how television returns to the 1980s today. In their work on the frontier in film and television, John E. O'Connor and Peter C. Rollins (2005: 2) state that 'throughout its history, American culture would be almost unimaginable without the West as a touchstone of national identity'. They (Ibid. 32) specifically link the themes and iconography of the Western to Reagan's political image. O'Connor and Rollins (Ibid.: 10) claim that the symbolism of Westerns has 'the ability to elucidate social and cultural concerns for contemporary audiences', a notion that Chapter 2 addresses when considering how Reagan's cowboy image is referenced and subverted in contemporary representations of the 1980s. Moreover, writing about the multifaceted ways in which the Vietnam War has been 'interpret[ed]' during the 1970s and 1980s, Michael Anderegg (1991b: 2, 14) highlights that widespread media coverage of this war led to its iconography being used for various, at times oppositional, purposes. Anderegg (1991a) analyses contrasting representations of Vietnam in relation to the celebrity of John Wayne and Jane Fonda who, Anderegg (Ibid.: 17) claims, 'can be seen as spokespersons for and representatives of the "right" and "left" extremes of the political response to the war.' He associates right-wing, conservative media responses to Vietnam with Wayne, whose most recognisable roles were in Westerns such as *The Searchers* (dir. John Ford, 1956) and *True Grit* (dir. Henry Hathaway, 1969), and who also directed and starred in the anti-communist Vietnam war movie *The Green Berets* (1968). This links Anderegg's notion of mediating Vietnam to the myths of the frontier as symbolic of American national identity (as per

O'Connor and Rollins 2005). The focus on Fonda as the representative of left-wing, liberal attitudes towards Vietnam considers her political activism, epitomised by the so-called 'Hanoi Jane' scandal, and her roles in films such as *Coming Home* (dir. Hal Ashby, 1978), which deals with the experiences of Vietnam veterans. The contrast set up by Anderegg draws attention to the impact that partisan politics can have on the remediation of history. Indeed, Chapter 3's exploration of the 1980s' heritage in relation to media representations of women refers to Fonda's later role as a 1980s fitness icon and the influence she has had on ideals of white femininity.

Scholarship that deals with the remediation of the 1950s and 1960s during the 1980s is particularly relevant to the analysis because it highlights the persistent framing of decades of the twentieth and, as this thesis argues, the twenty-first century as cyclical. The work of Daniel Marcus (2004) and Michael D. Dwyer (2015) reveals the diverse layers of America's engagement with its recent past whilst evidencing political and cultural trends during the Reagan era that the programmes examined in the thesis also unveil. Marcus (2004: 3) theorises that the widespread influence of 1950s and 1960s iconography in 1980s popular culture (seen in TV programmes, films, political references, adverts, news, and comedy) produced a retrospectively homogenous image of these decades, setting up 'linkages between different facets of the decades […] to create a sense of a unified whole, an encompassing treatment of national experience.' For example, he connects TV programmes such as *Happy Days* (ABC, 1974-1984) and *The Wonder Years* (ABC, 1988-1993), addressed in Chapter 5, to the creation of such 'linkages'. Most prominently, Macus (Ibid.: 62-63) observes that this 'unified' picture of recent history served a political purpose, supporting Reagan's 'belief in and yearning for a nation undisturbed by the social controversies and political traumas of post-1963 America.' His discussion informs the thesis' analysis of the Reagan era's heritage today, prompting a consideration of the extent to which the 1980s is seen as 'a unified whole' (Ibid.: 3) during the 2010s. Comparably, Dwyer (2015: 6) calls the representational strategies surrounding the 1950s in 1980s media the 'national popular', a term that refers 'not only to the shared cultural texts and practices of but also – and crucially – the shared *identity* of the nation' (emphasis in original). In his reading of 1980s Hollywood films such as *Back to the Future* (dir. Robert Zemeckis, 1985) and MTV music videos such as Michael Jackson's videos, Dwyer (Ibid.: 14) identifies 'competing claims for retrospective definitions of Fifties figures which represent a struggle over contemporary social and cultural values.' This recalls Monk's (1995: 122) claim that there is both 'conservatism *and* progressiveness' in heritage film. Hence, the reconstruction of heritage, whether in a British or an American context, is closely linked to

partisan politics. Dwyer (2015) characterises 1980s media through 'pop nostalgia', calling attention to a similar interplay between the factual and the fictional past which is present in discussions of heritage, authenticity, and pastiche. He (Ibid.: 22) suggests that 'nostalgia must be understood not as a reduction or denial of history but as a fundamentally *productive* affective engagement that produces new historical meanings for the past as a way of reckoning with the historical present' (emphasis in original). Dwyer's work is, therefore, foundational to this thesis which reads contemporary representations of 1980s America 'as a way of reckoning' with the social and political turmoil of the 2010s.[30] Scholarship on screening the American past raises issues that speak to the heritage debate, making the analysis of cultural heritage a key concern in the consideration of 1980s America on contemporary television. The remainder of this literature review expands upon the theorists and scholars whose work is used in the thesis' analysis of each case study. The five major themes that constitute the 1980s' American cultural heritage include: national identity, race, feminism, sensory nostalgia, and the effect of the Cold War on the experience of childhood.

National Identity and Race

National identity is central to this thesis' discussion of how media images of the 1980s relate to our understanding of America today. During the 1980s, nationalism itself became part of American cultural identity. For example, the presence of Reagan in contemporary television programmes is both a signpost of the decade and an emblem of its political identity. In 1983, Benedict Anderson (2006 [1983]: 4) argued that nationalism is inextricably linked to heritage, stating that:

> nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly we need to consider carefully how they have come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why, today, they command such profound emotional legitimacy.

The television programmes discussed in this thesis portray the ways in which the 'meanings' of being American, exemplified in the mythical image of the cowboy and the enjoyment of fast food, 'have changed over time'. Specifically, the thesis considers how 'nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life' of the 1980s, as per Anderson (Ibid.: 3), to illustrate that being American today is itself a 'cultural artefact' (Ibid.: 4) that harkens back

[30] Dwyer (Ibid.: 179-180) concludes that at the time of his book's publication in 2015, the 1980s appears to have resurfaced in the popular consciousness of the USA, not only in films and television but in politics as '[a]mong political conservatives in the United States, nostalgia for the Reagan Era, and the myths of Reagan himself, has only intensified since the former president's death in 2004.'

to the 1980s. Arguably, the most prominent cultural and political artefact that shapes and documents national identity is television. As discussed in the Introduction, Watson (2008: 7) suggests that in the USA television promotes cultural identity, describing it as 'the primary means by which Americans have defined themselves and each other' and the '"social glue"' that binds society and culture together.

Television's role in constructing affecting images of national identity in the 1980s is epitomised by Reagan's evocation of a shared American past through his televised speeches that painted mythic scenes of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln to 'illustrate enduring qualities of the nation rather than provide causal explanations for historical change' (Marcus 2004: 64). This feeds into Marcus' (Ibid.: 26) notion that 'the past can be remembered as a collection of intensely personal memories but more often also contains elements of group or public memories'. As Chapter 2 explores in detail, television allowed Reagan to bridge this gap between personal and public spaces and created a lasting image of American identity that remains, to a certain degree, synonymous with Reagan and his rhetoric. This image of what it is to be American has taken a white-centric view of the American peoples. For Joe R. Feagin (2010), whiteness has been framed as a normative racial category in the USA. He (Ibid.: 147) suggests that this is due to the '[w]orshipful stance' that is taken toward a 'supposed white superiority in knowledge, markets, technology and political institutions'. In their engagement with American identity, Chapters 2 and 3 discuss how television programmes reflect upon this white racial frame in order to highlight the problematic hierarchical infrastructure of the United States. These chapters read white and African American characters' experiences in light of Reagan-era race relations and their contemporary parallels. To do this, the thesis draws on Feagin's (2014: x) remark that, in the USA, 'racist thought, emotion, and action are structured into the rhythms of everyday life. They are lived, concrete, advantageous for whites, and painful for those who are not white.'

Feminism

Like national identity, discussions about feminism are linked to race. During the 1980s, feminist activism and backlash against the feminist movement in America intensified, with the media promoting opposing images of, predominantly white, women. For Thompson (2007: 9), the increasing visibility of social movements in the 1980s both advocated for diversity and sparked 'a reaction against liberalism'. In order to fully evaluate the turbulent development of feminism since the 1980s, whiteness needs to be analysed alongside blackness. This destabilises the positioning of whiteness as a normative race through which 'other' races are

seen (see Dyer 1997: 10). To do so, Chapter 3 examines the retrospective presence of black women in programmes set in the 1980s through the lens of black feminist theory, particularly that of bell hooks (1992) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000).

As feminist theory directly relates to close textual readings in Chapter 3, most of the comprehensive readings of feminism (specifically postfeminism, emergent feminisms, and intersectional feminism) are contained within the chapter. Hence, definitions of feminist movements as per Gill (2007) and Keller and Ryan (2018) are outlined in the introduction to that chapter. As feminism was such a culturally defining movement during the 1980s, it is embedded within what is now perceived as American heritage. It is this treatment of feminism as belonging to the 1980s' zeitgeist that the analysis of *The Carrie Diaries* and *Glow* draws out in Chapter 3. For Vidal (2012b: 24), heritage films interrogate women in relation to their political context. She (Ibid.) suggests that these films have 'a special critical relationship with women and feminine culture that revolves around identity, taste and consumption'. This is evident in several contemporary TV programmes' focus on female bodies in connection with self-assertion, performance, and costume. Julianne Pidduck (2004: 4) observes that period films since the 1990s, fittingly referred to as costume films, place great significance on the detail of historical dress, presenting 'the construction, constraint and display of the body through clothes' in order to illustrate how clothing signposts a historical sensibility. Pidduck (Ibid.: 31) also suggests that 'liberal feminist' adaptations of Jane Austen novels heighten the difference between women living in Regency-era Britain and during the 1990s/2000s. Hence, period dramas imbue present-day values into the past. This act of 'putting back' historically marginalized identities (Dyer 1995: 205) aids the redefinition of the 1980s' cultural heritage in terms of emergent feminisms in the 2010s. In short, programmes' engagement with the feminist heritage of the 1980s reflects various contemporary developments in the women's movement, especially intersectional efforts to define African American women's place within feminist activism and, more broadly, American society.

Sensory Nostalgia

The act of 'putting back' is also central to the foregrounding of LGBTQ storylines in the case studies of this thesis. By its very nature, the act of 'putting back' carries with it a nostalgic experience. In media depictions of the past, nostalgia has often been dismissed as a superficial connection between the viewer and the period shown on screen. Cook (2016 [1996]: 57) criticizes Higson for his perceived understanding of nostalgia as a 'spectacle' that detracts from 'the serious business of historical analysis'. In his analysis of what constitutes nostalgia

in American popular cinema, Frederic Jameson (1991: 118) distinguishes between nostalgia 'as fashion plate and glossy image', as seen in films such as *American Graffiti* (dir. George Lucas, 1973), and what he considers as less populist representations of history. He (Ibid.: 21) sees nostalgia films as a 'symptom of the waning of our historicity', contributing to a postmodernist narrative that obscures truth. By contrast, when discussing Korean period drama *Reply 1994* (tvN, 2013), Julia Keblinska (2017: 129) argues in direct response to Jameson that this TV programme 'makes consistent reference to the political and economic anxieties of the 1990s', adding:

> I counter that meaning does lie at the surface, of the technology of television and of our bodies, and that at these surfaces lies historical and theoretical insight. *Reply 1994* is pretty, but it is not 'mere' nostalgia that papers over a contentious recent past with pretty packaging, blinding us to media, history, and the fraught politics of the contemporary moment.

As this quote suggests, for Keblinska nostalgia is connected to sensory engagement with the world around us via our bodily interaction with technology. By analysing the aesthetic register of 1980s media, Chapter 4 engages with Keblinska's reading of the 'surface of the technology of television' as nostalgic in order to argue that television style itself occupies a prominent place in the 1980s' cultural heritage.

Discussing the plurality of nostalgia's possible functions in the media, Katharina Niemeyer and Daniela Wentz (2014: 129-130) observe that:

> Media can trigger nostalgic emotions, media are formative in the aesthetics of the nostalgic world they portray (through visual appearance, sound and narrative) and, at the same time, nostalgic media serve as a cure for the viewers' suffering and longing for a past era, the concept of which the media themselves may well have created.

As well as 'trigger[ing] nostalgic emotions' and creating an audiovisual map of a particular era, Niemeyer and Wentz (Ibid.) consider media to be 'technological objects of nostalgia and, by recalling their own past, they can even become nostalgic themselves'. Hence, nostalgia operates as that which facilitates reflection on mediation and the rapidly changing media landscape. Svetlana Boym (2001), who Niemeyer and Wentz reference in their definition of media nostalgia, argues that the second half of the twentieth century was characterised by nostalgia. She (Ibid.: xvi) suggests that contemporary evocations of a nostalgic response, often triggered by images of analogue media technologies, constitute 'fantasies of the past' that are 'determined by the needs of the present' and 'have a direct impact on realities of the future'. Chapter 5 interprets the representation of analogue media technologies in several of the case studies as enabling a nostalgic return to the experience of childhood in the 1980s.

The concepts of home and of national identity are closely linked to the experience of nostalgia. For Boym (Ibid.: 41), who refers to the etymology of nostalgia (Greek for *nostos* 'home' and *algia* 'pain'), nostalgia is especially linked to 'the interrelationship between individual and collective remembrance' of home. She (Ibid.) explains that there are two kinds of nostalgia that determine 'how we view our relationship to a collective home': restorative and reflective. Restorative nostalgia 'characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world' which create a sense of heritage 'by means of a return to national symbols and myths' (Ibid.). Reflective nostalgia is concerned with 'individual and cultural memory', as opposed to the 'national past and future', foregrounding 'fragments of memory' often seeming 'ironic and humorous' (Ibid.: 49). In its readings of how intimacy and identity politics define a national cultural heritage, this thesis considers both restorative and reflective nostalgias in order to understand the ways in which national and personal selves are constructed.

As examined above, Marcus (2004) and Dwyer (2015) highlight how nostalgia was central to 1980s media in the USA as it looked back to the 1950s and 1960s for its reconstruction of national heritage. The notion of nostalgically reconstructing recent American history is similarly woven into the fabric of present-day memories of the 1980s. This thesis argues that, as a consequence of the prevalence of nostalgia in 1980s media, nostalgia itself functions as part of the cultural heritage of the decade today. This cultural heritage was (and remains), to a large extent, political. Accordingly, Louis Bayman (2019: 3) discusses 'what it means to be simultaneously nostalgic and progressive' in relation to the British film *Pride* (dir. Matthew Watchus, 2014), which is set in the 1980s. He (Ibid.: 8, 11) identifies nostalgia as functioning through 'temporal layering' and 'multiple interacting temporalities' that include mixing visual styles, soundscapes, archival media, and LGBTQ plotlines. Hence, time functions not only as 'a unit of measurement' but also as 'a source of meaning' which 'determines the political function of nostalgia in any given artefact' (Ibid.: 15). The impact of the interconnection between the political, the artefact, and nostalgia on present-day understandings of 1980s America is a prominent theme dealt with throughout this thesis. Indeed, the thesis reads nostalgia as an emotional response to history (Boym [2001: xvi] refers to it as 'a historical emotion'). Such responses are evident in the programmes examined through the connection to home via national foods, the sounds of the past replayed as music recordings, and childhood memories that are triggered by toys and home videos. As these examples illustrate, in TV programmes that reconstruct the 1980s, nostalgia is enhanced by a sensory interaction with objects and experiences from the past.

The Cold War and Childhood

This thesis' preoccupation with the television medium and the telling of history, which at times evokes a nostalgic response in viewers, entails a discussion of media representations of the Cold War. The Cold War is part of a heritage that situates the American family's response to potential nuclear destruction as a pivotal moment in the lives of children who grew up in the 1980s. In the introduction to Baudrillard's work on the live television broadcasts of the First Gulf War, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Paul Patton (1995: 3) explains that for Baudrillard the 'Gulf War movie was instant history in the sense that the selected images which were broadcast worldwide provoked immediate responses and then became frozen as the accepted story of the war.' Baudrillard's theory underpins the reading of widely circulated televised images of Cold War-era political rhetoric in America, as in Reagan's speeches, and of nuclear fallout, as in fictional or educational TV programming. When the characters discussed in Chapter 5 encounter the memorable, 'frozen' (Ibid.) televisual iconography of the Cold War, they relive past events as depicted on television alongside the viewer. Patton (Ibid.: 2) states that in Baudrillard's view the 'TV Gulf War' produced '[f]ascination and horror at the reality which seemed to unfold before our very eyes mingled with a pervasive sense of unreality as we recognised the elements of Hollywood script which had preceded the real.' It is precisely this tension between reality and 'unreality' that the contemporary TV programmes analysed in this thesis address through their retrospective portrayal of the effects of the Cold War on families. By foregrounding how information about nuclear war is received via 1980s analogue television sets, these programmes challenge the reality of televised history and call into question the very idea of historical authenticity. The heritage of the Cold War, therefore, is connected to American viewers' past and present media consumption.

Like the First Gulf War for Baudrillard, the Cold War was not as straightforward as 'the accepted story' (Patton 1995: 1) transmitted in the media has often implied. Discussing the criticism and controversy surrounding CNN's 1998 documentary series *Cold War*, John Lewis Gaddis (2000: 43) contends that critics expected a 'single interpretative framework' of the Cold War instead of the 'multiple voices' presented in each episode of the programme.[31] He (Ibid.) states that the documentary foregrounds 'historical complexity', exposing viewers to 'an awareness of how people who did not know the future attempted to anticipate it, perhaps even the ability to imagine themselves in their place'. Similarly, several contemporary

[31] Gaddis' statement recalls Monk's (1995: 122) and Creeber's (2001: 449) analyses of pluralistic meanings in British heritage film and American historical television drama.

programmes set in the 1980s feature characters that 'attempt to anticipate' nuclear war and prompt viewers to 'imagine themselves' as children experiencing this moment. What is especially unique about these depictions of the Cold War (discussed in Chapter 5) is that they position the narrative in relation to the parent-child relationship, bringing to the surface latent generational and national anxieties about the potentially dangerous impact of international politics on the individual. In these moments, tensions between the political and the emotional heritage of the Cold War are played out in narratives centred on children.

Elisabeth Wesseling (2018: 10) argues that childhood nostalgia is connected to the national community, as outlined in relation to Anderson (2006 [1983]). She (Ibid.: 7) describes the close relationship between toys and the media (through promotion) and outlines how 'ephemeral childhood visions can materialize and solidify in artifacts [*sic*.]' so that we might 'retrieve childhood experiences by collecting the memorabilia of our youth'. Thus objects from the 1980s such as the home video camera and boardgames do not simply make up the decade's 'tangible' heritage, as defined by Harrison (2009: 10), but their inclusion in reconstructions of the 1980s facilitates a nostalgic response that reaffirms the Cold War's place in America's cultural and political heritage. More pertinently, the conceptualisation of the parent-child relationship itself shifted drastically during the 1980s, making the family a rich source for the analysis of 1980s' crises. Hugh Cunningham (2005: 202) explains:

> In the 1960s and early 1970s it might legitimately have been complained that the history of childhood consisted far too exclusively of a study of public policies towards children; in the 1980s and 1990s it was a contrary danger which threatened, an ignoring of anything outside the private sphere.

Thus contemporary television programmes map the dangers of the Cold War onto the historical developments of the parent-child relationship, which was prioritised during the 1980s, in order to interrogate adult responsibility for the wellbeing of the family as well as the national community more broadly.

Throughout their portrayal of issues surrounding nuclear anxiety and the American family, contemporary programmes incorporate meta-televisual moments to foreground the television medium as a historical signpost that points towards shared memories of the past and as a preserver of history itself. Derek Kompare (2005) and Amy Holdsworth's (2011) work on television's 'regime of repetition' (Kompare 2005: 19) details the recycling of old television images in an American and a British context, respectively. In Holdsworth's (2011: 6) study, 'nostalgia is explored as a way of approaching television's relationship to and memories of itself, which in turn reveal more about the medium's construction of broader

social and cultural memories.' Contemporary television reconstructions of 'social and cultural memories' of the Cold War in the USA prioritise children's experiences, revealing personal responses to a serious political subject through a mediated, nostalgic experience of the 1980s.

In response to the research questions outlined in the Introduction, the thesis' interdisciplinary critical framework highlights that the socio-political context of the 2010s affects the representation of the 1980s on contemporary television. The case studies' self-conscious aestheticization deliberately draws attention to personal as well as political issues which retrospectively constitute 1980s heritage. The thesis synthesises different strands of scholarship, including research within television studies, in order to demonstrate that the medium of television is paramount to the reimagination of the 1980s today. Whilst the term 'cultural heritage' comes with specific connotations in media scholarship, this thesis illustrates how its British theoretical frame has parallels with research that defines representations of the American past. More specifically, by combining these two theoretical approaches with research into television style, politics, race, gender, sexuality, children, and war, this study suggests that in present-day America the heritage of the 1980s is manifest in issues pertaining to national identity, identity politics, television aesthetics, and media technology.

CHAPTER 2

'Ronald Reagan is a cowboy': The Imagined American Community in Television Programmes set in the 1980s

'This is the Fourth of fucking July, let's get some burgers,
some hot dogs, potato salad, come on – things Reagan would eat!'
Red Oaks 1.05

On 17 January 2017, days before Donald Trump's inauguration as the 45th President of the United States, CNN reported that African American rap artist Kanye West had not been asked to perform at the event (see Diaz 2017). This was in spite of widespread media coverage of a meeting between the two men on 13 December 2016 (see Platon 2016; Blistein 2016). Tom Barrack, Chair of the Presidential Inaugural Committee, told reporters that West was not asked to perform and that the event would be 'typically and traditionally American' (qtd. in Diaz 2017). The language used by Barrack prompts the following questions about what it means to be 'typically and traditionally American', historically as well as today: (1) Which political values, behaviours, customs, and socioeconomic or racial groups do or do not fit into this category?; (2) Whose definition of 'traditionally American' is accepted, seen as alternative, or rejected (and by whom)?; and (3) How do television portrayals of the shared, national past (in this study the 1980s) inform a contemporary understanding of these issues?

This chapter focuses on engagement with American national identity and cultural assimilation in three contemporary television programmes set in the 1980s. It undertakes the comparative close textual analysis of KGB spy drama *The Americans* (FX, 2013-2018), coming-of-age comedy *Red Oaks* (Amazon Video, 2015-2017), and the German-American coproduction spy drama *Deutschland 83* (Sundance TV, 2015-). *The Americans* and *Red Oaks* draw on discourses that emerged under Reagan's presidency in the 1980s to question the changing definitions of American national identity. *Deutschland* 83 also engages with these discourses and portrays these themes from the perspective of East Germany under the USSR. The juxtaposition of perspectives from inside and outside the USA highlights the significance of Reagan as a signpost of not only the 1980s but also of the decade's impact on present-day definitions of American national identity. The chapter's analysis of the programmes' content and language, their visual style and texture, and their tone contributes to the thesis' consideration of the ways in which television recreates the 1980s from a contemporary perspective. This answers the thesis' first and second research questions as it illustrates how

television during the 2010s re-prioritises the historical significance of the 1980s in relation to today's political issues that include nationhood, presidential leadership, the wealth gap, immigration, and race-based conflict.

In his influential study on nationalism, discussed in the Literature Review, Anderson (2006 [1983]) suggests that nations can be understood as 'imagined communities'. This chapter makes use of Anderson's theory to frame its investigation into televisual portrayals of American identity as it examines the communities that are imagined as American in contemporary programmes about the 1980s. It references continuities and changes in what has been considered an American community since the 1980s, bringing Anderson's theory into the present and linking it to contemporary media practices.[32] By unpicking the influence of the 1980s' cultural heritage today, the chapter develops Anderson's (Ibid.: 4) argument that 'nation-ness' is itself a 'cultural artefact'. In so doing, it contributes to scholarship on heritage and nation (detailed in the Literature Review). Following Tim Edensor (2002), the analysis below considers national and personal identity as elastic, exploring scenes that represent characters as they transgress the boundaries of the community from which they stem and the community in which they live. Edensor (Ibid.: 69) states that:

> performance is a useful metaphor [with regards to national identity] since it allows us to look at the ways in which identities are enacted and reproduced, informing and (re)constructing a sense of collectivity. The notion of performance also foregrounds identity as dynamic.

The Americans, *Red Oaks*, and *Deutschland 83* present national identity as performative and 'dynamic', in Edensor's understanding of the word, as they engage with issues about nation, community, and cultural assimilation during and since the 1980s.

The programmes examined in this chapter expose how imagined national communities are defined by politically motivated thinking. The chapter discusses the depiction of culturally specific tropes and values, language, ceremonies and symbols, and cuisine, as well as divisions of sexual orientation and race. Close textual analysis highlights the ways in which *The Americans* and *Red Oaks* engage with the performative construction of national identity through characters who attempt to belong to a normative 1980s American community. Whilst they perform as white suburban middle-class citizens to varying degrees of believability, they also interrelate with alternative cultural, political, sexual, and racial communities. As explored

[32] This positions the thesis amongst the work of scholars including Silberstein (2003), Hartley (2004), and Mi (2005), who have similarly relied on Anderson's theory of 'imagined communities' to research national identity and television, in different geographical and historical contexts to this thesis.

in the Introduction and Literature Review, the fictional past is a productive space in which to question notions of identity due to the heightened element of construction in a period setting. In this chapter, the programmes' present-day perspective on the 1980s reveals that the definition of a national community is rooted in that community's shared history. *The Americans* and *Red Oaks*, and to some extent *Deutschland 83*, represent the continuities and changes of rhetoric about American identity from the 1980s to today.

Through the close analysis of television images of the past, this chapter responds to the third research question and examines how the texture of these images conveys the 1980s in its political and national contexts. In the discussion that follows, identity politics emerges as a core concern relating to nation and culture. Thus the chapter contributes to the thesis' overarching consideration of the interplay between the private and the political both within TV fictions and in their real-world context. *The Americans*, *Red Oaks*, and *Deutschland 83* all construct access to characters' personal lives through nationalistic and political imagery to accentuate and problematise the links between public and private identity. Engagement with these themes emphasises the reconstruction of 1980s America 'as idea, nation, and frame-of-mind' (Kleinfeld and Kleinfeld 2004: 43), rather than a homogenous historical space. Hence, it is productive to adopt an analytical stance towards period fiction that does not prioritize historical authenticity (as explained in the Literature Review). This chapter, therefore, focuses on what Landsberg (2015: 20, 9) has termed 'affective engagement' with the fictional past, and explores how such engagement produces 'historical knowledge' about the 1980s. It expands upon scholarship by Landsberg (2015), Marcus (2004), Creeber (2001), and Thompson (2007) to develop the thesis' argument regarding the seminal role of television in the self-reflexive remediation of historical narratives.

The chapter begins by analysing the significance of fictional engagement with President Reagan for a contemporary understanding of 1980s America. As Reagan's image balances both media celebrity and political conservatism, he and television are essential to the reconstruction of the 1980s as a 'consisten[t]' decade (Thompson 2007: 5).[33] The chapter then analyses intimacy and alienation in relation to representations of American national identity and the 1980s, paying particular attention to the use of foreign languages, English subtitles, and the trope of the cowboy in *The Americans* and *Red Oaks*. Contrasting insider and outsider perspectives about the USA in the 1980s are considered through the comparative analysis of the opening titles from *The Americans* and *Deutschland 83*. The chapter examines how

[33] This is what Marcus (2004: 3) calls a decade as 'a unified whole' (see Literature Review).

national celebrations (the Fourth of July) and symbols (the American flag) contribute to the construction of the imagined American community over time. In this context, it also analyses the satirical positioning of the LGBTQ community as part of the American nation in *Red Oaks*. Finally, the chapter explores the role of racial identity and food for cultural assimilation into the USA. The analysis focuses on whiteness as a perceived characteristic of American identity, drawing on Feagin's (2010) and Dyer's (1997) work within critical whiteness studies. In the programmes examined, when white characters interrelate with characters of colour and food from outside America these relationships are inflected by national identity.

As definitions of national identity differ depending on one's political affiliation (see Beasley 2004), reconstructions of national identity and the 1980s in popular culture are shaped by partisan arguments.[34] As Duncan S. A. Bell (2003: 73) remarks: 'there is no singular, irreducible national narrative, no essentialist "national identity"'. Hence, whilst individual TV characters may reflect conservative or liberal perspectives, a comparative analysis of episodes, narratives, and several texts that engage with 1980s America highlights the existence of 'multiple 1980s' and a variety of definitions of national identity associated with this decade in the 2010s. This inconsistency results in moments of rich tension and complex negotiations of the 'us and them' binary that is often present in nationalist rhetoric.

Reagan's American Television Legacy

As the Introduction to the thesis suggests, the 1980s is a decade defined by more than simply Reagan's presidency (see Thompson 2007: 3-5). Nonetheless, due to his significant 'rhetorical and political transformation' of American nationalism and conservatism during his time in office (Smith 2017: 39), it is important to examine the fictional reconstruction of the President's image in order to unpick the cultural revival of the 1980s. The public reception of Reagan is generally divided between his acting career and his political career. Hence, Reagan personifies the convergence of American television and politics, which became prominent during the well-documented 1960 election of John F. Kennedy (see Druckman 2003: 559-71) and was recently a deciding factor in the 2016 election of Trump (see Gabriel et al. 2018: 306). Iwan Morgan (2016: 65) stresses that television allowed Reagan to 'become known to younger viewers [in the 1950s], many of whom would later vote for him'. Similarly, Shira Gabriel et al. (2018: 306) claim that 'Trump's election was seriously influenced by his appearance on

[34] As outlined in the Literature Review, Monk (1995: 122), Dwyer (2015: 14), and Anderegg (1991a) all argue that the remediation of the past is shaped by conservative as well as liberal perspectives.

reality TV' which created 'parasocial bonds' between Trump and the viewers of his reality programme *The Apprentice* (NBC, 2004-2017). Television itself, therefore, has had a role in the remediation of American presidential rhetoric since the mid-twentieth century.

In his exploration of Reagan in the context of national identity, Gil Troy (2005: 10) highlights the President's 'power to shape the nation's self-perception and worldview' in the 1980s. Today, Reagan's image powerfully shapes memories of the 1980s, evidencing how 'Reagan's renewal […] was not simply economic or political. It was ideological, cultural, and philosophical, too' (Ibid.: 20). The 'renewal' and reimagination of Reagan's political rhetoric in contemporary American culture is evident in Trump's recycling of Reagan's campaign slogan 'Make America Great Again'.[35] Reagan's image is often associated with the trope of the cowboy, which is imperative to the analysis of the construction of national identity in *The Americans*, *Red Oaks*, and *Deutschland 83*. This is largely due to Reagan's roles in 1950s Westerns such as *Law and Order* (dir. Nathan Juran, 1953), *Cattle Queen of Montana* (dir. Allan Dwan, 1954), and *Tennessee's Partner* (dir. Allan Dwan, 1955). As President, Reagan continued to evoke the image of the cowboy. When considering Reagan's image in the 1980s, Janice Hocker Rushing (1983: 25) suggests that when America looked for a president in 1980 it 'found a "cowboy" with a ranch'.[36] Morgan (2016: 10) also links Reagan to the cowboy, citing an 'iconic photograph of cowboy-hatted Reagan at Rancho del Cielo'. He (Ibid.) notes that Reagan grew up in a small Midwestern town in 'the most American part of the United States'. As Anderegg's (1991a; see Literature Review) discussion of John Wayne's impact on perceptions of Vietnam highlights, the figure of the cowboy is central to American mythmaking about the nation's political values. Claims about Trump's 'resurrection of the American cowboy' (Bolling 2016) reflect an ongoing, contemporary preoccupation with the cowboy in relation to the American presidency. Trump appeals to a demographic that identifies the cowboy as a symbol of the 'most American' (Morgan 2016: 10) national identity. For instance, in February 2019 a group of Trump's supporters who call themselves 'Cowboys for Trump' rode into Washington, D.C., on horseback (see Fink 2019). References to the cowboy in *The Americans* and *Red Oaks* expose resonances between the socio-political atmosphere of the 1980s and of contemporary America; a link brought into focus through the similarities between Reagan's and Trump's campaigns and their former career as television personalities.

[35] See Morgan (2019) and McMillan (2017) on the resonances between Reagan's and Trump's campaigns.
[36] In Rushing's interpretation of Reagan's 'cowboy' persona, quotation marks are necessary because Reagan has only acted as a cowboy in films.

In the television programmes analysed in this chapter, cowboy imagery creates a powerful link between traditional and contemporary American identity. Rushing (1983: 15) proposes that 'the Western myth is most usefully conceptualized in terms of dialectical tension between "Individualism" and "Community".' Rushing's work is a starting point for this chapter's analysis of the cowboy trope, a significant element of the Western myth to which Rushing refers. Considering O'Connor and Rollins' (2005: 2) research that sees the mythical West 'as a touchstone of national identity', it is possible to identify thematic links between reimagining the past, cowboys, and American nationhood. In addition, Richard Slotkin (1984: 407) argues that the lasting imagery of the Western is rooted in 'the continuity of meanings: the transmission from generation to generation of a characteristic system of beliefs and values, embodied in a continuously evolving language of symbols, fables, images, and fictions.' Slotkin's remark is central to the analysis of reconstructing the 1980s in relation to the cowboy trope because it recalls UNESCO's (2003: 5) definition of cultural heritage as something 'transmitted from generation to generation' and Creeber's (2001: 449) observation that long-form television facilitates the 'multi-generational' and 'pluralistic' portrayal of American history.

Due to his omnipresence in 1980s media, Reagan's image in contemporary TV programmes highlights 1980s culture and politics. Robert E. Denton Jr. (1988) refers to Reagan's frequent presence on television during his time in office by titling his book *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan*.[37] The numerous and varied references to Reagan in contemporary televisual depictions of the 1980s illustrate the broad spectrum of opinions about Reagan then and now.[38] For example, *Red Oaks* and *The Goldbergs* (ABC, 2013-) engage with Reagan's recurring image in popular culture, as characters discuss 'things Reagan would eat' (*Red Oaks* 1.05; see chapter epigraph) and that 'Reagan likes jelly beans, [and] he's got the hair of a Greek god' (*The Goldbergs* 2.20).[39] *Red Oaks* and *The Americans* feature perspectives on Reagan's Hollywood career and his political prowess, calling him 'a cowboy' (*Red Oaks* 2.01) and claiming that he 'doesn't care' (*The Americans* 2.03). *The Americans* and *Deutschland 83* focus their narratives on Soviet characters who believe that '[t]he American people have elected a madman as their president' (*The Americans* 1.01) and call Reagan 'a

[37] Feuer (1995) details the impact of the Reagan administration's rhetoric on the content and tone of American TV programmes during the 1980s, as outlined in the Introduction.
[38] Hamilton's (2011) study of twentieth-century American presidents distinguishes between presidents who were 'later deified' and those who were 'later reviled'. He (Ibid.: 341) claims that Reagan was only deified 'by conservatives'.
[39] See Chapter 5 for the analysis of the reconstruction of the 1980s in *The Goldbergs*.

danger to mankind' (*Deutschland 83* 1.01). By describing Reagan as childlike, godlike, uncaring, and irresponsible, these programmes all suggest that his depiction is not simply inflected by partisan political perspectives, but, due to being an open signifier of a range of issues related to the 1980s, Reagan's image endures. Beyond these explicit references to the President, this chapter considers the subtle audiovisual texture of contemporary programmes that depict America during Reagan's presidency. John Tulloch (2002: 95) proposes that '"classic" historical dramas […] regenerate for contemporary audiences myths of heroism and militarism, while naturalizing real and […] ever more visible social divisions.' By contrast, contemporary TV programmes that reimagine the 1980s do not 'naturalize' social divisions, as they refrain from taking the traditionally conservative stance described by Tulloch. Even when they present conservative 'myths of heroism' (Ibid.) – through the inclusion of wealthy, white characters who support Reagan's 'conservative transformation' of America (Morgan 2016: 197) – *The Americans*, *Red Oaks*, and *Deutschland 83* draw attention to the performative nature of national identity.

Performing Reagan's America: Language and the Cowboy

The Americans and *Red Oaks* question the hierarchical underpinnings of American society by foregrounding Reagan's position as a signpost of the 1980s, destabilising the belief that English monolingualism is central to American identity, and invoking the mythical image of the cowboy. Reagan's own concerns with national identity inform present-day understandings of the 1980s and are therefore evident in *The Americans*' emphasis on government institutions (such as the Federal Bureau of Investigations [FBI]) and the choice of Washington, D.C., as the primary location of the programme.[40] These locations anchor the themes of nationhood to *The Americans*. In his definition of the nation as an imagined community, Anderson (2006 [1983]: 6) suggests that 'it is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, […] yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (emphasis in original). Emblematic places and organisations, such as Washington, D.C., and the FBI, become synecdochic of the nation, which can support the portrayal of a 1980s national 'communion', where the image of these locations stands in for Reagan's America.

[40] Reagan's 1981 'Inaugural Address' highlights his preoccupation with national identity, as he proclaims that 'we, as Americans, have the capacity now, as we have had in the past, to do whatever needs to be done to preserve this last and greatest bastion of freedom.'

To reinforce these connections, several pictures of Reagan adorn the halls of the FBI in *The Americans*. He is most prominently displayed just outside the office of the Director of the Counterintelligence Unit, which conveys an overarching sense of national alignment with Reagan. For example, the episode 'In Control' (1.04) depicts characters' reactions to the assassination attempt on Reagan on 30 March 1981. As FBI agents are called into an emergency meeting, initially, the camera focuses on agent Stan Beeman's (Noah Emmerich) face as he processes the news. The camera then pulls back and pans alongside Stan as he enters the meeting room. Instead of following Stan, the camera continues to pan to the wall outside the room, zooming in on a portrait of Reagan (fig. 2.1). For a few seconds the camera lingers on the President's smiling face, accompanied by violins playing the slurred first four notes of a minor-sounding scale, quickly and with crescendo, before cutting to the opening titles of the programme (discussed below). In this instance, the camerawork decidedly abandons its alignment with Stan to highlight Reagan as the figurehead of America and its national organisations including the FBI. Alignment shifts swiftly from Stan's personal reaction to the sense of national concern for Reagan's life that was palpable in 1981 (see, for example, the excessive original news media coverage of the assassination attempt; 'CBS News Special Report' 1981 [T81_0600]).[41] Here, the attempted evocation of concern for Reagan's life via the intimate close-up creates tension with the frenetic violin score, suggesting ominousness and reflecting the tension with contemporary viewers' likely awareness that, historically, Reagan survives.

The reconstruction of this well-known historical event relies heavily on the nuances of camerawork, sound, and aesthetics to create an affective experience for contemporary viewers. Here, the programme's historical content is conveyed through the evocation of an emotional response.[42] Thus *The Americans* can be read as a 'historically conscious television drama' that aims 'to reconstruct the lived contours of a particular historical moment' rather than focusing only on 'factual history', in light of Landsberg's (2015: 61-62) work on historical TV programmes. *The Americans* 1.04 foregrounds and questions themes of intimacy and community in relation to the assassination attempt on Reagan, promoting an 'affective engagement' (Ibid.: 20) with America's national past. It is this 'affective engagement' that produces 'historical knowledge' (Ibid.: 9) about the 1980s and Reagan for a contemporary

[41] Watson (2008: 247-248) discusses the abundance of video footage about the attempt on Reagan's life in the media, linking the mediation of this event to television's formative role in the construction of American identity.
[42] Chapter 4 explores the evocation of sensory, emotional responses to the 1980s in *The Americans*, as well as *Halt and Catch Fire* and the *Black Mirror* episode 'San Junipero', in further detail.

audience. The close-up of the portrait in figure 2.1 positions Reagan as a powerful and influential *image*, presenting him as a concept rather than a person. This positioning is contingent on Reagan's pre-presidency life as an actor. Reagan embodies many facets of the 1980s, from trickle-down economics to the 'Star Wars' missile defence programme. As a result, Reagan's mere emblematic presence suggests that the series is questioning the possibility of realising an authentic historical representation (what Landsberg calls 'factual history'; Ibid.: 62). If viewers are made aware that Reagan as image stands for an ideology rather than a real historical figure, the fictional television narrative can engage with the 1980s more freely, and the decade becomes a flexible space to be explored by the programme. As the camera seeks out Reagan's portrait, he appears to look straight at the audience through the setup. In this moment, the 'spatial' and 'temporal' axes of point of view, as theorised by Pye (2000: 8-12), are not anchored to the diegetic world of the programme because the camera has deliberately panned away from Stan. This prompts a consideration of the lasting impact of Reagan's presidency in the USA, suggesting that he has claimed his position not only as the figurehead of 1980s America, but also the figurehead of fictional reconstructions of the 1980s.



fig. 2.1 Portrait of Reagan at the FBI



fig. 2.2 Portrait of Stalin in Elizabeth's childhood home

During the same episode, Reagan's portrait contrasts with the framed picture of the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin (1922-1952), shown in a flashback to the childhood home of KGB spy Elizabeth Jennings (Keri Russell) in the USSR (fig. 2.2). Stalin's portrait also relates to national identity as the characters discuss how he 'guided the motherland'. In the shot of Reagan, the attempt to construct a sense of intimacy is evident through the tight zoom on the portrait. In figure 2.2, the domestic setting including the ornate, flower-patterned wallpaper surrounding Stalin's portrait marks a similar attempt to create intimacy. This sense of intimacy is simultaneously undermined by the presence of Stalin as a state leader inside the home, which suggests a more intrusive relationship between national and private life in the USSR than in the USA. Even though *The Americans* employs the perspective of Soviet agents to portray the Cold War, it often highlights negative aspects of the USSR, such as series regular Nina's (Annet Mahendru) unexpected assassination in Russia (4.04), or the flashbacks and recollections of Elizabeth and her husband Philip (Matthew Rhys) about their childhoods spent in poverty and starvation (seen, for example, in episodes 1.04, 4.01 and 5.11).[43] Nevertheless, the display of Reagan's portrait in a workplace environment also undercuts the construction of intimacy, hinting at an official and compulsory, rather than a personal and voluntary admiration of the President.

[43] In her analysis of *The Americans*, Kaklamanidou (2016: 105) proposes that the programme 'promote[s]' and 'safeguard[s]' the ideology of American exceptionalism. Whilst this thesis reads *The Americans*' engagement with politics, nation, and morality as more complex than implied by Kaklamanidou, her work is notable in relation to the comparison between the programme's portrayal of American and Soviet leaders.

Significantly, whilst Reagan's portrait occupies a frame on its own, Stalin's image is shown in a medium-wide shot, framed by two Soviet citizens discussing it. This establishes an added layer of mediation; viewers are shown Reagan's portrait on its own due to its presumed familiarity to American nationals, but Stalin's image and its function as a national symbol can only be communicated with the added support from the Russian characters as they admire it. The focus on Reagan's portrait enables a more 'affective engagement' (Landsberg 2015: 20) with the historical context of the programme for American viewers, whilst the mediation of Stalin's image constructs a less emotional and more factual relationship to the Soviet leader. Both shots demonstrate that with the passing of time, reconstructions of a national leader's image become conflated with the dominant ideology of their eras. The difference in the framing of the American and the Soviet leader within the context of a television programme produced by American creators for an American audience implies that emotional reverence for or resentment towards a leader depends on a person's cultural ties to a nation.

The discussion about Stalin takes place in Russian, drawing viewers' attention to connections between national identity, patriotism, and language. In her study 'Language and national identity in the US', Aneta Pavlenko (2002: 164) suggests that 'the historical construction of English monolingualism [is] a symbol of Americanness'.[44] Referring to Anderson's theories of the imagined community, Adrian Blackledge (2002: 67-68) discusses the construction of national identity in multilingual societies, suggesting that:

> A dominant ideology of monolingualism in multilingual societies raises questions of social justice because such an ideology potentially constructs the nation-state as an imagined community (Anderson, 1991) that is monolingual and that excludes and discriminates against those who are either unable or unwilling to fit the monoglot standard.

The Americans frequently engages with the construction of an American 'monoglot standard' that positions English language fluency, with American English pronunciation, as a marker of national identity. In the 'Pilot' (1.01), Stan's FBI partner Chris Amador (Maximiliano Hernández) describes KGB sleeper agents living in America, such as Elizabeth and Philip, as 'super-secret spies living next door. They look like us. They speak better English than we do. […] they're not allowed to say a single word in Russian once they get here.' Amador's statement illustrates that language and monolingualism are considered to be an integral part

[44] This is in spite of the fact that a considerable percentage of American society is multilingual (see Wright and Chan 2019).

of constructing an individual as well as a collective national identity. However, his point of view has its limitations, seeing as Elizabeth and Philip remain, for the most part, loyal to the Soviet Union despite being forbidden 'to say a single word in Russian'.

Moreover, in the moments before learning that Reagan has been shot in episode 1.04, Stan and Amador are practising Russian vocabulary using flashcards. They attempt to learn Russian so that they can perform their job in the Cold War-era FBI more efficiently. This small detail in episode 1.04 builds on Amador's comments about language from episode 1.01, contributing to a deeper engagement with themes of nation and language across the series. *The Americans* constantly questions issues of nation, language, and community with a significant degree of nuance. This gradually thickens and layers these themes, so that each new engagement with them carries a more meaningful charge (see, for instance, the use of Russian language in episode 5.02; discussed below). Over the course of episodes/seasons, this thematic development functions in the same way as television's spatial layering and its texture, which enriches the 'overall fabric' of the programme through the incorporation of 'fine detail' (Donaldson 2016: 5-6; see Introduction). The reconstruction of American national identity in the context of the fictional 1980s relies on these subtle, textured moments within each episode of *The Americans*.[45] As Landsberg (2015: 67) observes, specifically in relation to television's engagement with the past, 'long-form drama can allow for narrative complexity that cannot be realized in a single play.'

During the Russian dialogue about Stalin's portrait in *The Americans* 1.04, English subtitles aid viewers' understanding of the position of Stalin as figurehead of the USSR (fig. 2.2). At the same time, the subtitles emphasise the language barrier and, by extension, the cultural discord between an English-speaking American audience and the Soviet setting of the scene. Eva Novrup Redvall (2016: 350) argues that subtitling 'forces foreign audiences to pay close attention since they have to read the subtitles to understand the dialogue.' *The Americans* draws American viewers' attention to Soviet history using English subtitles. However, these subtitles remind the audience that they reside firmly outside of the Russian exchange that is taking place. During subtitled sequences the audience 'still has access to the original language content' which results in the programme 'appear[ing]s less "local"' (Mast, de Ruiter, and Kuppens 2017: 2576). In *The Americans* 1.04, the English translation is highlighted by the bright yellow colouring of the subtitles that are positioned in the lower third of the frame (fig.

[45] Below, the analysis of repetition and location in *Red Oaks* similarly details the layering of themes related to national identity in another TV programme set in the 1980s. Moreover, Chapter 4 reads the layering of nostalgic intertextual references in relation to the textured, televisual reconstruction of the 1980s.

2.2). Through these subtitles, the barrier between the foreign and the familiar can be trespassed, but never ignored; similarly, the reconstructed past appears as something familiar, yet removed from the viewer's present.

In the fifth season of *The Americans*, the episode 'Pests' (5.02) once again connects national identity and language through the use of English subtitles, whilst complicating American viewers' identification with English monolingualism. Tasked with targeting a Soviet defector, Morozov (Alexander Sokovikov), Philip and Elizabeth pretend to be his neighbours and take him and his family out to dinner. During the meal, Morozov comments on the abundance of food choices available in the USA and then loudly expresses that he 'hate[s] Russia'. The use of food as a signifier of national identity is discussed in more detail in the final section of the chapter. Regarding the use of language and subtitles, when Morozov talks about 'hate[ing] Russia' in English, his son Pasha (Zack Gafin) starts an argument with him in Russian:[46]

PASHA: They don't want to hear you go on and on about how bad the Soviet Union is.
MOROZOV: English, Pasha, English!
PASHA: Why can't I speak Russian? It is the only language I speak.
MOROZOV: This country has accepted us, given us a home, a life, everything.
PASHA: Bullshit.

As Morozov and Pasha argue about their conflicting definitions of national identity and community, unknown to them, Philip and Elizabeth understand their Russian conversation. This aligns the couple with the audience who are aware that they speak Russian and are thus in possession of information which Morozov and his family do not have. With the help of the English subtitles, the audience is also able to understand the Russian conversation, sharing this knowledge with Philip and Elizabeth. This connection between the Jennings and the audience is intensified when Morozov apologises for speaking in Russian, explaining that it was due to a family argument between him and Pasha. Elizabeth then reassures Morozov that they are not offended by saying, 'We understand.' The double meaning here is emphasised by a medium close-up of Keri Russell's knowing smile as she delivers the line almost into the camera (fig. 2.3). This constructs a sense of comradery between Elizabeth and the audience as they share in her knowing smile. Here, the viewer's 'cognitive' axis of point of view (as per Pye 2000: 8-12) aligns them with Elizabeth due to the shared knowledge that the subtitles make available. This alignment is significant because Morozov and Pasha's conversation in

[46] When citing dialogue in languages other than English, the thesis uses programmes' integrated subtitles.

Russian questions the legitimacy of Soviet national identity, which is an important part of Philip and Elizabeth's identities.



fig. 2.3 Elizabeth smiles after eavesdropping on Morozov, a Russian defector

Conversely, the use of a foreign language also exacerbates the distance between the audience and the characters by reminding viewers that Elizabeth and Philip are not American. Thus the 'evaluative' and, to some extent, the 'ideological' axes of point of view (Ibid.) are incongruous to the 'cognitive' axis during this scene because of American viewers' likely knowledge about anti-communist propaganda during the 1980s, which could impact their judgement of and alignment with the characters.[47] Considering Pavlenko's (2002: 164) argument about English monolingualism as a symbol of the American nation, Philip and Elizabeth are removed from the imagined community of Americans because they are native Russian speakers. This distance is emphasised visually during the medium close-up of Elizabeth's knowing smile (fig. 2.3). Instead of zooming in on Elizabeth and creating more intimacy between her and the audience, an imperative typical of television aesthetics as defined by Newcomb (1974: 245), the setup leaves a significant portion of the frame empty in the upper right quadrant. This undercuts audience alignment and reflects Elizabeth's insider/outsider status as a US citizen. Meanwhile, Morozov remains visible in the lower right quadrant of the shot, subtly reminding viewers of Elizabeth's Russian identity. As the analysis of sequences that feature Russian dialogue with English subtitles illustrates, in *The Americans*

[47] For example, one of Reagan's 1984 re-election campaign ads focuses on the threat posed by a 'vicious' and dangerous bear, emblematic of the USSR ('Reagan/Bush Re-Election Campaign: Bear' 1984 [AT:29530_034]).

(as well as *Red Oaks* and *Deutschland 83*, discussed below) the portrayal of American national identity constantly hovers on the threshold between intimacy and alienation. This simultaneously encourages and disrupts audience identification with the programme's illegal immigrant protagonists. As a result, *The Americans* creates a sense of instability with regards to 'typically and traditionally American' identity (Barrack qtd. in Diaz 2017).

The symbolism of Reagan and the use of a foreign language with English subtitles take on further significance in a sequence from the episode 'Paris' (2.01) in *Red Oaks*, reinforcing the centrality of national identity to reconstructions of the 1980s. *Red Oaks* represents various ideologies, with a focus on white Republican identity and American patriotism centred around the programme's main location at an affluent New Jersey country club called Red Oaks. Episode 2.01 displaces the protagonist, David (Craig Roberts), from his regular all-American surroundings as a tennis instructor at the Red Oaks club and a student in New York City. He follows his girlfriend Skye (Alexandra Socha), the daughter of Red Oaks' president Mr. Getty (Paul Reiser), to Paris. When they have dinner with Skye's French friends, she debates Reagan with Claire (Mackenzie Lansig) in French:

CLAIRE:	Ronald Reagan is a cowboy. Not even a real cowboy! An actor! How does he qualify to be president?
SKYE:	He was also governor of California. Not that I'm defending him.
CLAIRE:	So you voted for him.
SKYE:	Of course not. But my father did…

This conversation highlights concerns over Reagan's ability to lead America due to his lack of experience in politics. As the conversation takes place between Skye, the daughter of an American Republican, and Claire, a French, and therefore 'foreign', liberal, it emphasises that Reagan's image symbolises both political and national ideology. Here, Claire identifies the same Western imagery linked to Reagan that Rushing (1983: 25) refers to when stating that 'his experience as an actor aids in assembling the image, and the fact that we elected him expresses our need not for a *real* Western hero, but merely for the appearance of one' (emphasis in original). As a Frenchwoman, Claire's connection between Reagan and the cowboy reflects how the President's image is received around the world. Outsiders such as Claire associate Reagan with a deep-rooted nationalistic nostalgia; the sort of nostalgia that belongs to the Western (see Frantz and Choate 1968: 69) and is evoked in Reagan's attempt 'to resurrect the grandeur of his nation and his office' (Troy 2005: 11). When Claire exclaims that Reagan is 'not even a real cowboy' she exposes Reagan's rhetoric of American patriotism as no more than a performance and an 'appearance' (Rushing 1983: 25), resembling how his

image appears in *The Americans* 1.04 as a framed picture. The French conversation in *Red Oaks* 2.01 demonstrates that Reagan cannot be separated from the cowboy trope and that the American Western myth greatly influences the perception of the President. Hence, cultural and political ideologies feed into Reagan's image and, more broadly, into the idea of nationhood in the USA today.

The meaning of the French-language conversation is communicated to the audience via subtitles but remains inaccessible to David who does not speak French and spends the sequence looking between Claire and Skye with confusion on his face. Notably, Skye can only participate in this conversation because she was able to learn French due to her privileged upbringing and education, and her wealthy Republican father, which puts her claim that she is 'not defending [Reagan]' in conflict with her family history. The audience is included in the debate via the subtitles, regardless of their own knowledge of French, which exacerbates David's position of exclusion as a working-class outsider and reflects his displacement in Paris, as he is much more comfortable in America. Throughout the conversation, David is shown repeatedly glancing left and right between the two ends of the table where Claire and Skye are sitting. This movement reinforces his foreigner status in France as it resembles the ricocheting glances of a person watching a tennis match. David's opinions on Reagan remain unclear, but his subaltern position as a tennis coach at the affluent American country club is confirmed visually as an internalized part of his identity through this allusion to tennis.[48]

Through the back and forth movement of David's gaze and the use of French to discuss American politics, the sequence foreshadows David's narrative arc for season 2 of *Red Oaks*. He is torn between pursuing his dream of a filmmaking career or taking Getty's advice and becoming a stockbroker. By following this advice, he could achieve a status similar to that of the Republican members of the Red Oaks club. His displacement in France echoes that of his life at this time, as his employment and relationship with the club president's daughter have remoulded his identity. A conversation about American national identity remains inaccessible to David, doubling as a complex interrogation of his personal identity, which hovers between access to and exclusion from an exclusive all-American lifestyle. As an employee of Red Oaks,

[48] Comparably, in episode 2.14 of The CW's *Dynasty* (2017-), a reboot of the 1980s programme of the same name, Fallon Carrington (Elizabeth Gillies) and her brother-in-law Sam (Rafael de La Fuente) travel to Paris. Fallon, the heterosexual daughter of a white American billionaire, instructs a taxi driver in French; she then speaks in French to Sam, a gay Venezuelan illegal immigrant, but he does not understand. Like *Red Oaks* 2.01, *Dynasty* connects fluency in French to wealth and whiteness and excludes a person from an underrepresented background. The resemblance between these scenes highlights the centrality of hegemonic social hierarchies to remediations of 1980s heritage. Both scenes illustrate that English monolingualism is no longer considered essential to American identity when knowledge of another language maintains or even perpetuates the class- and race-based status quo.

David's relationship with the club is simultaneously intimate and distant: he regularly sees the club's patrons naked in the changing room, but his sense of belonging is undermined by his inability to share in the club's luxuries. His relationship with Skye and Getty's proposal of a Wall Street internship prompt him towards the imagined national community of Reagan's Republican America. However, his ventures into filmmaking and his socioeconomic background are constant reminders that the Red Oaks community is a microcosm of a privileged class in the USA to which David cannot ever fully belong. The focus on David's inner life in relation to his national identity recalls Monk's (1995: 120) assertion that remediations of heritage prioritise the 'search for the true (inner) self' alongside representations of the national past. Like *The Americans* 1.04 and 5.02, *Red Oaks* 2.01 incorporates a foreign language and English subtitles to interrogate characters' access to the American community under Reagan's administration.

The Americans also evokes Reagan's performance of the cowboy trope during moments of tension between national and personal identity. As its title suggests, the programme centres on the internal conflict of Soviet characters as they lead undercover lives in the USA. More specifically, the programme uses cowboy iconography to explore the themes of nation and identity on multiple occasions. For example, episode 1.01 portrays Philip's feelings towards being Russian or American through the evocation of the cowboy trope. When Philip takes his daughter Paige (Holly Taylor) shoe shopping, he considers buying a pair of cowboy boots. Figure 2.4 shows the contrast that is set up between modern shoes that appear small and insignificant in the background and cowboy boots that dominate the frame, as they also dominate Philip's attention. The consumerist excess of cowboy boots that are available in multiple designs, colours, and materials strongly links the boots to American capitalism. Thus the boots at the store metonymically represent the capitalist system which Philip is meant to fight against as a Soviet spy. As Odd Arne Westad (2017: 4) observes, the main reason for the Cold War and the conflict between the USA and the USSR was the inability to reconcile the two nations' diametrically opposed socioeconomic ideologies, capitalism and communism.



fig. 2.4 Philip browses through cowboy boots



fig. 2.5 Philip's feet are reflected in a gilded mirror when he tries on cowboy boots

During the sequence at the shop, Philip tries on a pair of cowboy boots and performs a short line dance combination to the diegetic country music playing at the store. Full-body long shots of Philip are then intercut with several shots that only show his feet in a gilded shoe-mirror (fig. 2.5). The separation of Philip's feet in the cowboy boots from the rest of this body through the framing of the shoe-mirror reflects Philip's fragmented national and private identity by visually cutting his feet from the rest of his body. In this moment, Philip's feet are performing the American identity that he desires through movement, costume, and mise-en-scène. His desire is apparent as his gaze remains firmly directed at the shoe-mirror throughout.

All close-ups of his feet are of the mirror image alone and never directly of his feet. The frame within frame setup highlights the constructedness of symbols of national identity such as cowboy boots, resembling the programme's focus on framed portraits of Reagan and Stalin (figs. 2.1, 2.2; above). These symbols come into being through performance so that they have to be actively and visually produced in order to represent the American nation. Taking into consideration Harrison's (2009: 10) claim that 'for every object of tangible heritage there is also an intangible heritage that "wraps" around it', these photographs and items of clothing signify America's cultural heritage. The gilding of the mirror's frame in figure 2.5 exacerbates the suggestion that Philip's desire to become an American cowboy is unachievable. The gold is synecdochic of the wealthy white Americans who emblematise the Reagan era, such as the privileged characters in two of the most popular TV programmes of the decade, *Dallas* (CBS, 1979-1991) and *Dynasty* (ABC, 1981-1989). An illegal Russian immigrant like Philip can never belong to this group, whose ideological stance predominantly reflects Reagan's anti-Soviet rhetoric. By foregrounding the gilded mirror image of Philip's cowboy boots, *The Americans* implies that the financial and political capital of ranch-owning, cowboy-hatted Americans, like Reagan himself and the Ewings in *Dallas*, is difficult to access for people from different backgrounds. This recalls David's displacement in relation to the Red Oaks country club and its affluent, Republican members in *Red Oaks* 2.01.

Links between the cowboy trope and the American past are strengthened when Paige, a teen girl, gets embarrassed whilst Philip performs the line dance in the shoe store. When Philip and Paige return home without purchasing the boots, Paige further dismisses Philip's desire for the boots, saying: 'No one wears cowboy boots anymore, dad.' Here, Paige evokes the idea that 'the cowboy belongs to the past' (Frantz and Choate 1968: 69). As a 1980s teenager, she associates cowboys with an outdated aesthetic. In this context, the image of Philip as a cowboy mobilises a collective, reconstructed American past tied to generational and political concerns. In her discussion of the Western myth, Rushing (1983: 22-3) claims that the trope of the cowboy becomes more powerful as it becomes less tangible. This means that the further removed Western imagery is from the American present, the more nostalgic desire it can incite for its specific version of American national identity. Considering Paige's remark about the outdated look of cowboy boots, links between the cowboy trope and Reagan can shed a light on potentially outdated aspects of the President's political vision for the USA, which Troy (2005: 63) describes as 'rooted in an understanding of the American past'. The contemporary production context of *The Americans* allows these connections to enter into a

dialogue with more recent political nostalgias, such as resonances between Reagan's and Trump's campaigns and Trump's cowboy supporters.

Additionally, the diegetic country music playing at the shoe store during *The Americans* 1.01 creates an effect of manufactured nostalgia around Philip and his desire to be a cowboy. Geoff Mann (2008: 76) argues that 'one of country music's most dominant (and stereotypical) tropes [is] nostalgia' for a white American past, expressed through the lyrics and musical traditions of the genre. However, Philip only has access to the fake past of his American alter ego, which he had to memorise when he moved to the USA. His real, Soviet past as a boy named Misha haunts him through frequent flashbacks (such as in episodes 4.01 and 5.11). Thus his fondness of 'nostalgic' country music (Mann 2008: 76) implies that he would prefer to swap his own past for an American, cowboy past. Ironically, the symbolic American past that Philip desires is just as manufactured and fictional as the false documentation and biography of his alter ego.[49] What is revealed here, then, are those tensions between individualism and community that Rushing (1983: 15) identifies in relation to the Western. They manifest in Philip's private struggle for meaning as a KGB spy living in America. Philip's performance of the cowboy persona creates a tension between his desire to own the boots and thus become American, and his loyalty towards the USSR. This is further complicated by the fact that this loyalty requires of him the performance of Americanness, and that part of such a performance could involve displays of affection towards cowboy memorabilia. Hence, Philip's identity runs toe to toe between the USA and the USSR. What is more, the theme of reconstructing an outdated American identity mirrors the reconstruction of a multifaceted historical time period on television. Philip's struggle for his private identity amongst two vastly different national communities reminds of the tension between 'factual history' and 'affective' representations of the past, as suggested by Landsberg (2015: 62, 20).

In *The Americans* and *Red Oaks*, Reagan's America appears as an exclusive community that characters such as David or Philip attempt to join but can never fully belong to. American and Soviet political values are questioned, often through the use of foreign languages and subtitles that simultaneously allow access to the narrative whilst distancing viewers from identifying with the characters. Focus on the American cowboy trope, in particular, reminds viewers of the performativity that is necessary to assimilate into a national

[49] This layering of Philip's multiple national identities also manifests in Matthew Rhys' vocal performance, as he is a Welsh actor. Holliday's (2015: 78) work on the 'accented American' voice in contemporary television drama suggests that Rhys' multi-layered performance as a Welshman playing a Russian agent performing as an American 'brings together actor and character through the notion of a counterfeit vocal performance.' This further contributes to the layered portrayal of national identity in the programme.

community. Below, the comparative analysis of the German-American programme *Deutschland 83* illustrates that 1980s America (as emblematised by Reagan) connotes different ideas of what it is to be American depending on one's national perspective. Comparing *Deutschland 83*'s treatment of Reagan's image and the Cold War to *The Americans* and *Red Oaks* draws attention to the versatility of contemporary perspectives about the 1980s. In its engagement with nationhood and the cultural heritage of the 1980s, *Deutschland 83* incorporates textured audiovisual moments that foreground political figureheads, the English language, and the performative construction of identity in a similar vein to the other two case studies in this chapter.

1980s America From Different National Perspectives

In *The Americans* and *Deutschland 83*, the opening credits frame the narrative intersection between a political and a private sense of national identity. Frames are significant for this chapter's discussion of the reconstructed 1980s both as an analytical unit (the television frame) and as a recurring visual tool used for emphasis, such as the framed pictures of Reagan and Stalin and the mirror image of Philip's cowboy boots. Kathleen Williams (2016: 61) suggests that 'credits not only open up the world of the television show they preface, but they also allow audiences to re-enter the familiar.' Williams argues that in many recent American programmes, such as *Californication* (Showtime, 2007-2014) and *Transparent* (Amazon Video, 2014-2019), opening credits present imagery that nostalgically evokes the past in order to anchor viewers in the narrative. She (Ibid.: 59, 68-69) makes brief reference to the evocation of period settings in the credits of *The Wonder Years* and *Mad Men*, but mostly focuses on programmes that are set in the present. Following Williams' (Ibid.: 61) notion that credits 'allow audiences to re-enter the familiar', the title sequences in *The Americans* and *Deutschland 83* can be read as time machines, repeated at the beginning of every episode to enable re-entry into the familiar but fictional 1980s. Yet, these opening credits do more than simply facilitate contemporary viewers' entry into the past. In light of Marcus' (2004: 26) suggestion that 'the past can be remembered as a collection of intensely personal memories, but more often also contains elements of group or public memories, representations, and actions circulating in broader social circles', television credits also contribute to the portrayal of national identity. To do so, they juxtapose iconic national symbols (what Marcus calls 'public memories') and images of fictional characters ('personal memories'). The short time span and indexical nature of title sequences necessitates the use of images that carry the strongest possible connotations of the

national communities that they represent, so that opening titles provide a microcosm of the stories and themes of the programme they foreshadow.

The opening titles of *The Americans* connect American and Soviet national symbols, locations, and leaders with the programme's protagonists.[50] Images of an astronaut holding an American flag, a Soviet red star, the White House, the Kremlin, Reagan, and a statue of the USSR's first Chairman Vladimir Lenin (1923-1924) appear in a montage of various pictures of the Jennings family (see, for example, figure 2.7). This collection of diverse images alludes to the programme's interrogation of Cold War history through the intersection of the national and private. In so doing, *The Americans* exemplifies Landsberg's (2015: 61) claim that TV programmes set in the past 'make visible the contours of life for everyday people as they were shaped or circumscribed by historical parameters.' In the credits, as in the rest of the narrative, factual history coexists with fictional stories and characters. This is conveyed through an assortment of photographs that flash across the screen for 26 seconds. The fast-paced editing hints at the abundance of media images from the 1980s that are available for recycling in contemporary media. In addition, the credits incorporate language as a symbol of national identity when actors' names appear in Cyrillic letters that are then superimposed with their names in the Latinate alphabet (fig. 2.6). This mirrors the superimposition of American identities onto Soviet ones within the narrative. The visual erasure of the Russian text signals the personal sacrifice that Philip and Elizabeth make when they give up aspects of their national identity (such as foods, music, and language) to perform their adopted identity. The significant difference between Cyrillic and Latinate lettering mirrors the drastic socio-political differences between the Soviet Union and the United States. This is similar to the programme's use of subtitles, examined above, as it simultaneously signals inclusion in and exclusion from the national community.

[50] The show's opening titles have undergone subtle changes over the seasons, mostly regarding the pacing of the images in relation to the music. This chapter refers to the sequence as it appears in season 1, though the images cited below recur in all iterations of the titles.



fig. 2.6 Elizabeth next to Constructivist art in the opening titles of *The Americans*



fig. 2.7 Elizabeth next to the White House in the opening titles of *The Americans*

A more subtle juxtaposition between Cold War history and the programme's fictional narrative also appears in figures 2.6 and 2.7. Figure 2.6 brings together an image modelled on Alexander Rodchenko's (1924) constructivist artwork of Lilya Brik and a passport photo of Elizabeth. Constructivism emerged as an artistic movement that took place during the Russian Revolution and shares its history with the emergence of the USSR (see Borthwick 2009).[51] Rodchenko's artwork, which became one of the most iconic images of the Constructivist movement, establishes a Soviet connection with the Jennings. This allusion to Rodchenko is

[51] For more on Constructivism, see Fer (1989) and Margolin (1984).

a subtle detail that requires a level of cultural capital from the audience.[52] Though the image only appears for a millisecond, it recurs at the beginning of all 75 episodes, making it a prevalent motif signifying the USSR. The juxtaposition of Lilya Brik, who is known to have been connected to the Soviet Intelligence Service (see Romano-Petrova 1984: 15), and Elizabeth reflects her political values and role as a KGB spy. Throughout *The Americans*, Elizabeth's resistance against American values is mirrored through her domestic rejection of Philip's desire for an American lifestyle. For example, she criticizes Philip's desire to 'fit in' by wearing 'an American suit' and insists that 'I remember where I came from' (1.04). The splicing between Elizabeth and Rodchenko's artwork in the opening titles reflects that Elizabeth 'remember[s] where [she] came from'. She only performs an American identity to complete her KGB mission, not because she is interested in an American lifestyle. Thus Rodchenko's artwork forms an entry point into the narrative that carries connotations of Soviet political history. Moreover, in figure 2.7 the drastic splicing between a darker image of Elizabeth and a brightly saturated photo of a mother with two children in front of the White House reinforces Elizabeth's separateness from American identity. The picture of Elizabeth fragments the left edge of the photograph, so that the little girl's arm appears disjointed. This signals that Elizabeth's presence in Washington, D.C., threatens the stability of the political as well as the domestic sphere in the USA.

The credits further hint at the construction and performativity of Elizabeth's American alias by placing her passport photo next to the Constructivist image. As seen in figure 2.6, the placement of Elizabeth's photo aligns with the loudspeaker in Rodchenko's art, implying that she is similarly aligned with the objectives of Constructivism. The Constructivist movement aimed to produce art 'as rationally as any other manufactured object' and focused on 'the physical qualities of the painting: the use of different paints and different textures, and how these related to other elements such as the painting surface' (Borthwick 2009). The importance of the artistic process as something that highlights the anonymity and heterogeneity of manufacturing is inherent in the name and work of Constructivist artists. This reflects the construction of identity that takes place and is questioned in *The Americans*. Elizabeth's identity, signified by her passport photo, has been 'manufactured' (Ibid.) so that she can assimilate into the American community. To expand upon the definition of Constructivism, identity also depends on many 'physical qualities' (Ibid.). These qualities

[52] The image may be familiar to contemporary viewers due to its use for the cover of the 2005 bestselling album *You Could Have It So Much Better* by Franz Ferdinand.

include language, traditions, food, and the 'American suit' (costume) Elizabeth accuses Philip of wanting to embody in episode 1.04. Hence, the Constructivist stylistic borrowings in the opening credits emphasise the extent to which Philip and Elizabeth adopt stereotypical 'physical qualities' to craft their American identity. These credits connect the textures of identity to the themes of the Cold War.

Elizabeth is not the only female character on television during the 2010s who opposes American capitalism and is loyal to the USSR. Lenora Rauch (Maria Schrader), a main character in *Deutschland 83*, is the Cultural Attaché at the East German Diplomatic Mission in Bonn (the West German capital) who also works for the East German Directorate for Reconnaissance. The first episode of *Deutschland 83*, 'Quantum Jump', immediately establishes the role of television for the international dissemination of American capitalist values and Reagan's politics during the 1980s. The episode starts with Reagan's famous 'Evil Empire' speech, which then has a significant effect on the narrative because it incites East German officials, including Lenora, to send a spy into the West German Federal Defence.[53] The speech is heard whilst an expositional image of the East German Diplomatic Mission in Bonn appears; it is played in English and at audible volume, even though its source is later revealed to be a television set inside the building. This suggests that the message of the speech is heard around the world as it crosses not only the boundaries of nations but the boundaries of the diegesis as well. This sonic expansion and the subsequent floating of Reagan's voice without an anchoring image suggests that his political messages, such as the Soviet Union being an 'Evil Empire', are pervasive due to their exposure in international media both during the 1980s and today. Thus the scene highlights 'television's power to shape national events' (Watson 2008: 234) and illustrates the important role of archival media footage for reconstructing the second half of the twentieth century. As this thesis argues, contemporary reimaginations of the 1980s depend on media images from the 1980s that have shaped viewers' memories of the decade. *Deutschland 83* 1.01, therefore, relies on both contemporary and contemporaneous definitions of Reagan as a television president in the 1980s.

The diegesis-crossing position of Reagan's voice in *Deutschland 83* 1.01 resembles the momentary floating of Reagan's image without a diegetic anchor during the close-up on his portrait in *The Americans* 1.04 (fig. 2.1; above). In both instances there is a momentary disjunction between the diegetic world of the televisual past and the present-day viewing

[53] Reagan used the phrase 'Evil Empire' to refer to the USSR in a speech he gave at the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando on 8 March 1983. The speech is also central to episode 3.13 of *The Americans*, discussed in Chapter 5.

position, resulting in the disruption of the 'spatial' and 'temporal' axes of the audience's point of view (Pye 2000: 8-12). Similar to the shot of his portrait, Reagan's voice has no narrative anchor during the first ten seconds of *Deutschland 83* as viewers hear his voice without a connection to the fictional world of the programme. The inclusion of Reagan in such a way in two different contemporary programmes that reconstruct the 1980s suggests that he is considered a powerful signifier of the decade's cultural heritage, as his image transcends the temporal gap between the 1980s and the 2010s.

Whilst *Deutschland 83* features a German cast and German dialogue, there are no subtitles that translate Reagan's English-language speech for a German-speaking audience during the opening scene in episode 1.01. Firstly, the lack of subtitles exacerbates the effect that the speech floats between the past and the present. Subtitles would anchor Reagan's voice to the image simply through the visual presence of the words on the screen. Secondly, untranslated English speech heightens the discord between Lenora's Soviet-inflected East German values and the American values expressed by Reagan. This reflects the narrative, as Reagan's speech condemns the USSR, whilst Lenora supports it. *Deutschland 83* draws on the same connections between language and national identity that are analysed above in relation to the use of Russian in *The Americans* and French in *Red Oaks.* However, since *Deutschland 83* takes place in Germany, it is the English language that is framed as foreign. The programme depicts English as a linguistic intrusion on its narrative, reflecting the negative views that many nations have held about American cultural imperialism, especially the influence of American media.[54] Comparing the use of English and subtitles in *Deutschland 83* to their use in the other programmes examined in this chapter highlights the subjective and performative links between nation, language, and identity.

The 'Evil Empire' speech's pervasive impact is later visually confirmed in *Deutschland 83* 1.01 when the episode cuts to the first internal shot of Lenora's office in sync with the following line: 'The greatest evil is [… conceived] in clear, carpeted, warmed, and well-lighted offices.' As figure 2.8 illustrates, this first interior shot frames Lenora at the centre of a carpeted, well-lit office, not unlike the one described by Reagan. Lenora is facing away from the camera and watching Reagan's speech on television. Her figure blocks the TV set from viewers. This setup mirrors her rejection of Reagan's beliefs: Lenora would prefer to see Reagan's 'trumpeting [of] traditional American values' (Troy 2005: 11) and anti-Soviet

[54] For research on American cultural imperialism, see Bertrand (1987) and Kroes (1999). For discussions specific to the late twentieth century and the Cold War, see Petras (1994) and Wagnleitner (1994).

rhetoric out of the picture. Similar frames are repeated later in the episode when Lenora's body blocks another television set from being seen during a discussion with her colleague Walter (Sylvester Groth). This visual motif implies that, on the one hand, popular media images of the American past such as television footage of Reagan shape people's understanding of the 1980s around the world. On the other hand, the placement of Lenora prompts *Deutschland 83*'s viewers to engage with German history during the 1980s independent of popular historical conceptualisations of this decade.



fig. 2.8 Lenora, a Soviet agent, in a 'clear, carpeted, warmed, and well-lighted office' in West Germany

During her discussion with Walter in episode 1.01, Lenora's statements and behaviour recall the French debate about Reagan in *Red Oaks* 2.01. Both scenes feature characters who are not American and who discuss links between Reagan's acting career and his performance as President of the United States in a language other than English. Thus both scenes engage with the international reception of Reagan's image during and since the 1980s. In particular, Lenora's nervous exchange with Walter highlights her concerns for the safety of the East German national community that she belongs to, on account of American imperialism:

LENORA: He called us the 'Evil Empire'.
WALTER: He's an actor. He's playing it for the applause.
LENORA: It's an open threat, Walter.

Considered alongside this exchange between two East German agents, the inclusion of the 'Evil Empire' speech in *Deutschland 83* foregrounds the one-sided interpretation of national

identity as a binary between 'good' and 'evil' by both Soviet and American authorities. By focusing on an East German spy in West Germany, *Deutschland 83* unsettles this binary similarly to the disruption of homogenous national identities in *The Americans.*

The opening credits of *Deutschland 83* expose the performative construction of national communities even more prominently, because the programme's broadcast in the USA (and UK) and its broadcast in Germany use two different title sequences.[55] Like the credits of *The Americans*, the credits of *Deutschland 83* highlight intersections between the national and the private. They do so, however, whilst remaining explicitly aware of the boundaries of the national and (since 1989) historical East German community. The stark contrast between the two opening credits illustrates how a television programme's target demographic impacts the nuanced reconstruction of a given historical period and national setting. The comparative analysis of *Deutschland 83*'s credits evidences the 'dynamic' elasticity of national identity (Edensor 2002: 69), because each credit sequence's portrayal of the national past, in this case 1980s Germany, is inflected by people's sense of belonging to that community. If opening titles serve as entry points into the fictional past (as per Williams 2016: 61), *Deutschland 83*'s contrasting openings emphasise that audiences can only enter a narrative about the past if they already possess a degree of familiarity with certain cultural specificities. Even though the analysis here focuses on the depiction of the German past, the discussion of the use of Reagan's 'Evil Empire' speech has already illustrated that *Deutschland 83*'s depiction of the 1980s is significantly affected by American history and culture.

Deutschland 83's American and British broadcasts draw attention to the duality within Germany during the Cold War from the perspective of an outsider. Meanwhile, the German broadcast relies on the pervasive impact of conflict between America and the Soviet Union on 1980s German identity. The American/British titles include images of protagonist Martin Rauch's (Jonas Nay) face over a map of Germany, signalling the Cold War era division between East and West through doubling and colour (fig. 2.9). The colours correspond to the German national colours (black, red, gold), but red is used over the Eastern side of the map; thus the colour takes on a similarly doubled function as Martin's face, representing both East and West Germany. The image is a microcosm of the programme's narrative, which depicts Martin's quest as a spy within the divided German nation. Like *The Americans*, the American/British credits of *Deutschland 83* juxtapose national symbols with images of

[55] The programme's opening credits change quite significantly for its second season, titled *Deutschland 86*. They maintain the visual iconography of superimposing characters onto a map but use a map of Africa instead of Germany to relate to the season's plot.

fictional characters, highlighting Marcus' (2004: 26) observation that the past combines public and private memories. This version of the credits positions viewers firmly outside Germany through the bird's eye perspective on the map seen in figure 2.9. Whilst presenting an outsider's point of view, shared by the majority of American and British viewers, these titles simultaneously problematize the idea that a national community can be reduced to one homogenous definition. The doubling of Martin's face combined with the distance from the map symbolises the splitting of Germany by external forces, whilst it also suggests that the inside of different national communities, in this case 1980s Germany, is multifaceted.

The American/British credits feature the English-language recording of Peter Schilling's 1983 upbeat West German hit 'Major Tom'. The song creates a nostalgic hook to appeal to international viewers who may be familiar with this version, rather than the German-language recording, due to its successful American release. The titles begin with the song's refrain which features a countdown ('4, 3, 2, 1 / Earth below us'). This countdown creates a mood of excitement and frames the opening titles as the kind of entry point into the fictional past that Williams (2016: 61) describes. The song choice increases the feeling of distance that is constructed by the bird's eye perspective between US/UK viewers and Germany, as the lyrics 'Earth below us' can be heard when the map appears. These titles, therefore, evoke an adventurous journey into the past, calling on American and British audiences to engage with a history that they are not especially likely to be familiar with. If they are familiar with it, their memories most likely depend on media images from the 1980s, such as the television broadcast of Reagan's 1987 'Berlin Wall' speech in which he urged the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-1991) to end the separation of East and West Germany.



fig. 2.9 Projection of Martin's face onto a map of Cold War-era Germany in *Deutschland 83*'s American opening titles



fig. 2.10 Projection of Reagan onto Martin's body in *Deutschland 83*'s German opening titles

The opening titles used in the German broadcast of *Deutschland 83* have a drastically different approach. They emphasise the psychological effect of the Cold War on individuals by projecting images of international locations and events (including the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, Reagan giving a speech, and nuclear explosions) onto Martin's naked torso, as if onto a blank canvas (fig. 2.10). In contrast to the divided map in the American/British credits, the German titles focus on Martin's, rather than the nation's, psychological fragmentation. This is reflected by the editing and the jump cuts during the projection of world news onto Martin's body. The projections highlight the role of the national for the construction of identity, and

they single out the surface of the body as a space for the performance of identity. However, the German credits do not simply juxtapose the national and the private. The extended focus on Martin's naked torso suggests that public, international events (and memories of these events) have a significant personal and emotional impact that is often neglected in discussions about history and war. For example, figure 2.10 similarly frames an image of Reagan to *The Americans* 1.04 (fig. 2.01; as above); here, it is the human body that creates the frame, implying that ordinary individuals play as significant a role in history as well-known public figures. The contrast between Reagan's aging face and Martin's youthful body strengthens the implication of a discord between Reagan's American values and culture and Martin's East German politics. The presence of Reagan's image on top of Martin's body implies the pervasive imposition of American rhetoric on Germany during the Cold War, the same imposition that Lenora objects to during the 'Evil Empire' sequence in episode 1.01.

Like the American/British credits, the soundscape of the German titles contributes to the construction of a historically specific entry point into the narrative. These titles feature an electronic instrumental section of New Order's 1983 hit 'Blue Monday', sound-mixed with fragments of German news reports from the 1980s. Notably, whilst the American/British credits use an English-language song by a West German artist to pull viewers in the USA and UK into the world of 1980s Germany, the German broadcast features a song by a British band. Together with the visuals of world news, the sonic presence of British music heightens the sense of a foreign presence in Germany that is expressed in these credits. This, then, reflects Germany's real socio-political situation during the 1980s, as a country divided amongst and influenced by foreign powers. Thus the construction of the German credits mirrors the critique of foreign, especially American, cultural imperialism, as expressed in the scenes from the programme examined above. Nevertheless, English is not heard throughout the credits as the music is instrumental. The only audible language is German, reinforcing that these credits serve as an entry point for a German audience. The inclusion of archival news soundbites mixed over each other reinforces the representation of fragmented identity, because it is difficult to understand each individual newscast. This creates an aura of confusion and complicates the tension between the national community (German news) and foreign influence (British music).

The German opening credits are mindful of their place within German discourse on the nation's shared history. Hence, they create a starkly contrasting entry point into the same narrative than the American/British titles. Arguably, Germans who have lived through the division of the country do not look for the type of adventurous, playful nostalgia constructed

in the other opening sequence. An emphasis on the psychological impact of the Cold War upon a German citizen is a more appropriate exploration of the 1980s in a national context where a large segment of the population with memories of the events are still alive.[56] This introspective engagement with the East German past characterises contemporary German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* ('coping with the past'), especially regarding the Stasi, the former East German secret police (see Gallagher 2016; Wicke 2020). Thus *Deutschland 83*'s dark and intimate German credit sequence foregrounds the '*micro-personal*' facets of history (Creeber 2001: 443; emphasis in original). The contrasting bright and '*macro-social*' (Ibid.) aesthetics of the US/UK credits speak to the difference between American, and more broadly Anglocentric, and non-Anglophone perspectives on the 1980s.

As stated in the Introduction, Thompson (2007: 1-6) considers certain parts of the American 1980s, including Reagan's presidency, key components of the retrospective definition of this period, calling it the 'decade culture' that surrounds the 1980s. Recurring focus on Reagan, Western music, and language in *Deutschland 83* evidences the profound impact of this American 'decade culture' on depictions of the 1980s, even in a different national context. Opening titles can create entry points into narratives about the national past, using signposts of the 1980s in different ways in order to portray multiple contemporary perspectives on the decade. In comparison to *The Americans* and *Deutschland 83*, *Red Oaks* does not feature a credit sequence; instead, it includes a superimposition of its title over a freeze frame near the start of each episode. These title screens, discussed below, also facilitate viewers' entry into the fictional 1980s. To consider how *The Americans* and *Red Oaks* engage with the 1980s and Reagan's rhetoric of patriotism, freedom, and self-fulfilment (see Hamilton 2011: 352), it is important to explore their portrayal of national ceremonies and symbols not only in the credits but across a range of episodes.

Belonging to America: Ceremony and the Flag

The depiction of national icons and traditions in *The Americans* and *Red Oaks* foregrounds the role of ritual and repetition for the construction of imagined national communities, and also for long-form television storytelling. The analysis of American and Russian ceremonies in *The Americans* and the celebration of the Fourth of July in *Red Oaks* develops Edensor's (2002: 72) remark that 'the most obvious and recognisable ways in which national identity is

[56] It is worth noting that the programme was well-received in America and the UK (see 'Deutschland 83' 2017) but was a commercial failure in Germany (see Oltermann 2016). As a result, German journalists have stated that the channel RTL 'has wasted lots of opportunities' with *Deutschland 83* (Lückerath 2015; author's translation).

performed are at those national(ist) ceremonies with which we are familiar.' In the programmes examined in this chapter, it is the repeated recycling of familiar historical and cultural images in a contemporary televisual context that connects 1980s America to today.

In the episode 'Darkroom' (*The Americans* 5.10), Philip and Elizabeth get married in a Russian Orthodox wedding ceremony, using their Russian birthnames Mikhail and Nadezhda. The scene highlights intimacy between them as well as a connection between the characters and their Russian heritage. The mise-en-scène and the use of English subtitles, however, create an alienating effect, distancing Philip and Elizabeth from their adopted American identities and the audience. In this episode, Philip and Elizabeth are visibly elated and humbled to participate in the Russian wedding ceremony that they would be familiar with from childhood. This is reflected by the actors' performance, which features subtle smiles and warm gazes at each other and at the Russian priest. The scene is one of few moments in *The Americans* when Philip and Elizabeth hear and speak in their native language. This is a powerful expression of their identity because they are otherwise forbidden to speak Russian in order to protect their American aliases. Thus Russian heightens the sense of familiarity and intimacy between the characters during the wedding. At the same time, the translation of the Russian ceremony with English subtitles has a similar distancing effect to other subtitled sequences throughout the programme (as above). The subtitles allow English-speaking American viewers to understand the content of the ritual, but they do not prompt an emotional attachment to the tradition of Orthodox weddings. Through their physical presence on screen, subtitles undercut immersion into the American national past by constantly reminding viewers of difference between American culture's privileging of English monolingualism (as per Pavlenko 2002: 164) and cultures depicted in languages other than English. The wedding sequence in *The Americans* 5.10 reinforces narrative tension between intimacy and distance, signifying the characters' constant questioning of real and imagined intimacy in their lives (such as their arranged relationship, their sexual trysts with unsuspecting targets, and the lies that they tell their children).

The ritualistic structure of the wedding ceremony foregrounds Philip and Elizabeth's Russian birthnames. As this scene takes place during the programme's fifth season, viewers are more used to the characters being referred to by their American aliases, and they do not usually need subtitles to understand Philip and Elizabeth. This puts the characters' Russian identity into focus. Whilst it is an intimate, happy, and comforting occasion for Philip and Elizabeth, the Orthodox wedding also presents a moment of disruption because the audience cannot share the characters' sense of familiarity and comfort. The setting of the scene at a dark,

abandoned hangar (an impersonal and alienating space) and other components of the ceremony that are unfamiliar to most American viewers, such as crowns placed on the heads of the bride and groom, exacerbate feelings of discomfort for these viewers. The sequence illustrates the important function of ceremonies and rituals for the construction and performance of national identity. Participation in a Russian ceremony gives Philip and Elizabeth a great sense of comfort, because 'expatriate communities frequently recreate familiar stages […] to tether national identity in unfamiliar surroundings' (Edensor 2002: 100). Instead of 'tether[ing]' American audiences, the wedding sequence highlights that a national community's rituals provide limited access to that community for members of another nation. The scene unpicks Philip and Elizabeth's performance of American identity whilst illustrating that people from different national communities have strong emotional bonds to the traditions of their community. The analysis of a Russian tradition in an American television episode demonstrates how unfamiliar rituals can complicate the construction and depiction of American identity.

David McCrone and Gayle McPherson (2009: 1) argue that 'national days are commemorative devices in time and place for reinforcing national identity.' Building on McCrone and Gayle's argument, national days and symbols are key to the reconstruction of the past because, unlike Reagan, they signify American history without being tied to a specific historical period. As is the case with opening credits, ceremonies and symbols are entry points into a familiar narrative and national world. Emphasis on American holidays such as the Fourth of July (otherwise known as Independence Day) and symbols such as the American flag in *Red Oaks* and *The Americans* speaks to the role of national ceremonies for the 'consisten[t]' (Thompson 2007: 5) reconstruction of 1980s America. As, historically, ceremonies and symbols use the same iconography, the self-conscious foregrounding of traditions and patriotic images in contemporary TV programmes bridges the temporal gap between the 1980s and today.

From a contemporary perspective, certain historical periods including the 1980s are reimagined with stronger links to patriotism and nationalism than other eras. For example, Troy (2005: 6) observes that Reagan's legacy in twenty-first century America includes the 'sentimental patriotism that he helped revive, as evidenced by […] our ever-kitschier national celebrations.' In *Red Oaks*, the celebration of the Fourth of July evokes the patriotic sentiments that Troy connects to Reagan's presidency, because the holiday commemorates America's

independence.[57] *Red Oaks* episode 1.05, 'Fourth of July', emphasises the national day's significance to the narrative through the inclusion of a large 'Happy July 4th' banner in several shots (fig. 2.11). As seen in figure 2.11, an employee carries the banner past Getty and David on the front plane of the action, blocking most the frame and the two main characters. The episode subsequently engages with several themes linked to the holiday such as self-fulfilment, community, and patriotism. Significantly, *Red Oaks* returns to these themes in episode 2.05, 'Independence Day', set on the same holiday a year later. Both episodes incorporate an abundance of national symbols and traditions, such as American flags, fireworks, and the national colours (red, white, and blue). The repetition of the holiday highlights its cyclicality in American culture. It allows the programme to portray the impact of national identity on people's private lives, resulting in layered character development over time so that issues raised during the 'Fourth of July' are resolved or complicated in 'Independence Day'. As stated above regarding the gradual development of narrative and audiovisual texture in *The Americans*, long-form television is a 'textured' medium that can layer its representations with each episode (Donaldson 2016: 5). Landsberg (2015: 67) explicitly links this layering to the reconstruction of the past. *Red Oaks* uses the passing of time, an essential element of long-form television narrative, to convey its contemporary perspective on American history.



fig. 2.11 A 'Happy July 4th' banner dominates the frame, blocking the camera's view of David and Getty

[57] Morgan (2016: 10) observes that Reagan had 'a particular reverence for Independence Day, whose celebration he anticipated as eagerly as Christmas.'

The depiction of a second Independence Day in *Red Oaks* 2.05 mobilises the 'themes of rebirth and reorientation' that Troy (2005: 49) associates with Reagan's political rhetoric. Examples of such a 'rebirth' between seasons 1 and 2 include Judy's (Jennifer Grey) sexual awakening – from acknowledging her attraction to a younger woman celebrating with a sparkler (1.05) to her first same-sex kiss (2.05) – and David's romantic progress – from visible boredom whilst watching the fireworks with Karen (Gaga Golightly), his ex-girlfriend (1.05), to happily kissing Skye under the fireworks (2.05). In these moments, Independence Day rituals such as fireworks and sparklers express characters' emotions. Judy's life stagnates and she remains closeted until she sees the woman with the sparkler in episode 1.05, which prompts her to make a change. Like *The Americans* and *Deutschland 83*, *Red Oaks* reconstructs the 1980s as a period that is preoccupied with expressions of national identity and the intersection of public and private desires.

There is a degree of irony in linking the themes of American patriotism and homosexuality in the context of the 1980s in *Red Oaks*. During this decade, the American government marginalised and oppressed the LGBTQ community, especially through the demonization of AIDS as a 'gay disease' (Netzhammer and Shamp 1994: 103). Thus LGBTQ characters may take on a subversive position in narratives that engage with the 1980s.[58] Whilst the inclusion of Judy and other LGBTQ characters in *Red Oaks* could risk becoming tokenistic (as they appear alongside the wealthy heterosexual patrons of the country club), the close analysis of sequences demonstrates that the tone of the programme impacts its engagement with this content. The discussion of LGBTQ characters and race (see below) draws on Pye's (2007) work on film tone and applies it to the analysis of television (as discussed in the Introduction). Pye (Ibid.: 8) links tone to irony and states that tone refers to 'the relationship of a film to its material, its traditions, and its spectator'. The comedic tone of *Red Oaks*, filled with exaggeration and witty visual humour, subverts a potentially one-sided representation of LGBTQ characters as representatives of their entire community. The 'relationship' (Ibid.) between the programme's tone and its engagement with LGBTQ history allows *Red Oaks* to bypass 1980s social issues such as the AIDS crisis. Instead, the programme explores gay characters' place within the American community. Vidal (2012: 103) suggests that some contemporary films and TV programmes foreground a sense of '*presentness'* when they depict the past (emphasis in original). This is achieved through allusions to recent socio-political

[58] See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of LGBTQ sexuality, AIDS, and the reconstructed 1980s.

shifts such as the increasing acceptance of LGBTQ people within American society.[59] *Red Oaks* 1.05 offers positive depictions of several gay characters celebrating the Fourth of July, and it connects the LGBTQ community with the holiday's positive, joyous spirit. This emphasises the '*presentness*' (Ibid.) of the depiction of the 1980s, considering that on television during the 1980s '[h]omosexual characters are rarely shown in their own communities, homes, or same-sex romantic relationships' (Dow 2001: 129-130). On the one hand, a present-day perspective reflects progressive developments in media representations of gay characters. On the other, there is a discord between the gay experience during the 1980s and its depiction in *Red Oaks.* This highlights that centralising LGBTQ stories remains an important issue as the community continues to face challenges in the USA. Contemporary reconstructions of the 1980s present American history in the context of recent events and policies, such as the Trump administration's efforts to legalise anti-gay discrimination in the workplace (see de la Garza 2019), the deadliest mass shooting in American history at a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida on 12 June 2016 (see Ellis et al. 2016), and Vice President Mike Pence's history of homophobia (see Nixon 2019).

The portrayal of Judy's sexual awakening in 1.05 paints her as an emotionally complex but light-hearted character, depicting a gay woman alongside the celebration of America's national holiday with an ironic and self-aware tone. Consequently, Judy is not positioned as a token character who is tasked with representing the entire LGBTQ community in the 1980s. Rather, a playful engagement with Judy's coming out highlights the importance of 'putting back', to borrow Dyer's (1995: 205) phrasing, positive LGBTQ stories into American history. Sparks literally fly whilst Judy gazes at a younger woman who is holding a sparkler to celebrate Independence Day (figs. 2.12-2.13). The obvious visual joke constructs Judy's sexual discovery as sentimental and whimsical. A slow-motion shot-reverse-shot sequence between Judy and the younger woman elongates the sequence. Viewers can therefore observe Jennifer Grey's subtle changes to her facial expression, which indicate her character's gradual discovery of desire (fig. 2.13). Meanwhile, the light from the sparkler creates a golden halo around the young woman's face, symbolising Judy's perspective of the woman's beauty and signalling that this is a gay woman's moment of enlightenment (fig. 2.12). Thus the visual construction of this sequence, set on the Fourth of July, mocks the inanity of homophobic rhetoric during the 1980s (see Thompson 2007: 21), which is still repeated by American politicians today (see de la Garza 2019; Nixon 2019). *Red Oaks* reckons with the contentious

[59] Same-sex marriage became legal in every American state in 2015 (see Liptak 2015).

history of gay life during the 1980s through humour and character development, rather than by explicitly depicting 1980s social issues such as AIDS.



fig. 2.12 A young woman in a bikini celebrates Independence Day with a sparkler



fig. 2.13 Judy gazes at the younger woman, discovering her same-sex desire

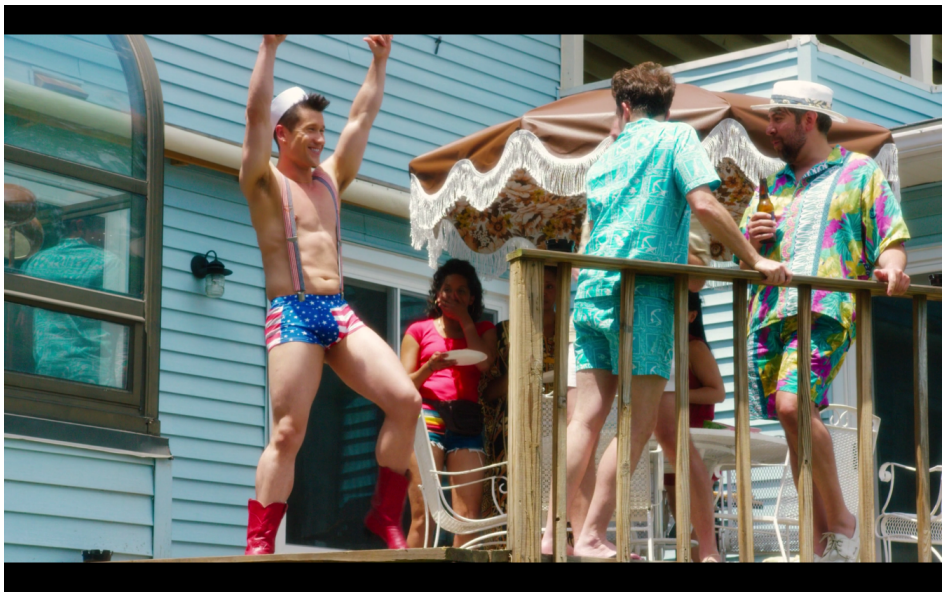


fig. 2.14 A gay man in American flag swimming trunks and cowboy boots celebrates Independence Day

Judy's story exemplifies *Red Oaks*' investment in constructing empathy for the American LGBTQ community today by depicting its members amidst the social and political parameters of the 1980s. Episode 1.05 also features an American flag on the tight bathing suit of a gay man at an Independence Day party (fig. 2.14). By positioning an American flag in such a way, *Red Oaks* offers a reinterpretation of the national symbol to include underrepresented communities within hegemonic definitions of the American nation. Because the flag constructs a sense of unity amidst the American community, its inclusion on the bathing suit of a gay man encourages the acceptance of LGBTQ people into this community. As this example suggests, the programme continually juxtaposes patriotic images to gay characters and constructs a comedic tone for these representations. For example, in figure 2.14, the use of the American flag print on a bathing suit exaggerates the 'kitsch' that Troy (2005: 6) links to Reagan's impact on national holidays. The conflation of national symbols and a young man's semi-naked body resembles the imagery in the German opening titles of *Deutschland 83*. In both instances, the young male body is used as a space to map out political and nationalist imagery. In *Red Oaks* the portrayal of Judy and the gay man amidst Independence Day celebrations results in a multifaceted engagement with American LGBTQ history.

As seen in figure 2.14, the gay man in the flag-patterned bathing suit is also wearing red cowboy boots, further contributing to *Red Oaks*' interrogation of performative American identity. This recalls Philip's fascination with cowboy boots in *The Americans* 1.01. However,

the boots in *Red Oaks* 1.05 destabilise mainstream associations between the cowboy and the American national community, as defined by O'Connor and Rollins (2005). Scholars including Barbara Mennel (2012) and Elyssa Ford (2018) observe that the gay community has longstanding connections with cowboy imagery and costume. Christopher Le Croney and Zoe Trodd (2009: 164-165) connect this 'queer' appropriation of the American cowboy specifically with 'Reagan's cowboy revival' during the 1980s. *Red Oaks* deploys the cowboy trope with an awareness of this gay cowboy tradition.[60] At the same time, the programme is conscious of Reagan's cowboy image and the links between cowboys and the performance of national identity. Awareness of the multi-layered symbolism of the cowboy trope strengthens *Red Oaks*' construction of an alternative American community. The combination of the gay man's cowboy boots and his all-American bathing suit ironically evokes a sense of conformity with American traditions in order to claim space for the LGBTQ community within the nation's imagined community.

The subversive placement of the American flag and the cowboy boots happens at a Fourth of July party away from the programme's central location, the Red Oaks country club. This spatial separation accentuates the contrast between the different communities depicted in the programme. *Red Oaks* presents the country club as a politically charged 1980s space that connotes power, wealth, and hegemonic whiteness (discussed below). This representation resonates with Jessica Holden Sherwood's (2010: 15) argument that country clubs operate within a 'matrix of privilege' imbued by wealth and whiteness.[61] Contemporary debates about patriotism and presidential duty continue to engage with the position of affluent nationalist communities at country clubs. Sherwood (2010: 17) suggests that 'intermingling at […] country clubs helps create a sense of class membership' that reinforces homogeneity and 'class privilege' amongst affluent club patrons. The press has criticised President Trump's frequent trips to the Mar-a-Lago club in Florida and to other golf clubs as unpatriotic, corrupt, and a wasteful use of taxpayer money, including the decision to hold the 2019 G7 Summit at a Trump golf course (see Jones 2019; Cassidy 2019a; Cassidy 2019b). Trump's behaviour resembles the depiction of an exclusive, Republican country club community in *Red Oaks*.

[60] Many popular LGBTQ narratives in the media have relied on the cowboy trope, such as the films *Midnight Cowboy* (dir. John Schlesinger, 1969), *Brokeback Mountain* (dir. Ang Lee, 2006), and *Dallas Buyers Club* (dir. Jean-Marc Vallée, 2014).

[61] Here, Sherwood's phrasing recalls Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) influential black feminist research into the 'matrix of domination' that women of colour experience within white-centric, patriarchal societies. Collins' work is explored in detail in Chapter 3, but it is important to acknowledge that country clubs, as defined by Sherwood, enforce race-, gender-, and class-based exclusion.

His presence at these clubs exhibits the type of 'class privilege' that Sherwood (2010: 15) identifies.

Red Oaks challenges the nationalism and privilege that are typical of country clubs through comedy. The freeze frames that the programme uses instead of opening titles reinforce the hierarchical position of the club and its patrons within the diegesis. As the frames feature the title, the name of the club, superimposed over shots from each episode, the club appears to claim an authoritative position over the narrative. Thus the programme's depiction of the country club shifts the traditional meaning of the word country for countryside to country meaning nation. The comedic tone, however, subverts the 'relationship' (Pye 2007: 8) between *Red Oaks*, the programme, and Red Oaks, the diegetic country club. Edensor (2002: 86) suggests that the 'encoded space[s]' where national ceremonies take place undergo 'strict environmental and aesthetic monitoring [that] produces a landscape abounding with clear visual and sonic cues.' When the country club in *Red Oaks* is decorated for the Fourth of July in episodes 1.05 and 2.05, it becomes such an 'encoded space'. Every inch of the club, and correspondingly the mise-en-scène, is adorned with American flags and red, white, and blue decorations as part of a patriotic performance of location (shown in figures 2.15 and 2.16). Flags are the focus of several narratively unmotivated shots: in figure 2.15, flags are in focus in the foreground of the shot and also in soft focus in the depth. Furthermore, figure 2.16 features three cocktails, each representing a different colour of the flag. The cocktails are surrounded by more flags including a flag umbrella in the red drink and a flag on a mason jar to the right. The jar itself doubles as a flag holder, taking the shot composition's patriotic imagery to the extreme. The self-conscious and exaggerated construction of patriotic mise-en-scène repositions sentiment towards national symbols and holidays from reverence to amusement and absurdity.



fig. 2.15 American flag decorations in focus



fig. 2.16 Red, white, and blue cocktails in focus

Regarding the Republican community in America, David Yanagizawa-Drott and Andreas Madestam (2011) found that there may be a link between positive childhood experiences of celebrating the Fourth of July and voting for the Republican party. Hence, political campaigns can use symbols of national identity, such as the decorations at the Red Oaks club, to engage voters' patriotic sentiment. These campaigns evidence Harrison's (2009: 1) claim that cultural heritage (here, the lasting impact of the Declatation of Independence on definitions of American identity) expresses 'political objectives' in order to create national 'myths of origin'. For example, Reagan's 1984 re-election campaign prominently features the American flag. His famous 'It's morning again in America' television ad reinforces the links

between the President's image and nationalism (see 'Reagan/Bush Re-Election Campaign: Stronger, Prouder, Better' 1984 [AT:29530_030]). The ad claims that 'under the leadership of President Reagan our country is prouder, and stronger, and better' (Ibid.). This claim positions the USA in opposition to an inferior extratextual other ('our country is prouder, and stronger, and better' than it used to be, than other countries). The campaign features people of all ages looking up at an American flag in awe (fig. 2.17) and several shots of men raising the flag. This encourages active participation in the construction of Reagan's national community, such as by voting for him in the 1984 elections. The ad ends with a full-screen image of an American flag (fig. 2.18), foregrounding the message that voting for Reagan is an act of patriotism. The visual construction of the ad, especially the admiring looks of two vaguely racialised brown-skinned boys at the flag in figure 2.17, calls upon outsiders to Reagan's American community to desire a normative American identity and lifestyle.[62]

The construction of desire for entry into the national community is a dominant motif in contemporary television programmes set in the 1980s. *The Americans* and *Red Oaks* represent many characters whose place within Reagan's America is unstable or alternative, at times even contested by Reaganite policies, such as Russians, working-class and LGBTQ characters, and people of colour (discussed below). These connections between patriotic sentiment and political authority continue to shape public discourse in the USA. Trump's 2016 presidential campaign highlighted the political applications of patriotism as it recycled Reagan's slogan 'Make America Great Again' and featured the slogan 'America First'. Trump, therefore, engaged with members of the American community who perceive outsiders as a threat and who identify with national symbols and tropes such as the flag and the cowboy. Fink (2019) reports that when 'Cowboys for Trump' entered Washington, D.C., on horseback, 'one of the participants carried an American flag and several others carried Trump campaign flags.' In addition, Trump's former press secretary Sean Spicer was mocked by the press and on social media for accidentally wearing an American flag pin upside down on the lapel of his jacket on 10 March 2017 (see Bever 2017). This incident supports the chapter's hypothesis that the same iconography has represented patriotic sentiment and political authority across the past and the present in the USA, both in fiction and in reality.

[62] This upward point of view starkly contrasts to the bird's eye perspective on the map of Germany in *Deutschland 83*'s opening titles for its US broadcast, reinforcing how the imagined American community is constructed through an emphasis on difference between insiders and outsiders.



fig. 2.17 Two boys admire the flag in Reagan's 1984 campaign video



fig. 2.18 Close-up of an American flag in Reagan's 1984 campaign video



fig. 2.19 Philip sings 'The Star-Spangled Banner'



fig. 2.20 Close-up of an American flag at Henry's school

In *The Americans*, the Jennings have to perform a respectful attitude towards the American flag on multiple occasions in order to blend into the American community. The shot composition and editing of a sequence from episode 1.01 (figs. 2.19-2.20) echoes the desiring gaze at the American flag that is featured in Reagan's 1984 campaign (figs. 2.17-2.18). The scene cuts from Philip singing the American national anthem, 'The Star-Spangled Banner', at his son's school (fig. 2.19) to a close-up of an American flag that Philip is looking at (fig. 2.20). Close-ups of Philip's serious facial expression foreground his conflicted emotions about his performance of a false national allegiance. This reflects his status as an illegal immigrant

who has to adopt American customs to maintain his cover. The performative desire for and focus on the American flag in both a real 1984 presidential campaign and a fictional 2013 television programme about the 1980s highlights the connections between American history, national identity, and television images (as per Watson 2008).

The Americans' engagement with national identity and patriotism is further complicated through the character of Paige. Paige becomes ambivalent about her place within the American community after she learns about her parents' Russian identity (in *The Americans* 3.10, 'Stingers'). The programme presents her emotional turmoil towards her national identity by linking it to the symbolic reverence of the American flag. In episode 4.01, 'Glanders', Paige is intentionally late to school in order to avoid the morning recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, an expression of loyalty towards the American flag that schoolchildren recite at the start of every day in the USA. During this sequence, the camera starts inside the classroom and moves slowly outward whilst students recite the Pledge. One student yawns during the recital, suggesting that for many young people the Pledge has lost its patriotic value due to its daily repetition. The camera then pans out of the classroom and reveals that Paige is anxiously waiting just behind the doorframe for the Pledge to be over (fig. 2.21). Her distressed facial expression demonstrates that she feels conflicted about partaking in a patriotic American ritual. Paige is stuck on the threshold between American and Russian identity, and in figure 2.21 she remains similarly stuck on the threshold of the classroom, unable to enter or declare an allegiance to either nation. Paige's face dominates the frame whilst the classroom is limited to a small, out of focus strip at the right edge of the screen. This moment constructs an access point into Paige's psyche through Holly Taylor's performance. The classroom remains visually insignificant so that viewers share Paige's feelings of exclusion from her American school community.

The depiction of national celebrations and symbols in *The Americans* and *Red Oaks* suggests that acceptance into the American community relies on a set of politically motivated criteria (resembling the membership criteria at the Red Oaks country club). Although the USA has historically been framed as a nation of immigrants, contemporary programmes illustrate that people perceived as outsiders and as part of sexual or ethnic minorities often need to perform in accordance with hegemonic definitions of national identity to gain access to the American community.



fig. 2.21 Paige is conflicted about the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag

Cultural Assimilation and the White Racial Frame

Whiteness is an important physical characteristic that has been linked to definitions of the imagined American community in both the 1980s and the 2010s. *The Americans* and *Red Oaks* expose whiteness as part of the construction of American identity and illustrate the role of food for assimilation into a white national community. The Jennings' performance of American identity in *The Americans* is contingent upon their whiteness. *Red Oaks* similarly highlights associations between American identity and whiteness, as it portrays socio-political privileges that white Americans enjoy. Engagement with white characters in these programmes does not reinforce racist hierarchies but instead makes visible a discriminatory white racial frame, explored in the Literature Review with reference to Feagin (2010). It is important to examine the construction of whiteness as a racial category in order to destabilise existing hierarchies that have positioned it as part of national identity in the USA. This chapter follows Dyer's (1997: 10) argument that 'the point of looking at whiteness is to dislodge it from its centrality and authority, not to reinstate it.' Feagin (2010: 15) suggests that whites in America have constructed 'lasting' interpretations of society, culture, and values according to a dominant racial frame centred around whiteness. To unpick these interpretations, it is necessary to interrogate the 'centrality and authority' of whiteness (Dyer 1997: 10) in *Red Oaks* and *The Americans*. More than any other race, whiteness has been linked to 'standard American culture' (Chávez and Guido-DiBrito 1999: 39) and white Americans formed Reagan's key voter demographic (see Morgan 2016: 91-2). White identity has intersected with

American national identity and political authority during the 1980s, and the white racial frame of American society continues to impact race relations today, evident in Trump's white voter base (see Pew Research Center 2018) and the Black Lives Matter protests discussed in the Introduction.

Herman Gray (2005: 14) argues that 'race and television were the twin pillars that anchored Ronald Reagan's decade.' Some of the most popular American TV programmes during the 1980s depicted privileged white characters such as the Ewings in *Dallas* and the Carringtons in *Dynasty*. At the time, programmes began to feature more successful and affluent African American characters, such as Dominique Deveraux (Diahann Carroll) in *Dynasty* and Dr Heathcliff Huxtable (Bill Cosby) in *The Cosby Show* (NBC, 1984-1992). On the surface, these characters defied longstanding racist representational practices (see Turner 1994; Harris-Perry 2011). As the work of scholars including Gray (1989), Russell L. Adams (1987), and Lauren R. Tucker (1997) illustrates, however, even these popular characters were framed from a white racial perspective, perpetuating an 'enlightened racism'. That is, they did not challenge white viewers' existing opinions about racial prejudice, resulting in the 'essentialization of black cultural expression' (Tucker 1997).[63] Contemporary media representations of race have improved due to changing attitudes in American society, reflected, for instance, by the 2008 election of Barack Obama, America's first mixed-race president. Nonetheless, links between power and whiteness remain significant. Debates about white racial identity and racism in America became more central to political discourse with Obama's election (see Feagin 2010: vii-viii) and were expanded further in 2016 when Trump became President. Ta-Nehisi Coates (2017) considers Trump's whiteness as an explicitly racialised category and claims that for Trump 'whiteness is neither notional nor symbolic but is the very core of his power.' Due to this evolving political and televisual context, a critical awareness of America's white racial frame is necessary for the analysis of American identity and the remediation of the 1980s.

To unsettle the racial status quo, *Red Oaks* uses the same ironic tone that shapes its depiction of LGBTQ characters and Fourth of July decorations when portraying white, brown, and black characters. This irony is embedded into the programme's premise, as the setting is a country club with Jewish patrons. In her analysis of country clubs and whiteness, Sherwood

[63] Whilst Gray's and Tucker's research concerns the representation of African Americans, their work relates to this chapter's analysis of white privilege and race on American television more broadly. Chapter 3 discusses race and the reconstruction of the 1980s at length, focusing on the historical positionality of white and black women specifically in relation to anti-black racism in America.

(2010: 15, 76) argues that Jewish and ethnic clubs were opened due to 'separatism' and discrimination against different communities in clubs that privileged white Protestant identity. Similarly, Richard J. Moss (2001: 129) remarks that Jewish country clubs in the USA 'were anomalies and thus hard to rank on the social hierarchy.' In this context, to an extent, even characters such as Getty, who loudly expresses Republican views, have a subversive presence within the space of the American country club in *Red Oaks*. These Jewish characters are not racialised in their appearance or costume, and they can access the privileges offered by white identity through white skin. Yet, they have to perform Americanness to counteract their different cultural background and traditions. In *Red Oaks* 1.09, 'The Bar Mitzvah', and 2.04, 'The Bris', the use of indoor and outdoor locations is suggestive of the separation between the Jewish and the American community. Jewish rituals, a Bar Mitzvah and a Bris (circumcision), take place inside the club house, in a smaller, more private environment. By contrast, the Independence Day celebrations in episodes 1.05 and 2.05 happen across the enormous garden of the club. The difference in location reinforces how the expressions of patriotism during the Fourth of July are performed to outwardly present American identity. The separation of Jewish and American ceremonies illustrates that minority rituals are not allowed to infiltrate American cultural norms in order to maintain a hierarchy between mainstream and alternative communities.

By drawing attention to club members' Jewishness, *Red Oaks* frequently highlights that membership in the imagined American community depends upon a narrow set of traits, including whiteness. Several episodes in season 2 interrogate whether a brown-skinned Egyptian Muslim, tennis instructor Nash (Ennis Esmer), can gain access to the club community by converting to Judaism. For example, in episodes 2.04 and 2.05 Nash dates a Jewish club member in order to become a patron and has to consider undergoing a Jewish circumcision ceremony to do so. In 2.04, Nash witnesses the circumcision of a Jewish infant at Red Oaks. The visual construction of this scene resembles the sequence where Judy desires the younger woman in episode 2.05. Both scenes exemplify *Red Oaks*' engagement with social issues concerning marginalised groups through a comedic tone. More specifically, the circumcision scene uses editing, lighting, and the actor's performance to present Nash's dilemma via a farcical tone. When the mohel ('circumciser') takes the scalpel to remove the infant's foreskin, central placement within the mise-en-scène and a dark backdrop draw attention to the blade (fig. 2.22). As the mohel lifts it, bright light reflects off of the scalpel and into the camera. The light blinds viewers for a moment, hinting at the sharpness of the blade and implying danger. Ennis Emer's exaggerated facial expression in response to seeing

the scalpel, such as his raised eyebrows and flared nostrils in figure 2.23, prompts a comedic response. As a result, it appears to be laughable that Nash, a brown immigrant, should have to alter and mutilate his body in order to belong to the white-passing Jewish American community at the club. The absurdity of this idea is heightened by the dramatic focus on the scalpel in figure 2.22, illustrating the discrepancy between Nash becoming Jewish (by cutting away a part of his body) and becoming white (which is impossible). Even if Nash were to join Red Oaks' exclusive member community, his ethnicity would still separate him from Reagan's hegemonically white America.



fig. 2.22 Comedic emphasis on a scalpel used for circumcision



fig. 2.23 Nash's dramatic reaction to witnessing a circumcision

In *Red Oaks*, white Jewish characters like Getty perform American national identity to assert the sense of authority that is associated with Reagan's supporters. As the quote in the epigraph to this chapter illustrates, when Getty is presented with a tray of kebabs on the Fourth of July he demands, 'some burgers, some hot dogs, potato salad, come on – things Reagan would eat!' (1.05). Getty's statement implies that the President's preference of a food strengthens its perceived Americanness. As Jesse Rhodes (2011) remarks, the hamburger 'is a part of our [American] national identity.' By insisting on having American food that 'Reagan would eat' during the Fourth of July, Getty invokes the President's iconic image in relation to all aspects of American identity during the 1980s. This shows that Getty is conscious of the performance and construction that is necessary for him and his Jewish country club to belong to the American community. Moreover, the waiter carrying the tray of kebabs is an African American member of staff at Red Oaks (fig. 2.24). The connection between an African American character and the kebabs, which Getty implies are un-American, draws attention to racial hierarchies in the USA. Getty's rejection of the kebabs also functions as a rejection of otherness, which in this case includes the African American waiter. The focus on the waiter's jaded facial expression as he listens to Getty's complaint speaks to *Red Oaks*' self-aware tone (fig. 2.24). Whilst Getty tries to assert the 'centrality and authority' of his whiteness (Dyer 1997: 10) by commenting on the inappropriateness of the food, the waiter's presence and performance highlight that the programme does not reinforce a 'supposed white superiority in knowledge, markets, technology and political institutions' (Feagin 2010: 147). Instead, it exposes the mechanisms of the white racial frame through the decision to have a black waiter carry the kebabs. This recalls Creeber's (2001: 447) analysis of *Roots*: like *Roots*, the portrayal of black and brown characters in *Red Oaks* 'implicitly reveal[s] the relativity of "otherness" and the subjectivity of racism.' Thus *Red Oaks* foregrounds the '*presentness*' (Vidal 2012: 103) of its engagement with nation, race, and the 1980s.



fig. 2.24 A jaded African American waiter carrying kebabs listens to Getty's description of 'things Reagan would eat'

Like the Jewish patrons of Red Oaks, white Russians in *The Americans* are able to infiltrate middle-class, suburban communities because they are white and therefore able to perform hegemonic 1980s American identity. John Lewis Gaddis (2005: 5) notes that even the Russian and American armies struggled to tell each other apart because of their whiteness; an American soldier observed that if 'you put an American uniform on [the Russians], they could have been American.' When Philip wears cowboy boots in episode 1.01 he engages with a Western iconography that is 'a reflection of white America' (Coyne 2008: 5).[64] He dances to country music that, as Mann argues (2008: 74), 'sounds white'. His ability to look the part of an American citizen and a cowboy depends on his whiteness. Similarly, during the Pledge of Allegiance in episode 4.01, Paige's ambivalence about her national identity reflects the positionality of children of immigrants who negotiate diverse, often multiracial identities (see Haller and Landolt 2005). However, Paige fits into Reagan's America physically, due to her whiteness. Because the members of the Jennings family can pass as white, their Americanness is not questioned by other white characters such as Stan. Thus they can infiltrate American society whilst working for the USSR. Gayle Wald's (2000: 2-4) study of racial passing in twentieth-century popular culture begins by analysing a *Saturday Night Live* (NBC, 1975-) comedy sketch from 1984, titled 'White Like Me', in which African American comedian Eddie Murphy goes undercover as Mr. White, a character in whiteface (*SNL* 10.09). Gayle

[64] See Schlatter (2006) for a discussion of links between cowboy iconography and white supremacy.

(Ibid.: 3) observes how this sketch illustrates that 'whiteness is symbolised by an array of seemingly embodied signs', including skin colour, vocal inflection, and financial security. Gayle's reading of 'White Like Me' demonstrates that passing as white was understood as advantageous during the 1980s. This continues to be the case. A recent increase in media engagement with racial passing is evidenced, for example, by the upcoming release of the American feature film *Passing* (dir. Rebecca Hall, 2021). The Jennings' ability to pass as white whilst spying for the KGB underscores the (racial, social, and economic) instability of Reagan's America and its cultural heritage today.

The Americans emphasises Elizabeth's whiteness because her only significant relationships besides Philip are with characters of colour. For example, she has an affair with African American civil rights activist Gregory Thomas (Derek Luke) in season 1 and befriends Korean immigrant Young-Hee Seong (Ruthie Ann Miles) in season 4. These relationships constantly remind the audience that Elizabeth is an outsider in 1980s America. Her affair with Gregory develops because he supports the communist cause and helps Elizabeth to gather intelligence. Gregory represents an outcast amidst the Reagan administration's prejudicial and critical attitude towards African Americans (see Troy 2005: 90-98; Morgan 2016: 91-4), especially as his engagement with communist ideas distances him from the American community. This is in stark contrast to Elizabeth whose whiteness enables her to live and spy unnoticed in America on behalf of the USSR. Their relationship exposes the privileges that white Americans enjoy. The programme highlights the role of race in their affair when a flashback reveals that Elizabeth had an abortion after falling pregnant with Gregory's child (6.10). Her decision here is undoubtedly influenced by the racial complications that keeping Gregory's mixed-race child would entail.

Elizabeth's friendship with Young-Hee draws attention to the sacrifices Elizabeth has had to make to maintain her American alias. Young-Hee represents an immigrant who is able to embrace her cultural heritage and her national identity in ways that Elizabeth cannot. She cooks Korean food, speaks Korean with her family at home, and speaks English with a Korean accent. This is in contrast to Elizabeth's total eradication of the Russian language and accent. Throughout her friendship with Young-Hee, Elizabeth learns to prepare a traditional Korean dish and makes it for her own family (4.06). Cooking allows her to express her otherness including her Russian heritage by proxy. Marta Rabikowska (2010: 378) argues that 'food making and food consumption projects the concept of "home", understood as a state of normalcy to be regained in face of the destabilized conditions of life on emigration.' In episode 4.06, 'The Rat', Elizabeth attempts to recreate 'a state of normalcy' by making and consuming

Korean food. However, Elizabeth's difference to Young-Hee, both cultural and racial, means that it is impossible for her to fully express her immigrant identity through Korean food. Arguably, her attempt to substitute Russian food with Korean heightens the distance that she feels from her own country. As Allyson Hobbs (2014: 18) argues, 'the core issue of passing is not becoming what you pass for, but losing what you pass away from.' Korean food serves as a reminder of Elizabeth's white otherness in the USA and her perpetual suppression of and distance from her authentic cultural identity.

Several other instances in *The Americans* connect food with national identity. The programme uses American, Russian, and Asian foods (such as Young-Hee's Korean dish) to demonstrate how national identity is, in Edensor's (2002: 69) terms, 'enacted and reproduced' through performance. In episode 5.02 Morozov proclaims how much he enjoys American food as a way to dismiss his Russian identity during dinner with Elizabeth and Philip (as above). Morozov's statement mirrors Getty's performative insistence on eating American food during the Fourth of July to strengthen his connection with Reagan's America in *Red Oaks* 1.05. The performative production of national food is further emphasised in *The Americans* 6.03, 'Urban Transport Planning', when Elizabeth and another Soviet spy, Claudia (Margot Martindale), teach Paige how to cook zharkoye, a traditional Russian stew. In season 6, *The Americans* jumps forward in time to 1987, a period leading up to the end of the Cold War and a time when relations between the USA and USSR were improving (see Lebow and Stein 2004; Haas 2007). This gradual release of socio-political tension is reflected in characters' behaviour. Rabikowska (2010: 378) suggests that 'food consumption and the ways of its preparation manifest the relationship with home and nation'. In the context of 1987, Elizabeth's relationship with her national identity can finally be expressed through cooking Russian food. As she prepares the zharkoye with her daughter, their mutual enjoyment is evident in Elizabeth's warm smile and Paige's relaxed expression (fig. 2.25). The communal preparation of the food reflects that it is an expression of the characters' imagined Russian community whilst they are living in America.

Characters' enjoyment of Russian food reveals the white racial frame that envelops them, in spite of their immigrant status. Paige's participation in the making of zharkoye in 6.03 contrasts to her cautious and mistrustful reaction to the Korean dish that Elizabeth prepares in 4.06. Paige's preference of Russian food evidences how Korean culture is perceived as foreign and different due to the racial divide between white Russian and East Asian immigrants. In addition, when Elizabeth takes the zharkoye home for Philip, he is too full to eat more than a bite, having already eaten Chinese takeaway food. As he approaches

Elizabeth to try the zharkoye, several empty cardboard food containers remain visible behind him (fig. 2.26). The containers are positioned in the centre of the shot, and the stark contrast between the navy background and the white boxes draws attention to them. The mise-en-scène, therefore, sets up a contrast between homemade Russian food and takeaway Chinese food. According to Feagin (2010: 15), the white racial frame structures American society 'by providing important racialized understandings, images, narratives, emotions, and operational norms.' The setup of the Chinese takeaway containers in figure 2.26, like Paige's dismissal of Elizabeth's Korean cooking, constructs tension between white immigrant food and 'racialized understandings' of Asian food. In this scene, Chinese food is contrasted to Russian food in two ways. Firstly, it is depicted as foreign, not only from the perspective of the white Russian characters, but also from a contemporary white American perspective. During Trump's visit to China in 2017, chefs aimed to 'keep [the food] simple and keep it familiar' to please the President (Huang 2017). This demonstrates the ongoing white racial framing of different foods within political contexts. Secondly, Chinese food has been enjoyed by some American Presidents and turned into a capitalist product in the USA. The takeaway containers in figure 2.26 connote the commercial exploitation of Chinese cuisine.[65] This moment stretches the meaning of American cuisine from 'burgers, […] hot dogs, [and] potato salad', as identified by Getty in *Red Oaks* 1.05, to include foods that have become synonymous with American lifestyles. Whilst Getty believes that Reagan would only eat the foods listed above, the President actually had a diverse and versatile diet (see Hickey 2019). In his memoir, Reagan recounts that he 'practiced using chopsticks and consulted with [former President] Richard Nixon about Chinese food' in advance of a visit to China (qtd. in Schaller 2015: 412). Engagement with the 1980s through the depiction of food production and consumption illustrates how both *Red Oaks* and *The Americans* 'reconstruct the lived contours of a particular historical moment' (Landsberg 2015: 61-62) by focusing on the everyday lives of people amidst America's white racial frame.

[65] This exploitation is especially pronounced because China is a communist country.



fig. 2.25 Paige, Claudia, and Elizabeth cook Russian food together



fig. 2.26 Chinese takeaway boxes remain visible in the background when Philip tries homemade Russian food

The Americans and *Red Oaks* expose whiteness as a racialised category that has historically dominated American society; a category that is linked to the definition of American national identity by those in power. Spaces and interpersonal relationships, such as the Jewish country club and Elizabeth's romance with Gregory, highlight that national identity is 'dynamic' (Edensor 2002: 69) in an ethnic sense. They illustrate how both Reagan's and Trump's presidencies reaffirm the perceived whiteness of America. Indeed, Trump's whiteness has been framed as part of the reason for his election; Coates (2017) refers to Trump as America's 'first white president'. Hence, Trump's presidency can be read as a reaction

against the supposed threat that Obama's presidency posed to America's historical racial status quo (as seen from a white supremacist perspective). By foregrounding racial passing, immigration, and the role of food for the creation of national communities, *Red Oaks* and *The Americans* explore the changing and elastic definitions of what Trump's Presidential Inaugural Committee Chair Tom Barrack refers to as 'typically and traditionally American' (qtd. in Diaz 2017).

Conclusion: National Identity as Heritage

The Americans, Red Oaks, and *Deutschland 83* highlight that the retrospective 'consistency' (Thompson 2007: 5) of 1980s America can only be established through a focus on issues surrounding national identity. Programmes use images of Reagan, the cowboy trope, language and English subtitles, national symbols like the American flag, celebrations and rituals, the LGBTQ community, whiteness, and food to portray the imagined American community of the recent past from a contemporary perspective. Mise-en-scène, performance, and language depict past and present national communities as heterogeneous. This prompts an investigation into whose definitions of the American national community are accepted as 'consisten[t]' (Thompson 2007: 5), and by whom. This, in turn, suggests that any definition of national identity – whether it is Reagan's, the gay community's, or immigrants' – is subjective and constructed alongside a set of politically motivated criteria.

From a present-day perspective, the cultural heritage of the 1980s is inflected by Reagan's impact on the decade. Contemporary media depictions of the 1980s engage with this heritage critically. Anderson's (2006 [1983]) work on imagined communities and Edensor's (2002) arguments about the elastic performance of national identity support this chapter's analysis of characters such as Philip, Elizabeth, Paige, Gregory, David, Getty, Judy, and Nash, all of whom experience an identity that is (at least partially) incongruous with Reagan's definition of America. Troy (2005: 6) contends that 'for better or worse, we live in a Reaganized America.' In response to the thesis' first research question, this chapter argues that the USA has become even more 'Reaganized' in the time between Troy's 2005 study and the election of Trump in 2016, due to the revival of Reagan's socio-political ideals. As a result of these socio-political developments, it is ever more critical to examine how 1980s definitions of national identity continue to impact an understanding of American heritage today. The chapter engages with the second research question by illustrating how television programmes that reconstruct the 1980s during the 2010s challenge and subvert established social hierarchies pertaining to national identity. Regarding the third research question, the layered

texture of long-form television narratives (as per Donaldson 2016: 5-6) is conducive to presenting multifaceted attitudes towards nationality, sexuality, and race throughout American history.

The final section of this chapter focused on the ways in which whiteness is exposed as a racialised category in two of the TV programmes examined throughout the thesis. Whilst whiteness is constructed as a component of American identity, it cannot be inherently equated to this national identity. Following Dyer's (1997) critical perspective, this chapter intended to dislodge whiteness from its position as a normative American race. Racist attitudes were pronounced during the Reagan era and remain a key issue today. Therefore, the next chapter develops the thesis' analysis of the 1980s' cultural heritage by discussing white and black women in two further case studies (*The Carrie Diaries* and *Glow*) and unpicking the impact of 1980s feminism on shifting definitions of the feminist movement throughout the 2010s.

CHAPTER 3

Material Girls: Feminism and Race in Contemporary Depictions of 1980s America

> 'It's not racist if the black girls came up with the idea, right?'
>
> *Glow* 1.07

The Women's March on Washington, D.C., that took place on 21 January 2017, just one day after President Trump's inauguration, was hailed as 'a tremendous success' and 'a unified pushback against the Trump [administration]' (Starling 2017). It raised awareness of the ongoing need for feminist activism in twenty-first century America. However, the Women's March was also criticised for its failure to comprehensively address issues faced by women of colour (see Tolentino 2017; Bates 2017). In an attempt to call attention to imbalances of power within the feminist movement in America, one of the organizers of the Women's March, Bob Bland, called upon white women to 'understand their privilege, and acknowledge the struggle that women of color face' (qtd. in Tolentino 2017). Thus the discussion surrounding the Women's March 2017, driven by the election of a white male president, highlights Western feminism's persistent failure to address issues of race. This chapter draws on Bland's observation in its analysis of the privileged positioning of white women in coming-of-age comedy-drama *The Carrie Diaries* (The CW, 2012-2014), hereafter *TCD*, and female ensemble comedy-drama *Glow* (Netflix, 2017-). The chapter explores how these programmes engage with the struggles that some women of colour face by examining the portrayal of black women amidst the reconstructed setting of the 1980s.

TCD and *Glow* both draw on existing television source texts. *TCD* is a prequel to the HBO programme *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), hereafter *SATC*, and *Glow* is inspired by the 1980s wrestling show *Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling* (syndication, 1984-1989). The programmes' retrospective setting in the 1980s prompts an interrogation of the reconstructed American past alongside shifting iterations of feminism over the last forty years. As noted in the previous chapters, 'multiple 1980s' exist in popular memory and are reflected in televisual reconstructions of the decade. This chapter shows that an engagement with feminism offers a way to reconstruct a 'consisten[t]' memory of the 1980s (Thompson 2007: 5), alongside signposts such as Ronald Reagan (as outlined in Chapter 2). Drawing on postfeminist, black feminist, and contemporary emergent feminist contexts, this chapter explores: how ever-changing perspectives on feminism inform contemporary televisual reconstructions of the 1980s; how TV programmes negotiate the audiovisual reconstruction of the 1980s in relation

to their approaches to gender and race; and how the racialised portrayal of white and black women reflects the cultural relevance of the 1980s in America today. Responding to the thesis' first and second research questions, the chapter argues that contemporary debates about feminism, including the contentious issues surrounding white women's privilege, resonate with some of the numerous feminist debates from the 1980s (see Whelehan 1995: 135-140). Hence, feminism is a defining element of the retrospective conceptualisation of the 1980s' cultural heritage. Various, at times oppositional, feminist movements gained momentum throughout the decade, and the impact of these movements has led to an array of contemporary interpretations of the 1980s' role in women's history. Concerning the third research question, this chapter expands upon Moya Luckett's (2017: 16) research into the 'historiographic' function of television period dramas such as *Mad Men*, *The Hour* (BBC, 2011-2012), and *Call the Midwife* (BBC, 2012-) by reading *TCD* and *Glow* according to Luckett's claim that period programmes can 'chronicle and archive' women's lives, frequently 'unveiling a secret or hidden past.' *TCD* and *Glow* convey two distinct versions of women's lives during the 1980s, as each programme is markedly inflected by the specific and rapidly changing cultural and televisual contexts of the early 2010s (*TCD*) and the late 2010s (*Glow*).

Contemporary TV programmes use the 1980s as a historical period through which to explore persistent conflict pertaining to white and black women's lives in America. *Glow* and, to a lesser extent, *TCD* feature women of many races such as Asian Americans and Latinas, including Mouse (Ellen Wong) and Donna (Chloe Bridges) in *TCD* and Jenny (Ellen Wong) and Yolanda (Shakira Barrera) in *Glow*. The chapter's focus on white privilege, racial segregation, and the stereotyping of black women draws attention to parallels between the hierarchical position of white people in 1980s America through the Reagan administration's contentious relationship with the African American community and the rise of Black Lives Matter protests during the Trump era. Following Dyer's (1997: 10) suggestion that an analysis of whiteness destabilises its hegemonic position in Western society, this chapter examines the representation of white women in *TCD* and *Glow*, expanding upon Chapter 2's discussion of whiteness as a signpost of hegemonic 1980s American identity. Parallels are foregrounded through the comparative close textual analysis of two programmes: one made in the early 2010s (*TCD*) and the other made in the late 2010s (*Glow*). *TCD* follows the postfeminist and post-racial representational practices of the Obama era, whereas *Glow* exemplifies the growing media interest in portraying women's lives in light of feminist activism.

Considering the focus on female bodies across several contemporary programmes set in the 1980s – *TCD* and *GLOW* in this chapter, as well as *The Americans, Halt and Catch Fire,*

and the episode 'San Junipero' from *Black Mirror* (3.04), explored in Chapter 4 – it is important to examine the special relationship between women, feminism, the 1980s, and contemporary American culture. Vidal (2012b: 24; see Literature Review) suggests that heritage films and television programmes have 'a special critical relationship with women and feminine culture that revolves around identity, taste and consumption.' This chapter focuses on the shaping of the female body according to white American beauty standards and related 'hierarchies of privilege' between white and black women (Whelehan 1995: 136). To discuss *TCD*'s and *Glow*'s engagement with these 'hierarchies of privilege', the analysis below draws on Jessalynn Keller and Maureen R. Ryan's (2018) study of contemporary 'emergent feminisms', Rosalind Gill's (2007, 2016) research into postfeminist media culture, Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) and bell hooks' (1992) foundational theories of black feminism, and Jess Butler's (2013) work on black women in postfeminist media. This theoretical framework underpins the reading of both the 1980s and the 2010s as decades when divergent feminist movements proliferated in the USA.[66] In order to unpick shifts in feminist thinking between the 1980s and today, the discussion about the aestheticization of white and black female bodies in *TCD* and *Glow* is framed by an analysis of relevant feminist concepts such as neoliberal postfeminist consumer culture and emergent popular feminisms.

As the title to the chapter suggests, changing perspectives on the materiality of the female body reflect changing feminist concerns. Here, the body is read as a site which signposts racial, national, consumerist, and political materialities.[67] Merri Lisa Johnson (2007: 16) argues that it is important for new scholarship on feminism and TV to 'counter the trend' of only reading programmes for the purpose of 'catching patriarchy at its old tricks.' The aim of the analysis below, therefore, is not to qualitatively evaluate programmes' engagement with a fixed understanding of feminism, but to analyse how different historical iterations of feminism permeate and affect representations of America's past. Any scholarly discussion of feminist debates must take into consideration the complexity and slippage when defining feminist terms. E. Ann Kaplan (2003: 47) contextualises feminism as follows:

[66] To engage more comprehensively with developments in post-1980s feminist criticism and television, the chapter also develops work by Crenshaw (1989, 1991, 2015) on intersectional feminism, Whelahan (1995) on the history of feminist debates in the 1980s, Dow (1996) on Second Wave feminism and postfeminism in 1980s television, McRobbie (2004, 2009) on postfeminist media, and Joseph (2009) on black postfeminism.
[67] Below, the chapter discusses the use of Madonna's 1984 song 'Material Girl' in *TCD* in relation to these themes.

> That there is no monolithic feminism is a good, if at times uncomfortable, fact: positions, actions and knowledge – constantly being contested, questioned, and debated – mean that feminism is alive and well, and always changing in accord with larger social, historical and political changes in whatever nation or part of a society women live in.

In light of Kaplan's remark, a range of feminist scholarship is needed to unpick the 'contested, questioned, and debated' iterations of feminism from the 1980s to today. As the activism of 1970s Second Wave feminists lulled and a much-debated conservative backlash against feminism started (see Faludi 1991), Whelehan (1995: 126-127) observes that the 1980s was characterized by feminist 'anxiety' and 'crisis'.[68] When considering race, in the 1980s there was growing awareness of the feminist prioritisation of white women's needs and their denigration of racism to 'black women's problem' (Ibid.: 135). Debates about intersectional feminism, a term coined by Crenshaw (1989), entered the mainstream, focusing on multi-layered social hierarchies and systems of power that disadvantage women of colour, especially black women, via a 'matrix of domination' (Collins 2000: 276). Many media scholars have since offered comprehensive analyses of women of colour throughout American television history (see, for example, Turner 1994 and Harris-Perry 2011). To contribute to this research, the chapter uses close analysis to show how *TCD* and *Glow* speak to the persistent imbalance of power between white and black women throughout American history.

Widespread beliefs that women's equality had been achieved in the 1970s and that feminism was no longer necessary led to the postfeminist cultural atmosphere which emerged in the 1980s (see McRobbie 2004: 255).[69] Bonnie Dow (1996: 86-202) focuses on 1980s TV programmes with white female leads such as *Designing Women* (CBS, 1986-1993) and *Murphy Brown* (CBS, 1988-1998; 2018-) to unpick the birth of postfeminism on 1980s television. As definitions of the term vary considerably, this chapter refers to Gill's (2007: 149) claim that postfeminism incorporates the following features:

> the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance; monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of the makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of a natural sexual difference; a marked sexualization of culture; and an emphasis on consumerism and the commodification of difference.

[68] Betty Friedan, author of the seminal Second Wave text *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), explicitly identifies the backlash against feminism as 'the backlash of the Reagan Years' in a 1988 interview with US broadcaster PBS ('Macneil/Lehrer Newshour' 1988 [T:18228]).

[69] For detailed explorations of postfeminist media culture, see Brunsdon (2005), Negra and Tasker (2007), and Moseley and Read (2002).

Since the 1980s, numerous American films and TV programmes have reflected this postfeminist attitude in their depiction of white women with 'continuing inequalities and exclusions that relate to "race"' (Ibid.) remaining evident.[70] Though relatively scarce, scholarly interventions into the privileging of white female subjects within postfeminist thought (see Butler 2013; Joseph 2009) are important to this chapter's reading of black characters. Recent developments in feminist theory problematise readings of the contemporary media landscape as being strictly postfeminist and therefore viewing culture through a white lens. Keller and Ryan (2018: 2) propose 'increasingly visible' emergent feminisms in 2010s popular culture which require 'an expanded theoretical lens that can offer an insight into a media culture that has changed dramatically over the past decade.' They (Ibid.: 1) cite African American singer Beyoncé's performance at the 2014 MTV Video Music Awards as an early example of such emergent feminisms. By using Beyoncé as their first example, Keller and Ryan link recent incarnations of feminism to a more comprehensive engagement with race from the outset. They (Ibid.: 6-14) argue that political, economic, and technological shifts in American society have changed feminist modalities and resulted in the resurgence of feminist activism. Responding to Keller and Ryan's ideas, Gill (2016: 612) has stressed the 'continued relevance of postfeminism as an analytical category' amidst emergent popular feminisms in the 2010s. In fact, the stylised reconstruction of the 1980s in *TCD*, a programme released before 2014, exhibits a postfeminist attitude towards women and race, recalling Vidal's (2012a: 29) claim that period dramas' self-conscious stylisation articulates an attitude towards the past. Meanwhile, through its satirical tone, *Glow* challenges several postfeminist representational practices, evidencing the shifts in feminist and anti-racist activism since 2017. The self-reflexive presentation of the 1980s contributes to both programmes' specific critical project regarding women and race in America. Thus in its analysis of feminist politics below, this chapter develops the thesis' argument that the intentional aestheticization of television images conveys the political perspective of 2010s TV programmes that depict the 1980s.

In order to understand how contemporary television engages with the cultural heritage of the 1980s alongside growing awareness about social divisions in America today, it is important to synthesise debates about feminism and race with the scholarship on heritage and period drama explored in the Literature Review. *TCD*'s and *Glow*'s detailed visual engagement with women's appearance and racial stereotype mirrors period dramas' stylistic

[70] For example, *SATC*, *Ally McBeal* (Fox, 1997-2002), *Legally Blonde* (dir. Robert Luketic, 2001), and *The Devil Wears Prada* (dir. David Frankel, 2006) are emblematic of 1990s/2000s postfeminist media culture.

preoccupation with 'the fragment and the detail', as theorised by Vidal (2012: 11). Pidduck (2004) and Cook (2006) argue that stylised costumes are central to period drama, reflecting both the historical setting and characters' inner lives and mood. Pidduck (2004: 5) adds that period dramas' iconography favours 'intimate contained spaces'. Costumes and 'contained spaces' are analysed as essential to *TCD*'s and *Glow*'s pastness and as elements of the mise-en-scène that attest to these programmes' attitudes towards the racial representation of women. Thus the chapter contributes to the thesis's concern with identity politics as it connects the political (feminism) with the personal (costume), epitomised in the line, 'It's 1984. Ronald Reagan and shoulder pads were all the rage', from *TCD* episode 1.02, 'Lie With Me' (see epigraph to the Introduction).

The chapter begins with a discussion on the impact of source texts on *TCD*'s and *Glow*'s feminist concerns, reflected in each programme's opening credits. For the most part, *TCD* follows *SATC*'s postfeminist privileging of neoliberal white consumerism, whilst *Glow* expands the stereotyped representational practices of *Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling* through an emergent feminist lens. The chapter then analyses how white individualism is expressed in *TCD* through stylistic links to the 1980s, whereas *Glow* uses 1980s signposts to frame postfeminism as performative and highlight the hierarchical racial position of whiteness in America. Black women's fight against systemic racism is explored in relation to *Glow*'s self-reflexive, satirical tone. *Glow* draws attention to black women's ongoing struggle against white supremacy when it depicts the shaping of black bodies through racist 1980s stereotypes. Lastly, the chapter considers the portrayal of black women within postfeminist contexts through the analysis of a black British character in *TCD*, Larissa (Freema Agyeman), whose behaviour is a counterpoint to that of the white protagonist. The comparative analysis of *TCD* and *Glow* draws attention to the ways in which, as Harrison (2009: 1) states, 'heritage is *not* about truth or authenticity but about deliverable political objectives' (emphasis in original; see Literature Review). The programmes' drastically different framing of white and black women within the reconstructed 1980s speaks to the changing 'political objectives' of feminist movements between the beginning and the end of the 2010s. This is not to suggest that these programmes work in opposition to each other, rather, to highlight the complex feminist ideologies at play. When analysed alongside each other, these programmes' depiction of the 1980s reinforces Vidal's (2012b: 18) notion that the meaning of the terms 'present' and 'past' continuously shifts because 'contemporary identities evolve in connection with a changing sense of historicity'.

Feminist Temporalities and the Reconstructed 1980s

As *TCD* and *Glow* both allude to their source texts, historical shifts in feminist thought inflect the programmes. The opening titles reveal each programme's feminist perspective by presenting a postfeminist (*TCD*) or emergent feminist perspective (*Glow*). Debates about postfeminism and emergent feminisms between Gill (2016) and Keller and Ryan (2018) evidence how feminist attitudes in America shifted during the 2010s. Broadcast from 2012 to 2014, *TCD*'s white-centric postfeminist framework aligns with its source text *SATC* which has been widely read as a key postfeminist text (see Arthurs 2003; Negra 2004). Released five years later, *Glow* subverts the racist stereotypes that were typical of its source text, *Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling* (see Migliore 1993). Thus *TCD* portrays the 1980s as the germination of the neoliberal consumer epitomised by *SATC*'s protagonist Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker), whilst *Glow* rejects postfeminist notions of femininity as 'a bodily property' (Gill 2007: 149) and self-consciously foregrounds systemic racism in the Reagan era.

TCD's attitude towards feminism is constrained by its source text. As a result, the programme does not simply frame its engagement with Carrie's (AnnaSophia Robb) coming-of-age as a white teenager at a suburban high school in the 1980s from the perspective of its production in 2012. Instead, it relies heavily on the framework set by *SATC* in the late 1990s and early 2000s regarding Carrie's adult life. *TCD* uses signposts of the 1980s such as neon colours, music, and the makeover montage to portray how teenage Carrie becomes the distinctly postfeminist Carrie of *SATC*, a sexualised individual who frequently indulges in consumerism (reflecting Gill's [2007: 249] definition of postfeminist traits). Echoes of *SATC* are most prevalent in *TCD*'s weekly prologue, which frames the programme as the origin story of *SATC* in the first seconds of each episode (starting from episode 1.02). In the prologue, the camera focuses on Carrie as she confidently walks down a street in Manhattan, and glances to the left of the camera with an elusive smile (fig. 3.1), closely mirroring the opening credits of *SATC* (fig. 3.2). In a voiceover, teenage Carrie narrates: 'Before there was sex, before there was the city, there was just me, Carrie. Carrie Bradshaw.' In so doing, each episode places *TCD* within a strict chronology with the source text ('before' sex and 'before' the city) as opposed to connecting to the viewer's present. For example, in the prologue Carrie is pictured in Manhattan (fig. 3.1) which resembles Carrie in *SATC* (fig. 3.2) even though she states that *TCD* takes place 'before there was the city'. The discrepancy between the voiceover and the visual setup suggests that *TCD*'s iconography and, by extension, its representation of women is constrained by *SATC*'s postfeminist environment. Cardwell (2002: 97) posits that many period dramas 'actively construct meanings through the televisual synthesis of represented

past and contextual present.' Whilst *TCD* exemplifies the neoliberal consumer culture that was promoted to teen viewers during the early 2010s (discussed below), it also constructs its 'represented past' through references to the postfeminist context of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

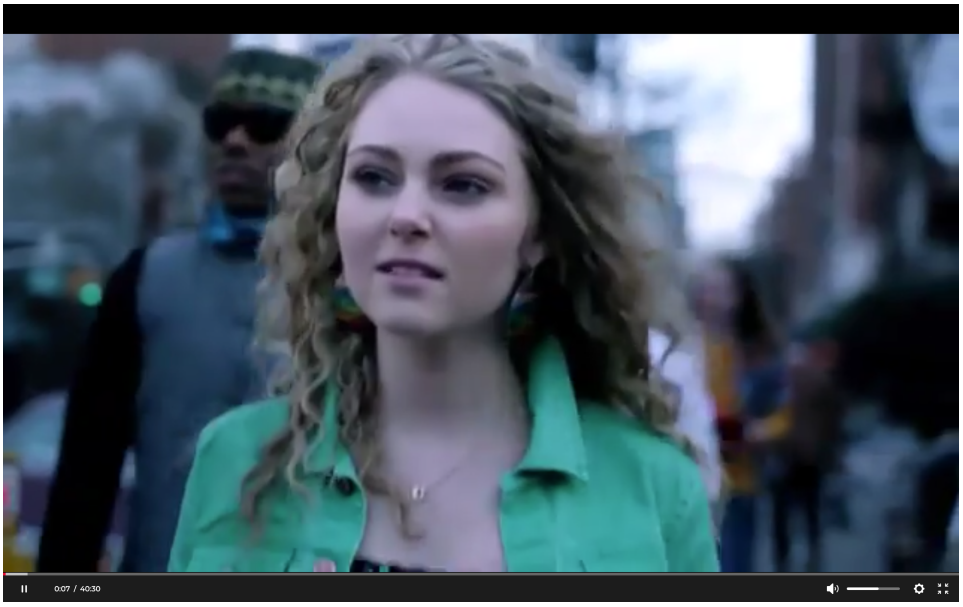


fig. 3.1 Close-up of Carrie in *The Carrie Diaries'* prologue



fig. 3.2 Close-up of Carrie in the opening titles of *Sex and the City*

TCD's postfeminist attitude and its indebtedness to *SATC* are prominent in the programme's privileging of Carrie over characters of colour such as Larissa. This focus mirrors the postfeminist privileging of white femininity in *SATC* (see Kim 2001). The prologue emphasises Carrie's name and subject position ('it was just me, Carrie') and highlights *TCD*'s investment in her individualistic young white identity. The opening credits of *TCD* similarly reflect a postfeminist centring of the white individual, using imagery linked to the 1980s.[71] The credits superimpose the programme's title, which includes Carrie's name, onto stills of the characters that quickly flash across the screen. For example, the image in figure 3.3 superimposes a bright pink colour tone onto a photo of Carrie and the title appears in the style of a teenager's handwritten doodle. The bright colouring and the teenage style, which mimics what Carrie probably writes on the front page of her diary, connote 1980s iconography.[72] The hand-made quality of the doodle reminds viewers that the 1980s was a largely pre-digital era, contrasting greatly to the frequent images of Carrie's computer screen in *SATC* during the 1990s and 2000s.[73] Thus the use of handwriting positions Carrie's teenage identity as part of the past, and not yet fully developed. Simultaneously, pink hues reflect postfeminist concerns with femininity (as per Gill 2007: 249), and according to McRobbie (2004: 260), a handwritten diary exemplifies postfeminist 'self-monitoring practices', epitomised in the 1990s and 2000s through the *Bridget Jones' Diary* book series (Fielding 1996, 1999) and its film adaptations (dir. Sharon Maguire, 2001; dir. Beeban Kidron, 2004). The credits, therefore, playfully engage with overlapping signposts of the 1980s and postfeminism to frame *TCD*'s setting in the 1980s as a point of origin for the postfeminist milieu of *SATC*.

[71] Though the music for the opening sequence differs with each episode, it is generally from the 1980s. In episode 1.02, for example, Talking Heads' 1985 record 'And She Was' is played.

[72] Druesedow (2017) refers to bold and bright colours as part of a 1980s fashion aesthetic, and Fogg (2009) identifies the prevalence of neon in British 1980s fashion.

[73] The contrast between the pre-digital and the digital is foregrounded by the final frame of the 'Pilot' episode in both the source text and the prequel. *TCD* 1.01 ends on a shot of teenage Carrie writing in her diary by hand, her face framed by the window of her bedroom; this is an almost exact replica of the final shot of *SATC* 1.01, with the exception that adult Carrie is typing on her laptop.



fig. 3.3 The opening titles of *The Carrie Diaries* imitate a handwritten diary, an example of postfeminist 'self-monitoring'

Glow's response to its source text also shapes its feminist perspective, albeit differently to *TCD*'s engagement with *SATC*, as *Glow* transcends multiple historical shifts within feminism since the 1980s. Though *Glow* incorporates some signposts of postfeminist identity seen in *TCD* (such as the colour pink and beauty rituals), it also points to the ways in which these require women to perform a femininity that restricts their autonomy over their bodies. As Keller and Ryan (2018: 3) argue, with reference to Gill (2007), emergent feminism 'seems to call into question the widely held assumption by media scholars over the past decade that popular culture is marked by an explicitly "postfeminist sentiment"'. *Glow*'s self-reflexive engagement with the construction of the racialised female body similarly 'calls into question' postfeminist media culture. Seasons 1 and 2 of *Glow* depict the casting and making of a TV programme that resembles the 1980s wrestling show that inspired *Glow*.[74] By focusing on events behind-the-scenes of its source text, *Glow* exposes the performative construction of gendered and racial identities. It facilitates a meta-textual discussion about women's rights, including the prejudices faced by black, brown, and Asian women. The production of the original *Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling* involved considerable sexist and racist stereotyping, as explored in the documentary *GLOW: The Story of the Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling* (dir. Brett

[74] In season 3, *Glow* portrays the production of a wrestling stage show in Las Vegas.

Whitcomb, 2012).[75] Netflix's *Glow* operates from an emergent feminist perspective and is therefore not determined by the source text's representational practices. Hence, *Glow*'s portrayal of women of colour is inflected by political and economic challenges in American society during the Trump era, and the programme responds to the sexist and racist precedent set by *Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling* through satire.

In contrast to *TCD*, *Glow* uses its opening credits to link visual signposts of the 1980s such as neon and pink to its portrayal of the female body. Thus *Glow*'s opening correlates the reconstruction of 1980s period detail with the physical beautification expected of women in American society. The credits show glowing neon silhouettes of women who construct stereotypically feminine bodies by putting on make-up or wearing tights (fig. 3.4), at the same time as showing women lifting weights and toning their muscles to shape their bodies in ways that have traditionally been coded masculine (fig. 3.5). This variety of images stresses that women are expected to alter their bodies in all circumstances, regardless of whether this alteration fits a patriarchal aesthetic or subverts traditional gender boundaries. Significantly, the images foreground movement and the active participation of women in the shaping of their bodies. Figure 3.4 captures the moment when tights are pulled by the wearer over the knees. Here, colour contrast between the pink neon tights and the purple neon fingers highlights how the body is in a state of conflict between feminine and feminist ideals. Figure 3.5 uses brighter and darker shades of pink neon to single out areas of muscle tension as a woman lifts weights to build strength. These emphases on movement and tension rely on 1980s aesthetics to signal that *Glow* uses the past and its signposts in order to explore feminist tensions and women's empowerment. Pidduck (1998: 388, 390) suggests that the visual motif of female characters on a country walk in 1990s Jane Austen adaptations conveys a 'liberal feminist mode of thought' because it 'wishfully projects the female body into motion' as a symbol of social liberation. In *Glow*'s opening, the emphasis on movement goes beyond the symbolic insertion of contemporary feminism into the past. For a 2017 audience, *Glow*'s foregrounding of muscle tension on a woman's body via 1980s iconography hints at the conflicts within both historical and present-day feminism.

[75] Stereotyped characters in the original 1980s programme included Americana (Cindy Maranne) and Dallas (Debi Pelletier), played by white women, Big Bad Momma the Voodoo Queen (Lynn Braxton) and Ebony (Jan White), played by black women, and Little Egypt (Angelina Altishin) and Palestina (Janeen Jewett), played by brown women.



fig. 3.4 Neon silhouette of a woman putting on tights in *Glow*'s opening titles



fig. 3.5 Neon silhouette of a woman lifting weights in *Glow*'s opening titles

The bodies throughout *Glow*'s opening credits are glowing neon silhouettes and not photorealist images of women, so they leave space for the viewer to imagine the women's identity, including their racial identity (as the silhouettes do not connote race). Thus the credits imply that *Glow* may engage with the development of female identity across a spectrum of diverse women. The 1980s aesthetic is significant in the context of the silhouettes because the stylistic evocation of the past suggests that women's identities can be developed over time, mirroring how feminist thought has taken on different shapes over time. Emergent feminisms have developed from historical iterations of feminism and 'are responding to the specificity of our current cultural moment' (Keller and Ryan 2018: 2). The fact that *Glow* features its

representations of women and race today suggests that the distance of the past enables an engagement with contemporary social issues.

It is through the comparative analysis of the prologue and opening credits of *TCD* and *Glow* that their contrasting strategies regarding the portrayal of women become evident. As each programme's source text impacts its attitude towards feminism, they implement similar stylistic signposts of the 1980s to convey different political leanings. The dissimilarity between these two programmes' reconstruction of women's lives during the 1980s illustrates that historical periods are repurposed in the media in divergent ways to reflect different contemporary social issues. More specifically, the distinctness of these programmes' feminist approaches reveals important changes that took place during the 2010s in the American media's engagement with feminism.

Postfeminist Whiteness and the 1980s Makeover

TCD and *Glow* both use gendered spaces to explore women's roles across the past and the present, especially in relation to race and the privileging of whiteness. The department store (*TCD*) and the wrestling ring (*Glow*) are important spaces that impact gender and racial performativity. They are both driven by commercial motives, that is, the selling of clothes, makeup, and tickets. These spaces resonate with the newly arising commercial possibilities linked to women's expanding role in the workforce in 1980s America, as a result of Second Wave feminism. For example, several 1983 adverts for Powers Department Stores address working women (mainly office workers), stressing how 'every morning millions of women get up and go to work, which means every morning millions of women have to choose an outfit to go to work in', and that 'as long as women are making offices beautiful, we'll continue making women look beautiful' ('Powers Department Stores: Bus Stop' 1983 [AT_23648_066]; 'Powers Department Stores' 1983 [AT_23648_067]). Adverts like these speak to a 1980s sentiment regarding the increased purchasing power of women and, consequently, their position as a desirable sales demographic. They nevertheless reflect the ongoing sexualisation of women as defined by their physical appearance. By foregrounding commercial, gendered spaces, *TCD* and *Glow* signpost the economic and cultural impact of 1980s feminism on white and black women from different feminist perspectives.

In *TCD*, Carrie's position as a heterosexual, middle-class white woman allows her to reimagine her identity through fashion at a department store. Dow (1996: 207) argues that postfeminist 1980s TV programmes such as *Murphy Brown* display a 'white, middle-class, heterosexual bias'. She (Ibid.) claims that these programmes often assume how a 'vigorous

individualism will solve all women's problems', without consideration of larger political contexts. With Dow's comments in mind, postfeminist programmes of the 1980s reflect the attitude of those white feminists who relegated racism to a 'black women's problem' in the 1980s (as per Whelahan 1995: 135). In the late 1990s, *SATC* developed these postfeminist representations by focusing on 'the commodification of the individual's relation to the body' and addressing 'affluent, white women' (Arthurs 2004: 87, 84). *TCD* frames Carrie as a postfeminist white subject partly due to *SATC*'s precedent and partly due to the 'bias' (Dow 1996: 207) of the media in the period that *TCD* depicts.

In *TCD* the department store functions as the birthplace of Carrie as a white, neoliberal, postfeminist consumer. When she enters a Century21 store in Manhattan for the first time in the 'Pilot' (1.01), she narrates: 'In my years of playing dress-up as a child I understood that what you wore could help define you. And in this store, I realised you might even be able to change who you are.' Her intention to 'define' and 'change' her body and identity through shopping and fashion reflects the makeover paradigm and consumerism that Gill (2007: 249) associates with postfeminism. When Carrie enters Century21, Depeche Mode's 'I Just Can't Get Enough' (1981) is playing. The soundtrack reflects the excesses of postfeminist consumerism especially 'the ostentatiousness of mainstream 1980s fashion' (Granata 2012: 183) through the lyrics and up-tempo synth beat, creating a connection between the programme's historical period and its postfeminist outlook. The synchronisation of this musical moment to Carrie's entry into the department store evidences how *TCD*'s reconstruction of the 1980s focuses on Carrie's entry into postfeminist consumer culture. Carrie's discovery that she 'just can't get enough' of fashion (which she believes can 'change who you are') echoes the central role of fashion in *SATC* (see Bruzzi and Church Gibson 2004). The emphasis on complete personal transformation reflects *SATC*'s representation of identity politics, exemplified by adult Carrie's statement that: 'Maybe you have to let go of who you were to become who you will be' (*SATC* 5.01). After entering the department store, teenage Carrie from the 1980s becomes the fashion-obsessed adult Carrie of the 1990s and early 2000s.

Whilst the focus on costuming in the sequence at Century21 relates to postfeminist identity politics and the legacy of *SATC*, its carefully stylised portrayal relies on genre specificities of the period drama. Inside the store, partially blocked and out of focus frames convey Carrie's act of self-discovery as she browses the store for the first time (figs. 3.6-3.8). These frames offer a heightened sense of intimacy as they focus on small details and sensations that include parts of Carrie's body (fig. 3.6), a dress (fig. 3.7), and Carrie carefully touching an item that she likes (fig. 3.8). Blurred images of clothing block the camera's view in figures

3.6 and 3.7, giving the impression that the camera is almost touching the fabrics. The proximity of the camera to the textiles creates a tactile sensation for viewers, mirroring Carrie's sense of discovery and exploration as she touches the clothes at the store.[76] Carrie's slow-paced consideration of the garments reinforces the 'display' of bodies and clothes in period drama, as discussed by Pidduck (2004: 4). *TCD*'s 1980s setting is significant in this context because the 'Pilot' initially positions Carrie's teenage body as a blank canvas for the development of feminine, or even feminist, identity. The fact that the viewer may have seen *SATC* and therefore knows that Carrie becomes a sex columnist for *The New York Star*, however, limits any emancipatory possibilities. Due to this knowledge, *TCD*, as a prequel set in the 1980s, cannot portray 'teenagedom [as] a liminal space', which Moseley (2002: 421), in her research on postfeminism and the teen in media, calls 'a time of possibility in relation to identity and power.'[77] In *TCD*, the only possible outcome for Carrie's teenage identity is becoming 'Carrie Bradshaw', the protagonist of *SATC*.[78]

TCD constantly reminds viewers that its setting in the past serves as an origin story for *SATC*, a programme criticised for its racist representations of African Americans (see Brasfield 2006). Michael Wayne (2017: 107) discusses how some television period dramas such as *Mad Men* 'address race and racism through white characters [and] allow the past to serve as a container for racism.' Wayne suggests that the portrayal of racism as a historical reality in the hegemonic, white-dominated context of the past reduces the severity of issues surrounding race and racism because they are depicted as problems of a bygone era. In line with Wayne, *TCD* contains and sanitises racial tensions from the 1980s due to its narrative involvement with *SATC*. Butler (2014: 49) suggests that 'rather than simply an exclusion of racial and sexual others, postfeminism primarily represents an *affirmation* of a white heterosexual subject' (emphasis in original). Carrie's intimate self-exploration at Centruy21 is a result of postfeminist 'choice and empowerment' (Gill 2007: 149) that she can partake in as a white woman. As detailed at the end of this chapter, the black British character Larissa is also seen in the department store in *TCD* 1.01; however, her interaction with this space as a shoplifter highlights *TCD*'s contrasting portrayal of white and black women.

[76] Chapter 4 focuses on the use of haptic imagery for the reconstruction of the 1980s across several contemporary TV programmes and identifies such imagery as a significant tool to create an 'affective engagement' (Landsberg 2015: 20) between viewers and the fictional past.
[77] More specifically, Moseley (2002) discusses the teen witch as a discursive site of identity formation with regards the negotiation between feminism and femininity.
[78] Further examples from *TCD* that portray the origins of Carrie's neoliberal postfeminist consumer habits include her first pair of Manolo Blahnik shoes and her first Cosmopolitan cocktail (both in episode 1.08).

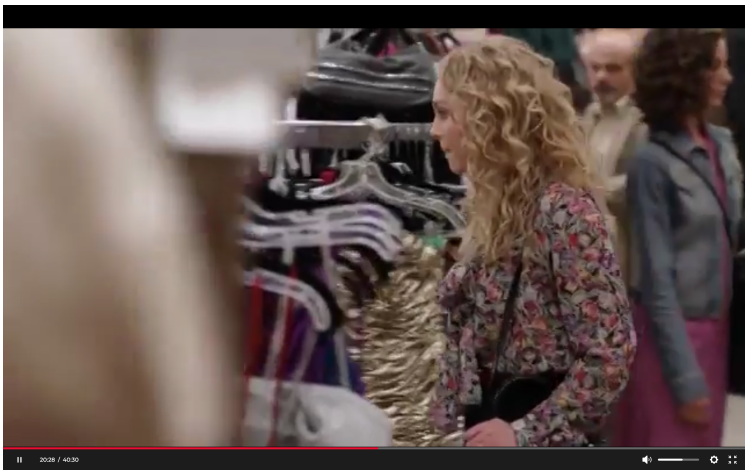


fig. 3.6 Carrie browses through clothes at Century21

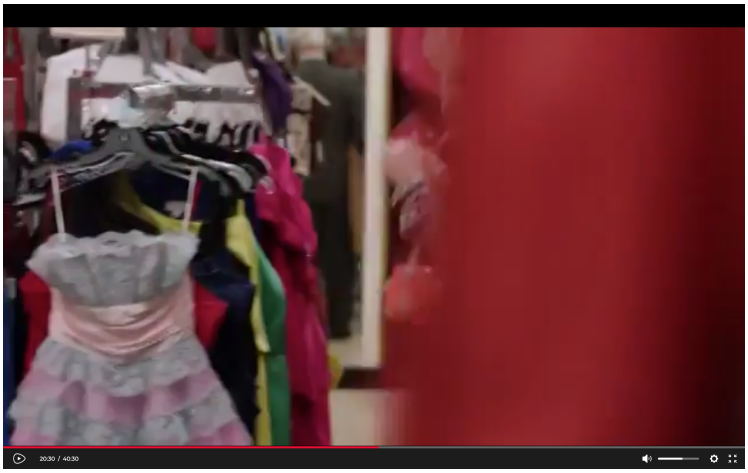


fig. 3.7 Clothes block the camera's view

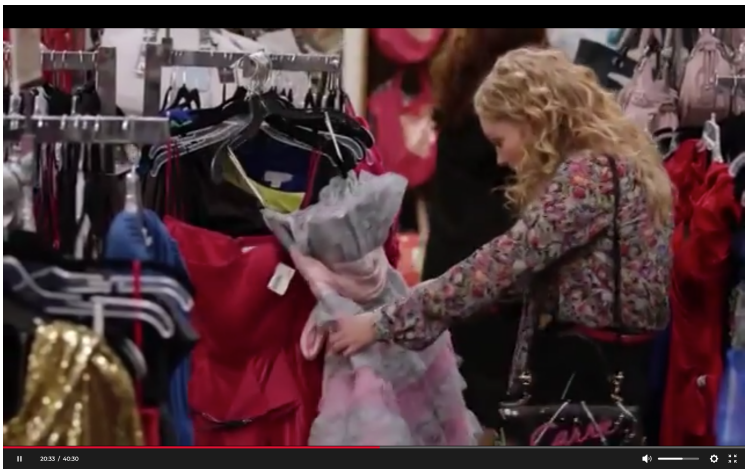


fig. 3.8 Carrie looks at a dress at Century21

TCD's depiction of Carrie as a postfeminist teen consumer also reflects its status as a popular teen comedy-drama on The CW network in the early 2010s. A rejection of the term feminism and, by extension, the developing heritage of feminist movements in favour of

concepts such as 'girl-power' characterises postfeminist culture, including popular culture in 2012, when *TCD* was released.[79] McRobbie (2009: 90) observes that in postfeminist culture 'spaces of attention and luminosity supplant and substitute forms of feminist political mobilisation' so that the media projects countless images of women and girl-power but, in fact, silences feminist activism. The decision made by *TCD*'s creator, Amy B. Harris, to let *SATC*'s postfeminist framing of fashion and white femininity set the boundaries for *TCD*'s reconstruction of the 1980s attests to the media's continued postfeminist framing of women as of 2012.[80] *TCD*'s connection with *SATC* results in the postfeminist '[exclusion] of second-wave feminism', as identified by Moseley (2002: 413), and an investment 'in the conjunction of conventional femininities with power: the idea of glamour spectacularly represented in all its senses.' The postfeminist assertion of white individuality in *TCD* relies on the transformation of 1980s fashion into a glamourous and desirable commodity for The CW's young, female audience.[81] Anaïs Le Fèvre-Berthelot (2018) discusses how the success of programmes such as *Gossip Girl* (The CW, 2007-2012) helped The CW implement a marketing strategy that attracted a narrow demographic of women aged 18 to 34 in the 2000s and early 2010s.[82] To address The CW's target demographic, *TCD* presents 1980s fashion as colourful, fun, easy to recreate at home, and as a way to express an inescapably postfeminist personality.

Carrie is given ample time to explore and affirm her individuality during a hand-made makeover sequence in episode 1.01. Carrie's freedom to define herself as a white woman is pronounced during this sequence, which foregrounds stylisation beyond narrative purpose. When Carrie's little sister Dorrit (Stefani LaVie Owen) ruins Carrie's black purse inherited from their mother by spilling white nail polish over it, Carrie uses multi-coloured nail polish to paint a pattern and write her name on the purse, remaking it as a fashionable accessory (figs. 3.9-3.24). Sarah Gilligan (2011: 168) claims that, in contrast to the shopping sprees and

[79] For example, pop star Katy Perry and Yahoo's CEO Marissa Meyer both publicly disavowed feminism during 2012 (see Berlatsky 2012).

[80] Harris, who served as a co-producer for *SATC*, states that prior knowledge about *SATC* is 'extraordinarily helpful' for an understanding of *TCD* (qtd. in Ng 2013). Rather than reflecting a pursuit of feminist historical enquiry which critiques present-day social issues (the objective of *Glow*'s creators, Liz Flahive and Carly Mensch; discussed later in the chapter), self-consciously stylised moments in *TCD* speak to Harris' awareness of the neoliberal consumer habits promoted by *SATC*.

[81] By contrast, Richardson (2016: 173) argues that the film *Sex and the City 2* (dir. Michael Patrick King, 2010), released two years before *TCD*, depicts the 1980s 'as a decade of poor taste', using 1980s fashion as 'little more than a sight-gag asking the spectator to giggle at 1980s iconography.' The difference between the film and *TCD* signals the commercial motivation behind *TCD*'s trendy depiction of 1980s fashion.

[82] Joseph (2018: 27) discusses how The CW changed its programming and marketing strategy in the mid- to late-2010s to 'move away from its image as a network for teenage girls.'

expensive designer fashions in postfeminist films for adults, 'teen films tend to fetishize vintage clothing, hand-me-downs, dressmaking, and stylistic experimentation as the means by which postfeminist subjectivities can be productively re-envisioned and performed'. In light of Gilligan's remarks, the overall effect of the purse makeover in *TCD* 1.01 is the symbolic construction of postfeminist identity on the surface of a 1980s fashion accessory. The makeover sequence uses mise-en-scène, tight close-ups, music, light and colour, and a sense of tactile identity construction (as with the garments in Century21; above) to connect teen viewers to this experience.

The sequence features numerous signposts of the 1980s such as a cover of Madonna's (1984) 'Material Girl', the makeover montage itself, and neon colours. This connects present-day viewers to the fictional past, in part by relying on genre-specific visual styles of the period drama like the palimpsestic accretion of meaning via popular culture references (discussed in the Literature Review). The association with Madonna during this sequence highlights the postfeminist 'masquerade' which, enacted through fashion and beautification, 'constantly refers to its own artifice' (McRobbie 2009: 66). Madonna is widely considered a postfeminist icon whose fans often imitate her fashion choices with hand-made clothes and accessories (see McRobbie 1991). Thus *TCD* explicitly connects its contemporary female viewers to 1980s popular culture through postfeminist iconography. Moseley (2015: 39) remarks that such 'self-conscious use of popular music' is characteristic of American teen dramas. Her observation reinforces the suggestion that *TCD* depicts the 1980s via postfeminist iconography in order to hail The CW's desired audience demographic (as of 2012). The use of a cover version of 'Material Girl' by contemporary indie pop duo The Bird and The Bee creates a clear musical bridge between the 1980s and the 2010s. The up-tempo cover stresses the reconstructedness of the past and positions the sequence in the present so that the issues about white self-expression raised throughout this scene appear relevant to female viewers of *TCD* and The CW more broadly.

Moreover, the title and content of 'Material Girl' reflect *TCD*'s focus on the material construction of white women's bodies. The original music video for 'Material Girl' (dir. Mary Lambert, 1985) relies heavily on themes of performativity as it includes a gendered play with costume, capitalism, and historical notions of femininity that border on critical in tone. In the video, Madonna dresses up as Lorelei Lee, the character who sings 'Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend' in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (dir. Howard Hawks, 1953), played by Marilyn Monroe. Thematic links between *TCD* and the 'Material Girl' video signal how beauty standards often cite images of women from the past. Madonna's reference to 1950s femininity

and fashion adds another layer to *TCD*'s engagement with 1980s femininity and fashion. As Dyer (2004: 17-63) argues, Monroe herself simultaneously challenged and embodied 1950s discourses of femininity. Significantly, both Monroe and Madonna epitomise white femininity. Dyer (Ibid.: 40) posits that 'Monroe conforms to, and is part of the construction of, what constitutes desirability in women', especially the desirability of whiteness. For Dyer (Ibid.), this is because 'to be ideal Monroe had to be white, and not only white but blonde, the most unambiguously white you can get.' Comparably, bell hooks (1992: 158) writes that 'the political reality that underlies Madonna's and our recognition that this is a society where "blondes" not only "have more fun" but where they are more likely to succeed in any endeavor is white supremacy and racism.' Echoes of 'Material Girl' in *TCD* reveal an engagement with historical iterations of feminism and race that is centred around an idealised whiteness.

The makeover sequence lies at the intersection of 1980s popular culture and a postfeminist preoccupation with beautification. Moseley (2002: 406) suggests that 'the glamorous makeover of the central female character' is 'a mechanism through which appropriate feminine identities are constructed and reinforced' in postfeminist teen films and TV programmes. Moreover, Maryn Wilkinson (2015) argues that makeover montages are central to the construction of young women's identity specifically in 1980s teen movies such as *The Breakfast Club* (dir. John Hughes, 1985) and *She's Out of Control* (dir. Stan Dragoti, 1989). The purse sequence in *TCD* reflects the style and themes of these 1980s makeovers. Wilkinson (Ibid.: 386) suggests that these montages 'make *visible* the transformation process, by connecting [it] to individual consumerism' and they present the body 'as malleable, promoting and celebrating notions of the self-transformation and actively self-initiated performances of femininity' (emphasis in original).[83] Accordingly, Carrie's transformation of her purse depicts the makeover as '*visible*', emphasising texture, touch, and time. The sequence includes traditional before (fig. 3.9) and after shots (fig. 3.24); however, these are not central to it. They simply frame Carrie's actions and symbolise her 'self-initiated performance of femininity' (Ibid.). This mirrors the home-made imitation of Madonna's wardrobe by fans in the 1980s and frames individuality as a reward for young women who participate in postfeminist practices.[84]

[83] Moseley (2002: 405) argues that makeovers in 1980s teen films, to some extent, address 'questions of class and status'. She (Ibid.: 406) suggests that in teen films and TV programmes from the late 1990s the 'reinstatement of acceptable norms of feminine appearance and behaviour are both more central and more insistent.' Whilst *TCD* references 1980s makeovers, its production in 2012 means that it is also indebted to developments in postfeminist teen media after the 1980s, as identified by Moseley.

[84] Lewis (2003: 184) observes that such a 'girl-fan response to Madonna' also characterises the 1985 film *Desperately Seeking Susan* (dir. Susan Seidelman), which stars Madonna as the title character.



fig. 3.9 Before shot of Carrie's purse



fig. 3.10 Carrie's bottles of neon nail polish



fig. 3.11 Carrie's fingers enter the frame when she pours pink nail polish

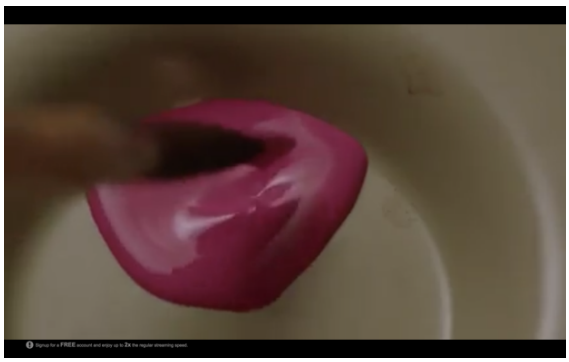


fig. 3.12 Close-up of Carrie's paintbrush dipping into pink nail polish



fig. 3.13 Carrie's fingers enter the frame when she pours yellow nail polish



fig. 3.14 Close-up of Carrie's paintbrush dipping into yellow nail polish



fig. 3.15 The empty surface of the purse



fig. 3.16 Nail polish splashes across the purse



fig. 3.17 Carrie's fingers enter the frame when she pours white nail polish



fig. 3.18 Close-up of Carrie's paintbrush dipping into whie nail polish



fig. 3.19 Carrie paints her name on the purse

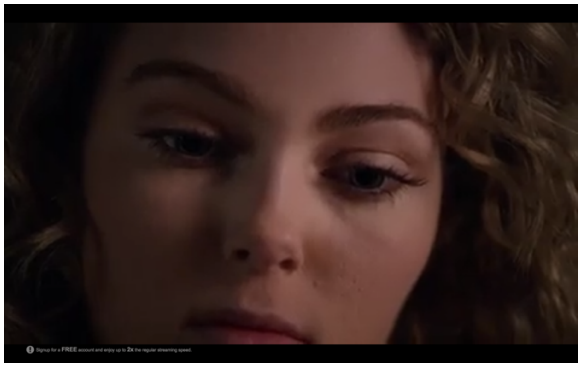


fig. 3.20 Close-up of Carrie painting her name



fig. 3.21 Carrie cleans her paintbrush

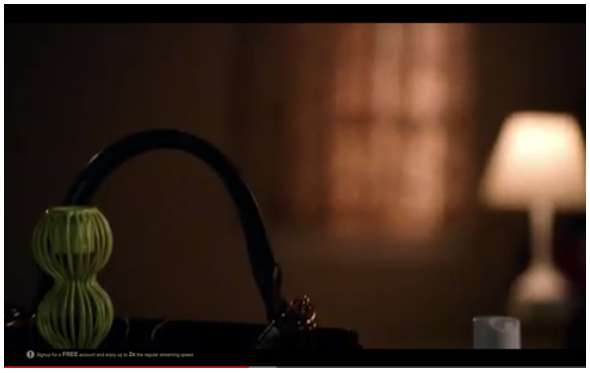


fig. 3.22 Lighting and deep staging signal that the purse is left to dry overnight

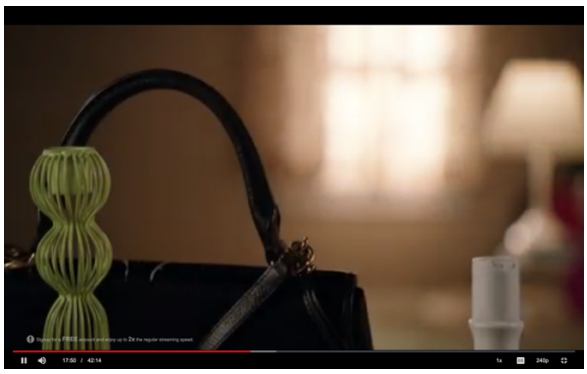


fig. 3.23 The purse has dried by sunrise



fig. 3.24 After shot of Carrie's purse

The makeover suggests that postfeminist beauty rituals require a laborious performance of femininity, as explored by Sarah Banet-Weiser and Laura Portwood-Stacer (2006). In figure 3.9, the presentation of the purse alongside colourful bottles of nail polish highlights the stark colour contrast between the empty black surface of the purse and the neon polishes. This illustrates how the purse as a blank canvas is synechdochic of Carrie's 'malleable' body (as per Wilkinson 2015: 386). This resembles the framing of Carrie's body as a tabula rasa for neoliberal consumerism when she shops at Century21 (figs. 3.6-3.8; as above). The setup in figure 3.9 conveys how the purse foreshadows Carrie's personal changes during episode 1.01 when she starts an internship in Manhattan the day after she modifies her purse. Focus is then again given to several bright neon bottles of nail polish via a close-up in figure 3.10, reflecting the consumerism that Wilkinson (2015: 386) connects to the 1980s makeover montage and that Gill (2007: 249) connects to postfeminism. Carrie's indulgence in nail polish (at least eight bottles can be seen in figure 3.10) reinforces the postfeminist interest in beauty products that serve no purpose other than the alteration of the female body. There are recurring shots of Carrie opening bottles of differently coloured polishes, emptying these onto plates, and dipping her brush into them (figs. 3.11-3.12; figs. 3.13-3.14; figs. 3.17-3.18). This repetition calls attention to Carrie's dedicated participation in makeover rituals. Carrie's fingers enter the frame every time she pours nail polish (fig. 3.11; fig. 3.13; fig. 3.17), aggregating the viewer's focus to her tactile engagement with cosmetics and consumer culture. Repeated shots of her pale fingers around multi-coloured bottles of polish strengthen *TCD*'s linking of ritualistic physical transformation, 1980s consumer culture, and white femininity.

This extensive detail included in the makeover sequence reflects Vidal's (2012a: 11) observation that the mise-en-scène of period drama favours 'the fragment and the detail'. The elaborate visual preoccupation with the surface of the purse and the liquid texture of nail polish is typical of the way in which period drama highlights 'attention to the "surface" visual qualities of a motif that is afforded special weight and duration' (Ibid.). The step-by-step depiction of the makeover accompanied by the strong beats of the cover of 'Material Girl' contributes to the sequence's 'weight and duration.' There are several shots of Carrie's paintbrush dipping into different colours of polish (fig. 3.12; fig. 3.14; fig. 3.18) and of paint splashing across the purse's black surface (figs. 3.15-3.16), lengthening the viewer's engagement with themes of beautification. The subtle change from the empty black surface of the purse in figure 3.15 to the splash of yellow neon paint across the top in figure 3.16 reflects the meticulous steps taken to beautify the female body; an act required of one participating in postfeminist rituals. The full screen focus on the texture of the purse allows viewers to observe

these subtle yet meaningful visual details. It encourages the exploration of the surface of the purse as comparable to the exploration of the female body. Hence, *TCD* depicts the ritualistic elements of a postfeminist 1980s makeover through period dramas' stylistic preoccupation with surfaces.

When Carrie starts to paint her name on the purse with pink polish in figure 3.19, she claims ownership over the bag. This moment represents the final synthesis of 1980s signposts (neon, pink), beauty rituals (the reconstruction of the purse with nail polish), and white subjectivity (Carrie's name). After Carrie writes her name, the sequence cuts to a tight close-up of her face (fig. 3.20). The tightness establishes a strong sense of intimacy between Carrie and the audience in a moment when she is actively constructing the postfeminist identity that the character is known for in *SATC*. Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2006: 200) argue that:

> post-feminism boldly claims that women possess active political agency and subjectivity, yet the primary place in which this agency is recognized and legitimated is within individual consumption habits.

TCD portrays Carrie's agency as a producer and consumer of fashion through a stylised makeover sequence that highlights the 'fragment' and the 'detail' associated with period drama (Vidal 2012a: 11).

Vidal (Ibid.) also claims that period drama 'finds its modus operandi in the balance between an overall sense of visual realism and the spectacle of period reconstruction.' In *TCD,* the makeover sequence incorporates carefully constructed moments of realism in order to 'balance' the 'spectacle' of the 1980s makeover. These moments include shots of Carrie's paint brush being dipped into a glass of water to wash off one colour of nail polish before using another (fig. 3.21), and a delay before the end of the makeover because the purse needs time to dry. The washing of the brush mirrors the many stages of beauty rituals, some of which are more glamorous (colour and painting), whilst others are simple yet necessary (water). The sequence ends with the purse drying, framed at the lower edge of the shot against Carrie's bedroom window in the depth (figs. 3.22-3.23). As the curtains open, allowing natural light to saturate the room, the changes in lighting from figure 3.22 to figure 3.23 imply the passing of time (another necessary step in the makeover process) and signal the dawning of a new beginning for Carrie. As the figures show, the makeover takes place in Carrie's teenage bedroom, a 'key space through which identity is expressed' (Moseley 2015: 39). Through its links to teen identity, the sequence depicts the 1980s as relevant and engaging for teen viewers of The CW in the early 2010s. This recalls Landsberg's (2015: 64) assertion that historical TV

programmes highlight those elements of the past that are 'most relevant and engaging' to present-day viewers.

Moreover, drawing on Vidal's (2012a: 11) comments about the balance between spectacle and realism in period drama, the washing of the brush and the drying of the purse create an illusion of realism for contemporary teen viewers of *TCD*. These moments suggest that the spectacular postfeminist transformation symbolised by the 1980s makeover remains a realistic goal for women today. The sequence's constructedness, however, highlights the difficulty in achieving a beauty ideal. Indeed, when conducting interviews about sexualisation with 19- and 20-year-old women, Jenny Kitzinger (1995: 193) found that young women look to Madonna as a role model, but understand that she is 'a fantasy figure, not a reflection of reality.' In line with Kitzinger's findings, *TCD* conveys such constructed notions of beauty in its presentation of a makeover sequence set to a cover of 'Material Girl'. In so doing, the programme layers postfeminist subjectivity on top of its period setting, evident in the layering of paint on top of the purse and the emphasis on the materiality of 1980s girlhood via reference to Madonna. Thus *TCD* hints at the 'layered performance' of Carrie's personality in *SATC* (Bruzzi and Church Gibson 2004: 118).[85]

Inherent to postfeminism, *TCD* privileges its white protagonist and thereby marginalises its characters of colour. A comparison of *TCD* and *Glow* helps to demonstrate that within the space of five years readings of the 1980s and feminism shift to such an extent as to change the aesthetic of the reconstructed 1980s. As *TCD* is a programme on The CW, it is aimed at white middle-class women between 18 and 34 (which Le Fèvre-Berthelot [2018] identifies as The CW's target demographic in the early 2010s). Within a neoliberal framework, *TCD* presents its female viewers, most of whom watch the network programme along with advertisement breaks, with an idealised image of postfeminist consumption during the 1980s. Comparably, *Glow*'s depiction of the 1980s highlights how the racial stereotyping of women's bodies is an act that belies the performativity of the postfeminism seen in *TCD*. In contrast to *TCD*, the 1980s provides a platform for *Glow* to engage with more exaggerated manifestations of gender and racial stereotyping. Whilst this engagement increases in seasons 2 and 3, the

[85] Bruzzi and Church Gibson (2004: 118) note that adult Carrie uses 'vintage items' and 'eclectic accessories', including a necklace with her name on it, to express herself. When Carrie loses this necklace in *SATC* episode 6.19, she simultaneously loses her sense of self (she is in Paris, alienated from her friends in New York). After she finds the necklace, she is able to reclaim her identity and leave her boyfriend (*SATC* 6.20). In both *SATC* and *TCD*, Carrie's identity is articulated and reaffirmed through her name written on fashion accessories that she is attached to emotionally.

analysis below focuses on season 1 to illustrate how the programme initially sets up emergent feminist ideas about white and black women.

Performative Whiteness and the All-American Body

In contrast to *TCD*'s portrayal of the department store as a transformative space for white women, *Glow* uses satire to expose the specific limitations placed upon white and black women's bodily autonomy within gendered spaces.[86] In her analysis of women of colour in *Glow, I Love Dick* (Amazon Video, 2016-2017), and *Insecure* (HBO, 2016-), Caetlin Benson-Allott (2017: 66) argues that *Glow* 'introduce[s] characters of color only in supporting roles that contest but never destabilize the white protagonists' racial solipsism.' Benson-Allott's work focuses on season 1 of the programme; as noted above, *Glow* foregrounds African American, Asian American, and Latina characters more explicitly from season 2 onwards. Even so, the close textual analysis of season 1 throughout this chapter counters Benson-Allott's argument. To do this, the examination of *Glow* takes a different theoretical context, focusing on the reconstruction of the 1980s in relation to race. The programme's engagement with the past from the perspective of present-day America is key to understanding its representations. In contrast to Benson-Allott's (Ibid.: 65) assertion that *Glow* 'fail[s] to confront the social differences between women that inform real-world politics and should inform feminist television production', *Glow*'s self-reflexive portrayal of race responds to the contemporary emergent feminist concerns about political and economic issues in America which Keller and Ryan (2018) outline. *Glow* does feature two white women, Ruth (Alison Brie) and Debbie (Betty Gilpin), as protagonists. However, Ruth and Debbie's interactions with gendered environments, such as the aerobics class and the wrestling ring, accentuate *Glow*'s critical distance from a postfeminist centring of white femininity. *Glow*'s depiction of white women draws attention to but does not perpetuate the white racial solipsism that Benson-Allott (Ibid.: 66) attributes to the programme.

In *Glow*'s 'Pilot' (1.01), Ruth and Debbie attend an archetypal 1980s aerobics class, popularised in the 1980s by the music video for Olivia Newton John's (1981) 'Physical' and Jane Fonda's at-home workout videos (such as *Jane Fonda's Workout* [1982]; fig. 3.25). During the aerobics class, Debbie, who has recently had a baby, starts to lactate through her leotard. When she notices, she blurts out: 'I'm a fucking bovine mutant.' The comic 1980s

[86] The analysis follows Pye's (2007: 30) understanding of tone, in this case satire, as that which involves 'different dimensions of understanding, with feeling and bodily response playing as large a part as more cerebral processes.'

setup of the aerobics class exacerbates Debbie's humorous words: neither Ruth nor Debbie stops working out whilst Ruth passes her sweater to Debbie so that she can cover her breasts (figs. 3.26-3.27). As a result, comedy is created by Debbie's exaggerated facial expression which mixes strain and embarrassment in figure 3.26. By contrasting 1980s beauty rituals to lactation, a bodily function that Debbie cannot control, *Glow* depicts how women have to follow unrealistic social expectations that include the shaping of the body through exercise at the expense of their bodily autonomy.[87]



fig. 3.25 *Jane Fonda's Workout* (1982)



fig. 3.26 Ruth passes her sweater when Debbie starts lactating during aerobics class

[87] This attitude towards women's bodies permeates 1980s workout culture. For example, Fonda states in her videos that 'exercise teaches you the pleasure of discipline' (see Woitas 2018: 148).



fig. 3.27 Debbie continues to follow the workout routine whilst she covers her breasts

Glow differentiates between white women's mainstream feminist aspirations (to be less objectified and more in control) and black women's concerns about their systemically oppressed, intersectional identities (discussed below). Out of the regular cast members of *Glow* only Ruth and Debbie participate in the aerobics class which represents mainstream 1980s popular culture. For Benson-Allott (2017: 66), *Glow* centres whiteness and does not move beyond superficial racial stereotypes, however, by making viewers aware of the contemporariness of the show, the representation of race becomes more nuanced. This sense of contemporariness is accentuated through the programme's release on Netflix which foregrounds *Glow*'s late 2010s production context. The aerobics scene is filmed with Netflix's digital high-definition aesthetics in a 16:9 aspect ratio (figs. 3.26-3.27) and depicts a 1980s aerobics class, emblematised by Fonda's standard-definition 4:3 aspect ratio VHS tapes (seen in figure 3.25 via the pillarbox effect of the black strips around the image when viewed on Amazon Video today). This distance from a 1980s aesthetic informs the viewing of *Glow* as a contemporary programme that takes into consideration 'the hierarchies of privilege' (Whelehan 1995: 136) between black and white women.[88]

Liz Flahive, the co-creator of *Glow*, states that when making the programme she and Carly Mensch wanted to 'look back at the Seventies – coming out of the women's movement – and into the Eighties, and ask the question: Did it work? Did things get better?' (qtd. in

[88] *Glow* episode 2.08 self-reflexively foregrounds this aesthetic difference by imitating a grainy 1980s VHS aesthetic, which comically heightens the discrepancy between historical and present-day media technologies.

Scherer 2017). Flahive's comments suggest that *Glow* deliberately uses its 1980s setting to unpick changing iterations of feminism and the cultural heritage of feminist activism in America today (in case things did not 'get better'). As explored in the Literature Review, depictions of heritage are particularly suited to 'playing out' contemporary anxieties (Higson 2006 [1993]: 100). In particular, breastfeeding and lactation were not openly discussed or represented in the media during the 1980s. A 2011 report by the United States Surgeon General highlights that in American culture 'breasts have often been regarded primarily as sexual objects, while their nurturing function has been downplayed' (United States Department of Health and Science 2011: 13), and breastfeeding in public only became legal in all 50 states in 2018 (see Mazziotta 2018). Debbie's loss of control over her lactating body during an aerobics class, then, frames the 1980s in a way that resonates with contemporary feminist calls for action.

Glow uses the masculine-encoded space of the wrestling ring to focus on the imposition of stereotypes on women based on race and physical appearance, including the performative construction of white identity. Focus on women's wrestling facilitates *Glow*'s engagement with another archetypally 1980s environment whilst unpicking contemporary issues surrounding women's empowerment.[89] In *Glow*, the ring acts as a stage where women perform choreographed fights with predetermined outcomes. The performance of wrestling mirrors the theatrical and inauthentic personas played by the characters. This suggests that the space within the ring is one that dismantles hierarchical experiences of gender and race. As such, the ring speaks to Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) theory of the carnivalesque. In his discussion of the subversive potential of Medieval carnivals, Bakhtin (Ibid.: 15, 10) argues that 'during carnival there is a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers' and as a result 'all were considered equal.' In *Glow*, the ring is a metaphor for the carnivalesque, eliciting laughter through the satire of stereotypical wrestling personae which give characters a 'second life, organized on the basis of laughter' so that they are 'reborn for new, purely human relations' (Ibid.: 8, 10). The characters in *Glow* find empowerment through wrestling, which allows them to better themselves, if only for the time they are in the ring. For example, Ruth, whose aspirations to become an actor have not been realised, and two unemployed African American women (discussed below) are able to rebel against hegemonic notions of gender and race.

[89] Women's wrestling is historically misogynistic and less popular than men's wrestling; the sport experienced a boom during the 1980s and has recently seen a resurgence and newfound respect towards female wrestlers (see Mondak 1989; Krauth 2018).



fig. 3.28 Ruth trains using the white ropes of the wrestling ring



fig. 3.29 Debbie performs for an audience using the pink ropes of the wrestling ring

Despite offering a sense of rebellion, *Glow*'s depiction of wrestling highlights the extent to which women have to perform their femininity when engaging in stereotypically masculine activities. For example, when the women rehearse wrestling routines, they use a ring with white ropes (fig. 3.28), whereas when they perform for an audience the ropes are pink (fig. 3.29). *Glow*'s mise-en-scène implies that the programme does not accept postfeminist notions of 'femininity [as] a bodily property' (Gill 2007: 249), symbolised by the colour pink (as in *TCD*). Even when *Glow*'s narrative centres white women, the programme

highlights the theatricality of wrestling to distance itself from a postfeminist approach. This is exemplified by the contrast between Ruth's unfashionable costume and muscular body against the white ropes during rehearsal in episode 1.01 (fig. 3.28) and Debbie's glitzy costume and beautified body touching the pink ropes during a wrestling match in episode 1.10, 'Money's in the Chase' (fig. 3.29). The use of costume and physical engagement with the ropes demonstrates how *Glow* relegates postfeminist beautification and white privilege to a performative and stylised pattern of behaviour that developed out of a 1980s backlash against women's liberation.

Glow draws attention to the fact that white women enjoy more freedoms than women of colour, but it does not portray these freedoms as innate. During auditions for the diegetic wrestling programme in episode 1.03, 'The Wrath of Kuntar', Ruth is the only woman whose wrestling persona has not been assigned by the director Sam Sylvia (Marc Maron) and producer Bash Howard (Chris Lowell). Ruth is given the option to find her own identity. *Glow*'s long-form narrative depicts Ruth's creation of 'Zoya, the Destroyer', an evil communist that she invents after a multi-episode arc (1.06).[90] On the surface, Ruth's freedom mirrors the lengthy narrative attention given to Carrie's individualistic white femininity in *TCD*. *Glow*'s self-reflexive narrative and visual style, however, highlights the discrepancy between Ruth's freedom of choice and other women's lack thereof. When Ruth auditions, Sam earnestly asks her: 'Who do you think you are?' (1.03). The camera then lingers on Ruth's puzzled expression as she is struggling to define herself. After a six-second pause the episode abruptly cuts to the credits. At first glance, Sam's question about Ruth's identity seems like a cliff-hanger to be explored and expanded upon in future episodes. Ruth's silence and the extratextual space of the credits suggest that her white identity has unlimited potential as she cannot even be contained by the end of the television episode. Yet, the editing decision to cut off Ruth's self-exploration and roll the black credit sequence that includes Netflix's five-second 'Next Episode' countdown implies that a white woman's self-exploration is not actually relevant to *Glow*'s engagement with historical notions of feminism and race. As all episodes of *Glow* are released at once, Netflix's publishing model and 'almost seamless flow from one episode to the next' (Jenner 2018: 115) encourages viewers to move on from contemplating white identity and turn their attention to the next episode.

[90] The comic potential of Zoya's staged fight with the character Liberty Belle, who represents America, relies on historical 1980s anti-Soviet rhetoric in the USA, as explored in Chapters 2 and 5.

Glow often makes its viewers consider what constitutes an all-American woman in terms of race and femininity. When Debbie auditions, she is immediately assigned the role of Liberty Belle, the 'all-American' hero of the wrestling show (1.03). This is in stark contrast to *Glow*'s women of colour who are assigned racist stereotypes by Sam and Bash. *Glow* connects Debbie's white femininity to performative ideas about American national identity, discussed in relation to the 1980s and whiteness in Chapter 2. Debbie's performance is both physical and verbal: her costume is an American flag leotard (fig. 3.30) and her character speaks with a Southern drawl. She can perform as Liberty Belle, a white, blonde, middle-class woman, because she fits conventional beauty standards both in 1980s America and today (recalling the white desirability of Monroe and Madonna). Her performance points to traditional perceptions of white bodies as symbolic of 'standard American culture' in contrast to 'ethnic identity' (Chávez and Guido-DiBrito 1999: 39). Sam and Bash stress the links between Debbie's white body and nationalism, stating that they chose Debbie because she 'seemed more all-American' than the other women (1.03), suggesting that women who do not look like Debbie may struggle to identify as all-American, especially if they are not white.



fig. 3.30 Debbie as Liberty Belle in an American flag leotard

Whilst both *TCD* and *Glow* present costume and beauty rituals as central to the construction of white women's identity, *TCD* addresses postfeminist white neoliberal consumers by connecting Carrie with the teen viewers of The CW. By contrast, *Glow* does not rely on advertisement in its exploration of feminism. As Lotz (2018: 492) observes, streaming platforms like Netflix 'succeed by creating enough value as to warrant payment, rather than

by collecting the greatest number of eyeballs for sale to advertisers. This leads to very different industrial practices that in turn produce different television texts.' Hence, *Glow* depicts postfeminist signposts such as the colour pink and aerobics in ways that expose their performativity. *Glow* makes viewers aware of its retrospective setting in the 1980s in order to highlight feminist issues related to beauty standards and the privileging of whiteness in America. It features a range of white, black, brown, and Asian women and uses the 1980s wrestling ring to portray 'female bonding', which Mareike Jenner (2018: 149) attributes to several female-driven comedies produced by Netflix. This multifaceted performance of women mirrors how during carnival the 'individual feels that he is an indissoluble part of the collectivity' (Bakhtin 1984: 255). Notwithstanding the bonding between the women, *Glow* highlights the separateness of white and black 'collectivity' in the USA. This is an important consideration, not only because Reagan 'contributed to the racial polarization of American party politics' during the 1980s (Mayer 2007: 86), but also because it is still necessary for African Americans to take collective action against white supremacy in the 2010s, embodied in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Black Women and the 'legacy of American racism'[91]

In the 1980s, television served as 'a central transit point and expressive vehicle through which popular debates and images about race [and blackness] circulated' (Gray 1995: 15).[92] *Glow*'s depiction of black women speaks to present-day socio-economic repercussions of the Reagan administration's negative relationship with the black community (see Troy 2005: 90-8). As a contemporary programme, *Glow* uses satire to subvert stereotypical images of black women. Satire exposes how, as Collins (2000: 69) theorises, 'portraying African American women as stereotypical mammies, matriarchs, welfare recipients and hot mammas helps justify U.S. black women's oppression.' As noted in relation to *TCD*'s focus on white identity, Wayne (2017: 107) argues that some period dramas 'serve as a container for racism.' He (Ibid.: 113) adds that 'there are alternative representational strategies that can confront viewers with images of systemic racism and challenge audiences to consider the legacy of American racism'. *Glow* foregrounds black women's struggles against 'systematic racism' through its depiction of 1980s wrestling personae that simultaneously enact and challenge 'the legacy of American racism'. This articulates the difference in issues faced by black and white women in the USA;

[91] See Wayne (2017: 113).
[92] As noted in Chapter 2, Gray (2015: 14) connects Reaganism, blackness, and television, concluding that 'race and television were the twin pillars that anchored Ronald Reagan's decade.'

a difference that led to the development of intersectional feminism during the 1980s (see Crenshaw 1989). *Glow*'s focus on race bears relevance to contemporary feminist debates surrounding race expressed about the Women's March 2017 and white privilege within the 2016 #MeToo movement against sexual assault.[93] This further connects the contemporary political context with that of the 1980s, suggesting that today's notions of America's heritage have been shaped by the 1980s.

When watching *Glow*, viewers are encouraged to question racial and gender stereotypes as scenes where white men create stereotyped characters are depicted in a blatantly satirical tone. Hence, tone is a significant consideration for any analysis of *Glow*. In light of Pye's (2007: 7) definition of tone, *Glow* is 'not simply about what is being signified in the dramatic material' but instead 'addresses its spectator and implicitly invites us to understand its attitude to its material and the stylistic register it employs.' The presence of Sam and Bash at auditions and rehearsals reminds viewers that the women's wrestling personae have been assigned by two white men who represent the gendered and racial 'matrix of domination' within American society (Collins 2000: 276). When the women try different costumes at Bash's house in episode 1.03, the tone is farcical. Bash enthusiastically points at several women of colour and exclaims: 'You're an Arab!'; 'You're a big black girl!'; 'She's Oriental!'. Chris Lowell's exaggerated vocal delivery suggests that Bash is proudly stereotyping the women. When several women object, he states: 'It's not a judgement. It's just what I and the entire world see with our eyes. And in wrestling that is the foundation on which we need to build.' Bash's flamboyant hand gestures and facial expression are positioned next to a bright spotlight that shines into the camera. This serves to unsettle the viewer to create the same tone of discomfort as that felt when Bash is racially defining the women (fig. 3.31). Here, Bash's role as a well-meaning comic relief character reinforces the embeddedness of racism in the USA because viewers are confronted by the racist standpoints of a character who is usually portrayed as sympathetic and goofy.

Bash's attention to the women's physical features is typical of period drama as it mirrors the 'attention to the "surface" visual qualities of a motif that is afforded special weight and duration' (Vidal 2012a: 11). Conversely, *Glow*'s stylistic contemporariness as a Netflix original contrasts with the surface-level racism and sexism taking place in the diegetic 1980s to such an extent that criticism of the prejudices of this era is implicit. Collins (2000: 69)

[93] Onwuachi-Willig (2018: 107) observes that women of colour were marginalized within the #MeToo movement 'despite the fact that #MeToo began with a woman of color [Tarana Burke]; and despite the fact that women of color are more vulnerable to sexual harassment than white women'.

suggests that 'controlling images [of black women] are designed to make racism, sexism, poverty, and other forms of social injustice appear to be natural, normal, and inevitable parts of everyday life.' *Glow* highlights the outdatedness of having a white man insist that women of colour should perform as stereotypes for special television events. To do this, the programme contextualises its 'controlling images' of black women by implying that these images should not be 'parts of everyday life' (Ibid.), and signposting that these images belong to the diegetic TV programme modelled on the source text *Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling*. In his analysis of a 1980s *Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling* match between the black character Big Bad Mama the Voodoo Queen (Lynn Braxton) and the white character Zelda the Brain (Marie Moore), Sam Migliore (1993: 70) points out that wrestling often features subjective moral commentary about 'certain stereotypes and prejudices that exist in North American society.' He (Ibid.: 70, 71) argues that this is particularly noticeable 'in the media-constructed images professional wrestling presents of peoples of different cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds', which depict white characters as quintessentially American and African American characters as 'exotic, dangerous savages who must be controlled'. As the analysis shows, *Glow*'s meta-textual acknowledgement of its source's racism through its wrestling scenes and Sam and Bash's stereotyping further implies that racism is part of the 1980s' heritage in America today.



fig. 3.31 Bash is enthusiastic about stereotyping women of colour

Black women are distinguished from white women in *Glow* with regards to the opportunities available to them and the economic stereotypes they portray. Benson-Allott (2017: 69) observes that in *Glow* 'unlike the white wrestlers, [women of colour] are assigned

wrestling personae based on reprehensible racial stereotypes.' In her analysis, she does not read Cherry (Sydelle Noel) and Tammé (Kia Stevens), the two recurring black characters this chapter explores in detail, as aware of the racial stereotyping in their performance as wrestlers. For example, Debbie is chosen to headline the diegetic wrestling programme as Liberty Belle without auditioning for the role; a privilege she is granted due to her whiteness. By contrast, even though Cherry is the most skilled wrestler, Sam mentions her lack of acting work 'since 1979' (1.01). Cherry sardonically replies that 'movies get a little white after 1979', expressing her frustration with a white-centric turn in American popular culture during the Reagan era. Indeed, Sam is likely referring to Cherry's acting experience before 1979 due to the popular Blaxploitation films of the 1970s which Novotny Lawrence (2008: 18) describes as follows:

> Blaxploitation films feature a black hero or heroine who is both socially and politically conscious. They also illustrate that blacks are not monolithic […]. The characters are strong because they possess the ability to survive in and navigate the establishment while maintaining their blackness.

Through Cherry's backstory, *Glow* singles out the 1980s as an inhospitable decade towards the African American community that requires black people to learn how to maintain their blackness whilst navigating environments that privilege whiteness.[94] Furthermore, the exchange between Cherry and Sam recalls Feagin's (2014: x) observation that 'racist thought, emotion, and action are structured into the rhythms of everyday life [in the USA]. They are lived, concrete, advantageous for whites, and painful for those who are not white.'

Tammé's performance as the character Welfare Queen similarly interrogates the 'legacy of American racism' (Wayne 2017: 113), especially the stereotypes inherited from the 1980s. The Welfare Queen is 'the caricature of [financial family and childcare aid] recipients that dominated debates about race, gender, poverty, and government responsibility in the 1980s and 1990s' (Kohler-Hausmann 2015: 757). As such, it is one of the most prominent stereotypes of black women identified by Collins (2000: 69). Benson-Allott (2017: 68-69) highlights Tammé's disruptive potential as Welfare Queen but does not engage with this black stereotype's historical ties to 1980s politics or its potential contemporary relevance. According to Dorothy Roberts (2014: 1777), the Welfare Queen's image 'relie[s] on stereotypes of black women […] that were at once sexist and racist and implemented policies targeted specifically at them as the vilified beneficiaries of state largess.' *Glow*'s engagement with this 1980s stereotype exemplifies period dramas' focus on 'how individual lives are circumscribed by

[94] Sims (2006) discusses Blaxpolitation films specifically in the context of their portrayal of strong black women. For a discussion of Blaxploitation, stereotype, and costume, see also Bruzzi (1997: 95-119).

the political, economic, and social constraints of a given historical moment' (Landsberg 2015: 70). Tammé's performance as Welfare Queen presents everyday life in the 1980s as a hostile environment towards African Americans that continues to impact media representations of race.

Glow's self-aware engagement with the Welfare Queen persona is highlighted during the auditions in episode 1.03 when Bash refers to Welfare Queen as 'our masterpiece'. His comment suggests that the most desirable and entertaining wrestling character is the one that offers the highest degree of social satire and performativity, which coincides with Welfare Queen as a curvy, African American, working-class woman. As Collins (2000: 79) notes: 'The image of the welfare mother provides ideological justifications for intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class.' Considering *Glow*'s release in 2017, Bash's fascination with Welfare Queen raises the question as to whether any aspect of Welfare Queen's identity has become accepted since the 1980s. Keller and Ryan (2018: 7) observe a recent 'shift in the political sphere where issues of economic and social justice have arguably re-emerged as flashpoints for […] feminist politics.' Thus *Glow*'s focus on Welfare Queen highlights its interest in interrogating America's racist past in the context of emergent feminist issues of the present. Welfare Queen is costumed and performed according to a 1980s 'caricature' of this stock character (Kohler-Hausmann 2015: 757), and her long, red, artificial nails, shiny, tacky jewellery, and leopard-print leotard reflect associations between black femininity and savage, tasteless, and bestial behaviour (fig. 3.32; explored in detail below). Due to *Glow*'s comedic and self-reflexive presentation of this stereotype, Welfare Queen's costuming resembles the self-conscious citation of black stereotypes in costumes of Blaxploitation movies, as identified by Stella Bruzzi (1997: xviii).

The self-conscious performativity of Welfare Queen relies on a black actor's active participation in the satire on two levels. First, *Glow* has to convincingly portray Tammé's diegetic motivations for playing this character. The programme explores Tammé's feelings in episode 2.04, 'Mother of All Matches', when her son Earnest (Eli Goree) questions her complicity in portraying a racist stereotype. The episode offers meta-textual commentary on Welfare Queen, signalling the creators' awareness of the high degree of mediation necessary for the character to fit into a contemporary programme. As Earnest remarks at the end of the episode, Tammé's performance as Welfare Queen is 'offensive' but this is counteracted when she 'threw a white girl across the ring', illustrating how satire is used to depict systemic racism

and destabilise white supremacy.[95] Second, wrestler-turned-actor Kia Stevens has to perform as Tammé/Welfare Queen in the Netflix programme. In interviews, Stevens emphasises that *Glow*'s creators 'wanted to illustrate the profoundness and the extremeness' of racism in the wrestling and media industries through Welfare Queen (qtd. in Turchiano 2019). Ultimately, *Glow* needs these two layers of mediation in order to portray an exaggeratedly racist 1980s stereotype in a way that is palatable for contemporary audiences.

Tammé's performance of Welfare Queen possesses a directness that encourages a reading of this black stereotype through a contemporary lens. Her long speeches are in stark contrast to the largely silent stereotyped personae of Lebanese terrorist Beirut (played by an Indian American woman) or the Chinese communist soldier Fortune Cookie (played by a Cambodian woman).[96] Whilst these non-black women of colour perform characters that do not reflect their own ethnic identity, Tammé performs an African American stereotype linked to her own identity as a black woman as well as to 1980s social issues.[97] For example, Welfare Queen references the political economy of the 1980s and questions her own construction as a stereotype by the Reagan administration, asking the audience: 'You're afraid of me, right? You believe what President Reagan says, that I'm cheating the system?' (1.10). Her performance frequently incorporates direct address to the diegetic audience, and, by extension, she confronts contemporary viewers' potential prejudices. Welfare Queen's attempts to connect with the non-diegetic audience suggest that the stereotype the character is subjected to in the programme's fictional 1980s world continues to bear relevance today.

Glow's engagement with the 1980s and the black working-class body of Welfare Queen comments on persistent social issues in the USA and reflects the programme's emergent feminist perspective. Keller and Ryan (2018: 10) argue that the after-effects of the 2008 global economic crisis 'can be seen in contemporary media culture', as recent economic shifts in America intersect with emergent feminisms. In episode 1.10 after Debbie (as Liberty Belle) wins the final wrestling match of the night against Ruth (as Zoya), she puts a pink 'GLOW' crown on her head, which Tammé (as Welfare Queen) forcefully takes from her. Welfare Queen justifies her actions by lamenting: 'You've ghettoized my people, trapped us

[95] This dynamic recalls the Bakhtinian carnivalesque in its emphasis on degradation and the grotesque leading to 'a new birth' (Bakhtin 1984: 21). Carnivalesque portrayals of working-class women characterise many popular TV programmes in the USA, most prominently *Roseanne* (ABC, 1988-1997; 2018) and *Married… with Children* (Fox, 1987-1997).

[96] The stereotyping of South and East Asian Americans as 'foreigners' reflects further racist hierarchies in America, which fall outside the scope of this chapter.

[97] The link between African American identity and this stereotype is highlighted in episode 3.05, when the wrestlers swap characters. Carmen (Britney Young) states that she's 'the only one, besides Cherry' who can swap with Tammé because she is 'half black', evidencing how Welfare Queen is defined by her blackness.

in an endless cycle of poverty. Not anymore. Tonight, I take back what I deserve.' Her interruption of Liberty Belle's celebration acquires importance when she calls attention to issues such as ghettoization and poverty which still disproportionately affect the African American community today (see Keegan 2020; Jowallah 2020). Consequently, the economic imbalance between Welfare Queen and Liberty Belle is encapsulated in the racial difference between them. Butler (2013: 50) argues that 'postfeminism requires its nonwhite participants to reject political activism in favor of capitalist consumptions.' As Welfare Queen cannot partake in 'capitalist consumption', she advocates for political issues. Welfare Queen's stance suggests that *Glow* firmly rejects postfeminist sentiment in favour of an emergent feminist attitude.



fig. 3.32 Welfare Queen poses like a Greek goddess after defeating Liberty Belle

After Welfare Queen defeats Liberty Belle, she exclaims: 'America, you have turned your back on me long enough!' She demands inclusion for marginalised aspects of her identity in definitions of the American nation by claiming the crown from all-American Liberty Belle and addressing her statement to 'America'. Her words and actions reflect how in the 1980s 'most blacks did not feel invited to Ronald Reagan's patriotic street festival' and 'resented Reagan for being tone deaf on racial issues' (Troy 2005: 90, 91). As Welfare Queen's wrestling victory proposes the curvy black body as an alternative representation of an American body, it directly challenges Debbie's slim white body which was chosen to represent

America by two white men. According to hooks (1992: 4), for those who turn away from conventional ways of seeing blackness:

> the issue of race and representation is not just a question of critiquing the status quo. It is also about transforming the image, creating alternatives, asking ourselves questions about what types of images subvert, pose critical alternatives, and transform our worldviews.

Welfare Queen's victory over Liberty Belle subverts the racial 'status quo' in the original 1980s *Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling*. This subversion poses 'critical alternatives' and transforms 'our worldviews' regarding televisual representations of race. This is made possible through *Glow*'s affiliation with Netflix; a streaming platform associated with diversity, as Jenner (2018: 163) suggests.

When Welfare Queen defeats Liberty Belle, she establishes her superiority by pinning Liberty Belle to the floor of the wrestling ring and posing for the audience (fig. 3.32). In so doing, she takes on a sculptural posture that evokes a Greek goddess.[98] Such a pose might traditionally be mapped onto a white body (such as Liberty Belle's) as it recurs in images of many white celebrities in classical Hollywood (see Williams 2017). By claiming the pose, Welfare Queen critiques the deification of whiteness in American culture through her blackness. As Sam and Bash's heads are out of the frame, Debbie occupies a small section at the bottom of the frame, and Welfare Queen and the African American referee are positioned at the same level within the shot; unity between the black characters is prioritised so that whiteness is not given space within the frame. This framing centralises narratives about black characters and points to what hooks (1992: 4) describes as a 'critical alternative' to white-centred media. Welfare Queen's victory over Liberty Belle, therefore, is emblematic of the subversion of America's white racial frame, as seen in the recent Black Lives Matter protests.

Collins (2000: 222-223) describes how black communities have tended to rely on a strong collective black identity and 'group survival' as a defence against white supremacy. In the episode 'Live Studio Audience' (1.07), *Glow* engages with collective black action against systemic racism when Tammé and Cherry team up to wrestle against characters portraying the white supremacist group Ku Klux Klan (KKK). In a decision that mirrors 1980s racial dynamics of *Glow*'s source text, Sam decides that Cherry and Tammé should lose against Dawn (Rebekka Johnson) and Stacey (Kimmy Gatewood), two white women. *Glow*'s focus on events behind the scenes, however, foregrounds the problematic 'legacy of American

[98] Compare, for instance, the statue of Athena Parthenos by Antiochus (first century BC) in the style of Phidias, exhibited at the Palazzo Altemps (Rome, Italy).

racism' (as per Wayne 2017: 113). Indeed, when Tammé tells Cherry that they're 'a team now', Cherry sarcastically replies '[I] wonder why'. Cherry's knowing tone, raised eyebrow, and pursed lips convey her awareness of race-based discrimination in the 1980s, as do her comments on the whiteness of films 'after 1979' in episode 1.01. Her sarcastic comments, delivered almost straight into the camera, function as gestures towards a contemporary audience whose awareness of issues surrounding race throughout American history might mirror Cherry's. To challenge the dynamics between black and white characters, Cherry suggests that Dawn and Stacey should perform as members of the KKK because she does not want to play a villain. She tells Tammé: '[if] we do my version, we're empowered.' Thus Cherry and Tammé's fight against the KKK quite literally represents Melissa Harris-Perry's (2011: 4) observation that 'black women have always had to wrestle with derogatory assumptions about their character and identity'. Reinforcing the persistence of this prejudice, the Trump administration has been investigated in the press in relation to white supremacy and racism (see Darby 2018; Blow 2017). White supremacist 'Unite the Right' marches have become increasingly common during the late 2010s, such as the rally at Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017 (see Fausset and Feuer 2017). As the Women's March 2017 happened just seven months before the rally at Charlottesville, these white supremacist marches can be read as a rejection of emergent feminisms and related 'anti-racist activism', outlined by Keller and Ryan (2018: 10). Recent years have also seen an increase in black activism to raise awareness about the persistent struggles of African Americans in the USA (e.g. Black Lives Matter; see Rickford 2015; Taylor 2016). In particular, social media campaigns such as #SayHerName, which advocates for black female victims of police brutality, have drawn attention to the multiply marginalised position of black women in American society.[99]

The performance and costuming of the KKK match illustrate some white women's difficulty to understand, empathise with, and support black women's fight for equality. Just before the match, Dawn and Stacey are wearing white robes but they have not yet put on the unmistakable cone shaped KKK hoods. Their body language and discussion reveal that they are not entirely comfortable performing as racists: Dawn paces up and down a corridor, both women's speech is unnaturally staggered, and they have nervous ticks. Stacey attempts to calm Dawn by shifting the responsibility for the match onto Cherry and Tammé, and Dawn quickly accepts Stacey's disavowal of accountability:

STACEY: It's not racist if the black girls came up with the idea, right?
DAWN: Yes. It was their idea. So, it's not us, it's them.

[99] For studies of the #SayHerName movement, see McMurtry-Chubb (2016) and Battle (2016).

Their exchange reveals how an 'us' and 'them' binary between white and black women re-establishes racial segregation on the level of language. Dawn and Stacey's misunderstanding of white culpability for racism highlights the lack of responsibility that many white people have taken regarding Civil Rights issues. Breines (2006: 4) explores how white feminists, in particular, 'believed that there could be a universal sisterhood, that black women would join their movement.' Many white women continue to ignore the intersectional relevance of racism to the feminist movement so that African Americans stand alone in their fight for racial equality. This is evident both in Dawn and Stacey's discussion and the exclusion of black women's voices from the Women's March 2017. Black women's collective fight against white supremacy in *Glow* 1.07 reflects this persistent feminist and political context as the programme engages with resonances between the 1980s and today.

None of the characters explicitly mention the KKK until the discussion between Dawn and Stacey. It seems shocking, therefore, when the two white women put on KKK hoods (fig. 3.33). The effect of this shock is enhanced by Dawn and Stacey's contrasting cartoonish characterisation as elderly wrestling women with walking frames called the Beat-down Biddies. Their alternate roles as members of the KKK replaces comedy with absurdity. This resembles the satirical exaggeration of Bash's racial stereotyping in episode 1.03 and can also be linked to the farcicality of joining the American community via circumcision in *Red Oaks* 2.04 (discussed in Chapter 2). The gradual revelation of the KKK roles represents Dawn and Stacey's uncertainty about playing white supremacists. Their reluctance to take on this role leaves the audience unsure as to whether the performance will take place. It is only when they put on the KKK hoods that the audience understands their trepidation. The effect of the hoods is created by the programme's balancing of spectacle with moments of realism, as Vidal suggests when discussing period drama (2012a: 11). A strong historical spectacle is created through the hoods which remind viewers of 'the legacy of American racism' (Wayne 2017: 113). At the same time, the hoods function realistically as they are made from pillowcases with holes cut for the eyes. Moreover, the viewer cans see that the cotton is creased, and the hoods have a seam running down their centre. The home-made quality of Dawn and Stacey's KKK hoods, emblematic of white supremacy and the oppression of African Americans, functions as an unsettling counterpoint to Carrie's colourful and fun home-made purse in *TCD*. Importantly, both items connect viewers with the American past via historical signposts as their shared DIY materiality projects the realness of the feminist issues that they represent,

even if these emergent feminist and postfeminist issues are vastly different when incorporated into their perspectives on race.



fig. 3.33 Dawn and Stacey in Ku Klux Klan hoods

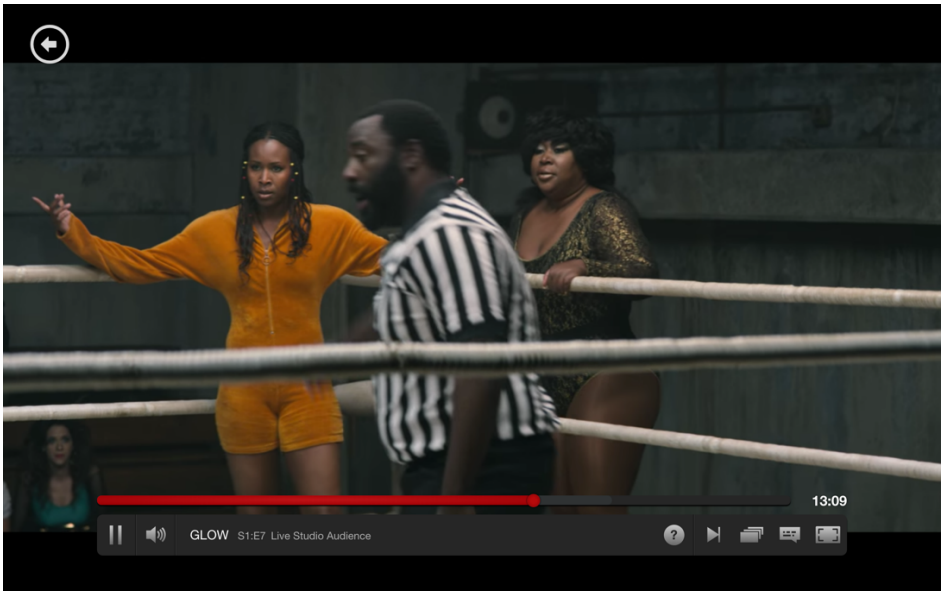


fig. 3.34 Actors' placement in the mise-en-scéne symbolises the black community's collective fight against white supremacy

In episode 1.07, Dawn and Stacey's unexpected entrance into the wrestling ring as KKK members prompts Sam to exclaim: 'Ladies and Gentlemen, this is some inappropriate social satire!' This remark exemplifies the programme's self-reflexive interrogation of its own 'social satire' through its exaggerated focus on racist stereotypes such as Welfare Queen or the hip-hop gangster Junkchain played by Cherry. During the KKK sequence, several shots

group Welfare Queen, Junkchain, and the African American referee together to represent the collective black responsibility which Collins (2000: 222-223) links to the fight against systemic racism (fig. 3.34). Similar to the shot composition during Welfare Queen's defeat of Liberty Belle in figure 3.32, figure 3.34 frames every African American character's head at the same level, implying their unity when confronted with white supremacy. *Glow* uses a socially satirical tone to address the racist stereotyping of black women in the 1980s. In so doing, the programme suggests that black bodies can be all-American and encourages reflection on the importance of black women's lives in America. Furthermore, *Glow*'s meta-textual engagement with race and feminism firmly establishes its contemporary approach to reconstructing the 1980s.

Glow's depiction of racial tensions and the inequalities between black and white Americans is emblematic of television's ability to inform contemporary conceptions of the heritage of American racism. McCrisken and Pepper (2005: 42; see Literature Review) argue that media depictions of America's racist history can speak to 'the changed and changing nature of cultural and economic power' in order to require viewers 'to develop a new critical idiom to come to terms with concepts such as race, racism, national identity and multiculturalism'. In light of these claims, it is possible to read *Glow*'s portrayal of Tammé and Cherry throughout season 1 as 'develop[ing] a new critical idiom' about black female identity for contemporary Netflix viewers who may have been exposed to social media campaigns such as #SayHerName. By contrast, *TCD*'s depiction of Larissa operates from a strict postfeminist framework that is generally preoccupied with developing white identity and prioritises the 'cultural and economic power' (Ibid.) of capitalism.

The Double Bind of Black Postfeminism

Throughout the 2010s, Netflix 'recalibrat[ed] towards diversity' (Jenner 2018: 163), producing content with multiracial casts, including *Glow*, *Orange is the New Black* (2013-2018), and *Sense8* (2015-2018). By the mid- to late-2010s, such promotion of diversity can also be detected on network TV, exemplified to varying degrees by ABC's *Black-ish* (2014-) and *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014-2020), NBC's *Superstore* (2015-), and The CW's *Jane the Virgin* (2014-2019). In the early 2010s, most American network programmes still had white protagonists because the ostensibly post-racial cultural atmosphere of the Obama

era[100] did not yet necessitate that networks engage with racial tensions in the USA.[101] This is reflected in *TCD*'s perspective on the 1980s, having aired between 2012 and 2014, and its emphasis on Carrie and the portrayal of postfeminist consumption as a fun activity that viewers should imitate. However, the programme's depiction of white consumerism is complicated by the portrayal of Larissa, a black British woman. In her work on women of colour within postfeminist systems, Butler (2013: 50) posits that:

> on the one hand, [postfeminism] allows nonwhite women to participate in its deployment and enjoy its rewards, albeit in narrowly circumscribed ways; on the other, it works to conceal the underlying power relations that reproduce hegemonic ideas about race, gender, sexuality, and class.

Butler's (Ibid.) description of this binary as a 'double-edged sword' supports a reading of Larissa through seasons 1 and 2 of *TCD*. In season 1, she enjoys some consumerist 'rewards' pertaining to postfeminist ideals. In season 2, Larissa is marginalised through *TCD*'s narrative that largely subscribes to 'hegemonic ideas about race, gender, sexuality, and class.' Larissa's experiences and character development evidence how the 'underlying power relations' (Ibid.) of postfeminism shape *TCD*'s racial politics and its approach towards the 1980s.

Within this postfeminist frame, the representation of Larissa highlights but does not challenge historical or present-day racial hierarchies in the USA. In light of the imperative, discussed in the introduction to this chapter, to 'counter' the scholarly trend of 'catching patriarchy at its old tricks' in feminist media analysis (Johnson 2007: 16), the following reading of Larissa's positionality within *TCD* considers how historical and industrial circumstances shape her portrayal, rather than simply 'catching' white supremacy 'at its old tricks' (Ibid.). Connections between Larissa, black feminist thought (especially hooks' [1992] work), and postfeminist theory operate tacitly. This suggests that if a critique of America's historical racial status quo takes place, this is only inferred by *TCD*'s viewers through a critical evaluation of the underlying power dynamics between Carrie and Larissa. As a network programme from the early 2010s, *TCD* makes room for viewers' indirect engagement with 'the legacy of American racism' (Wayne 2017: 113) during and since the 1980s. It is only three years after *TCD*'s ending that a programme such as *Glow* unveils these issues, bringing

[100] Roediger (2008: 213) states: 'we hear often that race is […] eliminated by symbolic advances, demographic change, and private choice, if not by structual transformations or political struggles. Nowhere is this line of argument more forcefully, or more contradictorily, made than in the analyses of Barack Obama's 2008 campaign for US president.'

[101] The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) media report for the 2012-2013 television season in the USA found that: 'Ethnic diversity on primetime […] remains unbalanced, as once again 78% of regular broadcast characters are White, while 12% are Black' (GLAAD Media Institute 2013: 5).

black feminist debates to the surface of its reconstruction of the 1980s. Nevertheless, through the analysis of Larissa, one can begin to understand the 'double-edged sword' (Butler 2013: 50) that successful black women face, not only within postfeminist systems but also within America more broadly.

Larissa's race (black) and national identity (British) are immediately apparent in episode 1.01 when she walks up to Carrie in the Century21 department store and enthusiastically exclaims in a British accent, 'Your bag!' Her race and nationality doubly distance her from the hegemonic American identity marked by whiteness that Carrie in *TCD* and Debbie in *Glow* represent. Unlike *Glow*'s Cherry and Tammé, however, Larissa's Britishness removes her from a black American identity, so that *TCD* is able to bypass African American history and culture. Moreover, she does not fight systemic oppression as her blackness is never explicitly acknowledged. Larissa, therefore, occupies a unique position within an American period drama: she neither belongs to the past, as her Britishness sidesteps black American history, nor to the present, as the programme's lack of engagement with her blackness limits the extent to which her character can reflect contemporary social issues.

One of the ways in which Larissa's representation does connect to the 1980s is through her job as a fashion magazine editor and the simultaneous othering of her black body as exotic and different to that of the show's all-American protagonist, Carrie. As African American news anchor Carole Simpson states in the 1989 television documentary 'Black in White America' (ABC, 1989 [B_15279]):

> Black America is moving towards two separate and unequal societies: the blacks who have made it and those who have not. And even if some of us do seem to be living the American dream, racism is inescapable. We still carry the burden of color.

Simpson's observation applies to Larissa's experience as a successful black woman living in 1980s America who is nonetheless othered. This speaks to the persistent double bind of upward mobility and racism that many black people face. Moreover, in the context of 1980s 'hierarchies of privilege' that favour whiteness (Whelehan 1995: 136), it is historically relevant that a successful black woman such as Larissa does not directly engage with political issues surrounding race and happily mentors a privileged white teenager (a contrast to the collective anti-racist action taken by African American women in *Glow*). The lack of protestation supports *TCD*'s postfeminist perspective, so that Larissa is only allowed to participate in neoliberal society 'in narrowly circumscribed ways' (Butler 2013: 50). Hence, Larissa's only form of protest is through her defiance of traditional notions of femininity, racial stereotype, and consumerism. Whilst Carrie's fashion sense is symbolised by her

transformation of her late mother's purse, indicating an intimate engagement with postfeminist consumer culture, Larissa's job as a fashion editor suggests that her relationship to neoliberal consumerism is corporate and disrupts the status quo. According to hooks (1992: 28), by 1992 the world of fashion had 'come to understand that selling products is heightened by the exploitation of Otherness.' As a black woman, Larissa's senior position in the 1980s fashion industry establishes a degree of defiance in its engagement with American history, blackness, and postfeminism.

Mimi White (1992: 163) suggests that every analytical reading should be 'interested in the latent possibility of alternative viewpoints erupting' in texts. In line with White, Larissa's presence within the postfeminist world of *TCD* encourages 'alternative viewpoints' on race in the 1980s. For example, *TCD* often portrays Larissa according to well-worn stereotypes such as the overly sexual black woman, or Jezebel, described by Collins (2000: 83) as 'at best inappropriate and, at worst, insatiable.' When she meets Carrie in episode 1.01, Larissa is wearing a neon green leopard-print top, and a few seconds later she is shown in a leopard-print bra inside Centruy21's dressing room (fig. 3.35). Much like Welfare Queen, this immediately associates Larissa with untamed sexuality and animalistic behaviour. In contrast to *Glow*, this scene lacks the satirical tone or meta-textual discussion of Reaganite race-relations, so that the portrayal of Larissa is meeker in its subversion of racial stereotypes. When Carrie appears behind Larissa who is in her bra (fig. 3.36), the shot composition and actors' performance suggest that Larissa will have a negative influence on Carrie. A hypersexualized Larissa dominates the front plane of the frame with a mischievous grin on her face, whilst a naïve Carrie stares at her with excitement from the depth of the shot. Thus figure 3.36 presents the negative stereotype of a dangerous foreigner who might corrupt white Americans.

This mise-en-scène sets up 'a veritable segregation within the diagesis [*sic*.]' between black and white women; a characteristic that Sharon Ross (2004: 143) links to American teen TV programmes more broadly, such as *Felicity* (The WB, 1998-2002). *Felicity* aired on The WB, a precursor of The CW, suggesting patterns in the ways in which this network has historically dealt with the representation of race relations. The portrayal of Larissa in particular closely relates to the network's history, but only connects with the history of the 1980s in limited ways. Following Vidal's (2012b: 4) assertion that the heritage film has become 'more adventurous in its continuous incorporation of a popular historical iconography informed not only by literature or painting, but also by fashion, popular music and television', Larissa's depiction relies on popular *postfeminist* iconography, influenced by both *SATC* and teen

dramas of the late 1990s and 2000s on The WB and later The CW, but only incorporates 'popular historical iconography' (Ibid.) to the extent that these maintain the 'hierarchies of privilege' (Whelehan 1995: 136) between white and black women. For instance, in the episode 'Fright Night' (1.04), Larissa dresses in a heavily feathered peacock costume for Halloween, whilst Carrie dresses as Princess Diana on her wedding day. Although Larissa's costume alludes to the wealth and vanity associated with the 1980s, it also perpetuates 'racist notions that black people were more akin to animals than other humans' (hooks 1992: 62). Carrie's citation of a popular and, crucially, white 1980s icon positions Larissa's blackness outside of *TCD*'s engagement with popular signposts of the 1980s.[102] Moreover, as Princess Diana was British, Carrie's costuming suggests that Larissa is othered from the 'popular historical iconography' (Vidal 2012b: 4) of the 1980s both in her native and adopted home.



fig. 3.35 Larissa in a leopard-print bra

[102] As discussed above, Madonna, another white celebrity, is also an important signpost of the 1980s in *TCD*.



fig. 3.36 Larissa's mischievous smile invites viewers to contemplate her black postfeminism

In episode 1.03, 'Read Before Use', Carrie points out Larissa's difference by telling her, 'Your life is just so exotic!' to which Larissa deviously replies, 'You mean dirty.' Carrie's white perspective on Larissa's 'exotic' lifestyle mobilises many racial stereotypes that black women have been subjected to in Western culture. Amidst these associations between Larissa and racial stereotypes, her black, British, bisexual body (another marginalising identity factor) is often presented as a dangerous force of corruption for Carrie, who epitomises whiteness and, at this stage, virginity.[103] This contrast is highlighted when Larissa enlists Carrie to help her steal a dress from Century21 immediately after they first meet, and when Carrie states 'I might have just lost my innocence' at the end of episode 1.01 after attending her first Manhattan party with Larissa. Carrie's adoration of Larissa's 'exotic' and worldly attitude mirrors how, according to hooks (1992: 157), many white 1980s celebrities like Madonna 'publicly name their interest in, and appropriation of, black culture as yet another sign of their radical chic.' Hence, from the white postfeminist perspective symbolised by Carrie (who imitates Madonna; as above), when Larissa steals from the department store, she appears as a 'radical chic' postfeminist consumer.

[103] Though detailed exploration of Larissa's bisexuality falls outside the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting here that when she has sex with another woman in episode 2.06 the scene is framed as solely titillation for her white boyfriend via the presence of a video camera next to the bed. This coincides with *TCD*'s placement of each marginalised element of Larissa's identity within a normative hierarchy of race and sexuality.

Conversely, figures 3.35 and 3.36 highlight that 'chameleonic identity play' can be useful for black women who want to enter postfeminist spaces (Joseph 2009: 243). The central placement of Larissa's mirror image in the shot pictured in figure 3.35 implies that the animalistic sexuality symbolised by her leopard-print bra is a hegemonically conceived notion of black women, rather than a genuine character trait. During the scene, Larissa confidently touches her bra straps whilst talking to Carrie, whom she just met. She is not embarrassed by her body and has embraced her sexuality. By looking at herself in the mirror, Larissa engages in the postfeminist process of turning 'sexual objectification to sexual subjectification' (Butler 2013: 44). As a black woman, her participation in postfeminism is innately defiant. In figure 3.36, Larissa looks at Carrie through the mirror and gazes partially into the camera and, by extension, at the viewer. Larissa's confidence in looking towards the audience positions viewers along the 'evaluative' axis of point of view which, according to Pye (2000: 11), encourages 'a more complex and problematic view of the nature of and relationship between the competing values dramatized in the narrative.' It is therefore possible to interpret Larissa's mischievous smile as a knowing invitation to the audience to align with more inclusive views on race than with the postfeminist world of *TCD*.

Larissa's senior role as a magazine editor and the liberating influence she has over Carrie by showing her a sex-positive attitude also establish a degree of positivity for her presence as a black woman within the reconstructed 1980s. Carrie is subtly present on the right edge of the frame that shows Larissa in her bra (fig. 3.35). This foreshadows how she is going to learn from Larissa, who dominates the frame, about womanhood. In her work on black postfeminism and the supermodel Tyra Banks, Ralina L. Joseph (2009: 24) argues that 'resistant possibilities [towards racial hierarchies] do surface in popular culture, even in commercial popular culture' and therefore 'sometimes some version of the truth is "exposed".' Larissa's blackness in *TCD* season 1 can be read as both exemplary of and, to some extent, resistant to postfeminist racial hierarchies in popular culture. This double-edged sword was typical of black success in the 1980s, when some African Americans were able to succeed but could not escape the white racial frame of American society. As the Black Lives Matter movement evidences, the white racial frame is still intact in 2010s America, regardless of the successful election and re-election campaigns of a biracial president in 2008 and 2012, the time period of *TCD*'s production and broadcast.

As Carrie matures in season 2, *TCD*'s timeline and representational practices move even closer to those of *SATC*, and, as a result, the programme's relevance to contemporary social issues becomes increasingly out of date. In episode 2.01, 'Win Some, Lose Some', *TCD*

noticeably shifts its narrative and character development further towards the white postfeminism of the source text. As the episode title suggests, season 2 of *TCD* 'wins' Samantha Jones (Linsey Gort), a white main character from *SATC* who meets Carrie in this episode, and 'loses' any attempt to portray Larissa as a disruptive black character in the programme's 1980s world.[104] Larissa does not appear at all in episode 2.01 and the rest of season 2 similarly prioritises Carrie's first sexual experience and her budding friendship with Samantha (both integral to *SATC*). Ross (2004: 143) observes how the 'segregation' of white and black characters in *Felicity* results in the erasure and death of Elena (Tangi Miller), one of the only African Americans in the programme. Similarly, Moseley (2015: 40) argues that 'working-class, non-white and homosexual characters [are] rapidly punished or expelled from the narrative' in another popular teen drama, *The OC* (Fox, 2003-2007). Larissa's narrative arc develops in a similar vein, evidencing how *TCD*'s points of reference are *SATC*'s white postfeminist perspective and further examples of late 1990s and 2000s postfeminist popular culture. As a result, the programme's reconstruction of the 1980s does not entirely align with the socio-political context of the early 2010s which saw the presidency of America's first mixed-race president (see Roedinger 2008: 213). In season 2, *TCD*'s postfeminist outlook intensifies as white privilege is re-asserted via Samantha, a bouncer at a bar who is unable to afford her rent. Though Samantha is not the positive role model for Carrie that Larissa was, she is presented as a more significant person to Carrie due to the source text's postfeminist narrative precedent. More specifically, as *SATC* does not feature any significant friendships between Carrie and black women, *TCD*'s portrayal of a black mentor's influence on teenage Carrie is always-already trivialised.

During episode 2.01, Carrie lives in Larissa's extravagant Manhattan apartment when Larissa is away. This gives Carrie a sense of personal freedom and deepens her attachment to 'the city' (of *Sex and the City*). Larissa's marginalisation (she is replaced by Samantha) means that Carrie loses a nurturing mentor, but, through Larissa's absence, gains independence and personal growth. Carrie's inhabiting of Larissa's apartment conveys her 'radical chic' (hooks 1992: 157) attitude towards race as she engages with Larissa's satin sheets, zebra-print settee, and green hammock. In and of themselves, these items reinforce Larissa's depiction as a sexual (satin) and exotic (zebra-print, hammock) other.[105] Yet, Larissa's othered blackness is useful

[104] In *SATC*, Samantha is portrayed by Kim Cattrall.

[105] Here, the hammock brings to mind the Colonial exploitation of indigenous peoples. The word comes from Arawak, the language of a group of indigenous peoples in South America and the Caribbean. As Christopher Columbus (2005 [1893]: 67) wrote in his journal during his first voyage: 'That day many canoes came to the ships, to barter with cotton threads and the nets in which they [indigenous peoples] sleep, called *hamacas*.'

to Carrie, who appears sophisticated in front of her white friends who visit her. The fact that Carrie is only able to occupy the apartment when Larissa is away positions *TCD* alongside similar mainstream representations of race and blackness that 'support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of all black people' (hooks 1992: 2).

Larissa's place within the reconstructed 1980s becomes further destabilised as the white postfeminist environment of the 1990s and 2000s seeps into *TCD*'s diegesis via the increasing prominence of Samantha. Larissa's blackness is exploited when Samantha, who moves into her apartment with Carrie for free, dismissively remarks that Larissa's belongings are 'a lot of crap' (2.01). The racial slur implicit in Samantha's remark is intensified as she is wearing a crop top with the face of a tiger printed on it (fig. 3.37). Dressing Samantha in animal print, previously associated with Larissa's black identity through her leopard-print bra, reflects Samantha's overt sexuality (already established in *SATC*) whilst sidestepping the bestial stereotype that the same imagery connotes for a black woman. Indeed, animal print is now portrayed as a bold fashion choice for a sexually liberated white woman, the *non plus ultra* of postfeminism. At the same time, Samantha is criticising Larissa's expensive décor, reflected by Lindsey Gort's cocky body language in figure 3.37 when she stands in front of Larissa's hammock. Through this visual and narrative centring of Samantha, Larissa's exoticized black identity is rejected as subaltern. Larissa's wealth, the 'rewards' that she has gained from postfeminist consumer culture, are undermined by the 'power relations that reproduce hegemonic ideas about race' within postfeminist systems (Butler 2013: 50).



fig. 3.37 Samantha dismisses Larissa's belongings as 'crap'

The fact that Larissa stands apart from the other characters in *TCD* and from the 1980s community in which the programme is set encourages viewer engagement with black feminism. As the skin-bleaching of 1980s pop star Michael Jackson and the *Saturday Night Live* sketch 'White Like Me' (discussed in Chapter 2) evidence, having black skin in 1980s America forms part of a politically contentious issue. *TCD* includes moments when Larissa as an influential magazine editor engages critically with the programme's postfeminist environment, as well as moments when she is stereotyped as an exotic Jezebel whose characterisation is reduced to other. In contrast to *Glow*, which uses satire to undermine the predominance of racial stereotyping in 1980s American society, the analysis shows that *TCD* operates from the still predominantly postfeminist perspective of American media in the early 2010s.

Conclusion: Feminism and Racism as Heritage

The range of feminist discourses throughout recent history have significant bearing on contemporary memories of the 1980s. As the television programmes discussed and referred to in this chapter demonstrate, discourses have rapidly shifted since the 1980s and continue to take new forms every day. This chapter's analysis of vastly different feminist perspectives taken by two programmes from the 2010s that reconstruct the 1980s illustrates the extent to which contemporary standpoints impact the remediation of the past. This evidences how historical television programmes can contribute to feminist historiography as they 'chronicle and archive' (Luckett 2017: 16) women's lives. Importantly, the five-year gap between *TCD*'s and *Glow*'s productions creates a dissimilarity in their approaches towards the same historical period, which is further inflected by each programme's distribution context. In the early 2010s, *TCD* targeted The CW's young female viewers and encouraged them to participate in postfeminist consumerism, mirroring the representational practices of its source text (*SATC*) regarding 'hierarchies of privilege' (Whelehan 1995: 136) between white and black women. By contrast, *Glow*'s multiracial ensemble cast and its engagement with race-based inequality reflects Netflix's aim to diversify its original content (as per Jenner 2018: 163), whilst the programme's satirical portrayal of racism speaks to emergent feminist activism in the late 2010s. Both programmes position women within the mise-en-scène to present the privileges and stereotyping that white and black women experience in the USA until today. *TCD* portrays the 1980s as a chic neoliberal playground for white women like Carrie, which reinforces the white racial frame in the USA (as per Feagin 2010). Though only created five years later,

Glow's satirical humour emphasises social injustices to stress that a white racial frame has historically shaped media portrayals of African American women. Thus each programme uses the 1980s as a reference point to convey what Bob Bland describes as 'the struggle that women of color face' (qtd. in Tolentino 2017), albeit in dissimilar ways.

Whilst *TCD* and *Glow* have different feminist attitudes, they rely on similar stylistic practices of television and period drama to tell their stories, including nuanced exploration of identity politics, 'fragments and details' (Vidal 2012a: 11), and character development. These programmes exemplify Monk's (2002: 188) claim that media engagement with heritage depends on mise-en-scène as well as the 'pleasures of narrative, character, performance, humour, sexuality and so on.' *TCD*'s and *Glow*'s contrasting relationship with their television source texts evidences the differences between representations of gender and race in the 1980s and today, as well as between the early and late 2010s. *TCD*'s dependence upon the precedent set by *SATC* in the late 1990s and early 2000s informs its portrayal of the 1980s so that the primary cultural and political resonance between the 1980s and the 2010s is a postfeminist concern with white women's independence. *Glow*'s more critical reference to its source text's (*Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling*) misogyny and racism highlights the conservative legacy of 1980s media, making visible the connections between the Reagan and Trump eras. The analysis of these connections answers the thesis' first research question. Conflicting ideas about feminism and racism constitute part of the 1980s' heritage, which this chapter, in response to the second research question, reads as multifaceted with regards to gender and racial politics.

The representation of feminist and race-related concerns in *TCD* and *Glow* speaks to fast-changing debates about women's role in American society and the privileged social position of whites. The contemporary sentiment's impact upon a depiction of the past, characteristic of remediations of heritage, is not only narrative but, as this chapter suggests, is also stylistic. In its detailed outline of the ways in which industrial and audiovisual practices of broadcast networks and streaming services influence the portrayal of the 1980s, the chapter engages with the third research question and argues that ideological and aesthetic differences between 1980s and 2010s television programmes affect the representation of American heritage. Whilst *Glow*'s feminist historical enquiry diverges from *TCD*'s neoliberal attitude towards the 1980s, both programmes display varying degrees of intentionality. The analysis of their style and address to viewers evidences how the remediation of the 1980s is inflected by the political and industrial circumstances of each programme's contemporary production context. The next chapter picks up on the social issues raised in this chapter (as well as in

Chapter 2) pertaining to conservative and progressive conceptions of history and the retrospective inclusion of underrepresented groups in depictions of the past. Chapter 4 explores how 1980s television style, including depictions of sexuality and MTV's widely popular aesthetic practices, has influenced contemporary television. It analyses the interplay between 1980s standard-definition and today's high-definition television images with reference to changing representational practices surrounding the LGBTQ community on American TV.

CHAPTER 4

Feel It *on* the Air Tonight: Sensory Affect, Sexuality, and the MTV Aesthetics of the 1980s

> 'Announcing the latest achievement in home entertainment.
> The power of sight: video. The power of sound: MTV. Music television.'
> 'First hour of MTV' 1981 (T85_0496)

In February 2017 Karl Vick reported for *Time* magazine on 'The Emotional Divide of Trump's Presidency'. Vick (2017) notes that Trump's supporters reacted to the 2016 election with satisfaction and believed that America had become a better place. Meanwhile, Democratic voters reported high levels of anxiety about the future of the country. Vick observes that the contradictory experiences of different voters suggest how 'reality is subjective. Especially since Election Day.' He goes on to discuss the worries of Trump's opponents, stating that 'the threat of rollbacks on nondiscrimination protections […] spread fear among the LGBTQ community.' Arising out of Vick's comments about the considerable emotional divisions of the Trump era, including the fears of the LGBTQ community, this chapter explores how several contemporary programmes reconstruct 1980s America by facilitating emotional engagement with the past through sensations including sight, sound, and predominantly touch.

Halt and Catch Fire (AMC, 2014-2018), hereafter *HaCF*, a drama about the computer industry in the 1980s, episode 3.04 of the dystopian science fiction series *Black Mirror* entitled 'San Junipero' (Channel 4, 2011-2014; Netflix, 2016-), and *The Americans* (FX, 2013-2018) create an emotional connection between contemporary viewers and the 1980s by heightening the sensory affect of the past through sequences that foreground intimate touch, televisual style, and pop music.[106] At times, this constructs a nostalgic experience; however, in scenes that deal with the 1980s AIDS crisis feelings of empathy, rather than nostalgia, are evoked.[107] Thompson (2007: 26) states that 'anxieties about the human body and its place in a society increasingly dominated by science and technology spill out into American culture during the

[106] *Black Mirror* is an anthology series with episodes that have standalone narratives. This chapter refers to *Black Mirror* episode 3.04 by its title 'San Junipero'.

[107] AIDS and HIV were prominent discussion points in conservative 1980s political rhetoric in America (see Thompson 2007: 21). The virus was initially labelled a 'gay disease' (Netzhammer and Shamp 1994: 103). Usually transmitted via bodily fluids during sexual intercourse, intravenous drug use, or blood transfusion, today the AIDS crisis is often used to signpost 1980s America.

1980s.' Comparably, anxieties about the loss of human connection due to the adoption of digital and virtual reality (VR) technologies in contemporary America (see Carew 2016; Lemma 2017) influence people's standpoints about the recent, pre-digital, past. By immersing viewers in the 1980s, *HaCF*, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero' play out anxieties relating to sexuality, the quickly changing media landscape, and the role of nostalgia in American society.

The 1980s and the 2010s were both turbulent decades during which issues relating to the LGBTQ community were politicised. Hence, the analysis of changes to the lives of LGBTQ people since the 1980s, which have significantly transformed media portrayals of the LGBTQ community, answers the thesis' first research question. Echoes of the hostile political climate against the LGBTQ community during the 1980s, explored earlier in Chapter 2's analysis of *Red Oaks*, continue to permeate American society. Gay marriage only became legal across the USA in 2015, under the Obama administration, and the Trump administration has since threatened LGBTQ rights in multiple ways, reflecting the 'fears' of Trump's opponents discussed by Vick (2017).[108] Contemporary television programmes set in the 1980s can, therefore, draw attention to LGBTQ stories throughout American history. Regarding the programmes examined in this chapter, it is worth noting that *HaCF* first aired in 2014, before the election of Trump. Its sensory engagement with bisexuality and AIDS is evidence of broader cultural shifts in the USA throughout the 2010s and not simply a response to the Trump era.[109] Similarly, 'San Junipero' was released in October 2016, a month before Trump's election. As such, its focus on a lesbian love story exemplifies the cultural and political climate that led to the emotional divisions of the Trump era.

The close textual analysis of haptic, sensory affect and MTV (Music Television) style throughout this chapter develops the thesis' overarching argument, in response to the third research question, that medium specific features of television (such as televisuality, television history, and the foregrounding of intimacy) facilitate the reconstruction of the 1980s' cultural heritage. Landsberg (2015: 69) suggests that TV programmes set in the past 'have the capacity to orchestrate a complex mode of address (visual, aural, even tactile).' Her claims prove the necessity of this chapter's focus on tactile and aural engagement with the 1980s in order to investigate how and why a sensory 'mode of address' is central to contemporary reconstructions of the decade's heritage, engaging with the second research question. These

[108] For example, the Trump administration has advocated to legalise anti-LGBTQ discrimination in the workplace (see de la Garza 2019).
[109] Such gradual changes are also reflected by the shift in feminist perspective between the productions of *The Carrie Diaries* and *Glow*, discussed in Chapter 3.

reconstructions are not limited to explicit period signifiers such as political events or dress style (discussed elsewhere) but are also achieved through the construction of an immersive audiovisual experience. *HaCF*, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero' epitomise Vidal's (2012b: 4) claim that heritage films and television programmes have become 'more political' through a 'preference of emotional histories' and 'more adventurous' through the 'continuous incorporation of a popular historical iconography.' The sensory portrayal of the past in these programmes references the iconography of 1980s television in order to facilitate contemporary viewers' engagement with the political and emotional history of the United States.

When contemporary programmes self-consciously foreground style in order to evoke sensory engagement with the 1980s, they call upon established notions of televisuality which started to saturate American TV during the 1980s (see Caldwell 1995: 4-5). The Introduction of the thesis outlines the significance of Caldwell's work on televisuality to the methodology of this study. Caldwell (1995: 4, 6) identifies various characteristics of 1980s televisuality, including an 'aesthetic based on an extreme self-consciousness of style' and the 'structural inversion' between narrative content and style. These aspects of televisuality are central to this chapter as it explores the influence of the audiovisual, and televisual, traditions of 1980s depictions of sexuality, AIDS, and the MTV music video on reconstructions of this era. Since the 1980s, television production and distribution technologies have undergone radical changes (such as digital recording, high-definition screens, and streaming). Thus recent depictions of the 1980s look necessarily (and visibly) different from programmes of the past, resulting in a complex stylistic and musical interplay between televisual conventions of the 1980s and contemporary television cultures in the USA.[110]

To explore these issues, the chapter examines the portrayal of intimacy and the focus on touch in sex scenes from *HaCF*, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero'. The evocation of haptic sensory affect via close-ups of hands, lips, and lighting design in these scenes strives to create an embodied connection between contemporary viewers and the 1980s. Thus bodily connection relates more broadly to temporal connection between audiences today and the recent past. The programmes engage with the complex history of depicting sex and sexuality on 1980s television whilst representing female heterosexual pleasure (*HaCF* and *The Americans*) and lesbian sex ('San Junipero') in ways that reflect sociocultural attitudes and

[110] As noted in Chapter 3, technological and aesthetic differences are also relevant to *Glow*'s evocation of Jane Fonda's 1980s aerobics videos.

televisual practices in the 2010s.[111] The chapter then investigates how *The Americans*, 'San Junipero', and *HaCF* use pop music to evoke a sensory and, at times, nostalgic affect. Pop music contributes to the immersive portrayal of emotional and political issues relating to love and sexuality. *The Americans* and 'San Junipero' feature 1980s hit songs and reference the style of the MTV music video, such as 'the submission of editing to the customary tempi of popular music' and the 'aesthetization of *speed* (especially in terms of visual disruption)' (Dickinson 2003: 144, 147; emphasis in original). They cite 1980s television aesthetics and songs to layer their sensory engagement with the past and evoke varying degrees of nostalgia. Comparably, a scene from the third season of *HaCF* features a little-known song from 2016 to evoke empathy, rather than nostalgia, for its bisexual male lead Joe (Lee Pace) when he receives HIV test results. Instead of resembling the fast-paced aesthetics of MTV, *HaCF* uses a long take and zoom to create tension and engage with a challenging 1980s social issue that still effects the LGBTQ community disproportionately today (see Connors et al. 2020).

The analysis of 'San Junipero', a standalone episode from an anthology series, offers a more comprehensive interrogation of sensory immersion into the 1980s in a broader range of television formats. In 'San Junipero', the 1980s appears as a VR space into which characters can enter to escape their everyday lives. The close analysis of this 1980s VR environment is juxtaposed to several sequences from *HaCF* and a key moment from the 'Pilot' of *The Americans* (1.01) in order to examine how sensory affect links today's viewers to the 1980s in multiple contexts. *HaCF* and *The Americans* ran for four and six years, respectively; they are two of the longest-running programmes belonging to the contemporary 1980s cultural revival on American television.[112] The analysis of a standalone episode alongside the types of long-form narrative considered in the thesis so far expands the scope of the investigation. *HaCF* shares several themes with 'San Junipero': they both engage with technological innovation, use Mackenzie Davis as a lead actor, and feature characters of various gender expressions and sexual orientations to address non-heteronormative sexuality within and beyond the 1980s. The tactile and aural effect of a sex scene in *The Americans* further echoes the sensory impact in *HaCF* and 'San Junipero'. Hence, these programmes offer multiple entry points into the past to reflect on sociocultural shifts in America today, especially in relation to

[111] Whilst the chapter refers to lesbian sex to describe sex between two women and to synthesize the analysis with existing debates on the subject which use this term, the discussion includes examples of sex in which one or both partners are attracted to people of multiple genders.

[112] The final season of *HaCF* is set in the 1990s. The programme's focus on technological development necessitates progression into a new, and more technologically advanced, decade. This chapter focuses on the first three seasons to engage with the programme's reconstruction of 1980s heritage.

the 'anxieties about the human body and its place in a society increasingly dominated by science and technology' that Thompson (2007: 26) identifies in 1980s culture.

In addition, *Black Mirror* originally aired on Channel 4 in the United Kingdom before moving to the online streaming service Netflix. Its British writer and creator Charlie Brooker stresses that 'San Junipero' engages with the American past as a direct response to online complaints about the series' move from Channel 4 to Netflix (see 'Paley Center for Media, The: Paleyfest NY 2017: Black Mirror' 2017 [130973]). Brooker received complaints that the move would 'Americanise' the programme, which had previously been linked to UK-specific sociocultural themes (Ibid.).[113] Hence, Brooker wrote 'San Junipero' to self-consciously engage with a narrative set in the USA. Comparably to Chapter 2's discussion of *Deutschland 83* as a counterpoint to *The Americans*' and *Red Oaks'* portrayal of national identity, this chapter relies on an example that originates from outside the United States to highlight a widespread engagement with sexuality, nostalgia, and television style in contemporary depictions of 1980s America.

In an increasingly digitised world saturated with fake news and 'subjective' experiences of reality depending on one's political affiliation (as per Vick 2017), television programmes that engage with intimacy through touch can connect contemporary viewers to the 1980s. This chapter develops Donaldson's (2014) research into texture and Keblinska's (2017) work on haptic nostalgia in television period drama (explored in the Introduction and the Literature Review). More specifically, a consideration of Donaldson's (2014: 4) claim that film and television images can 'appeal to our sense of touch' contributes to this chapter's engagement with emerging scholarship on sensory nostalgia (including that of Keblinska).[114] Through a televisual 'appeal' to the viewer's 'sense of touch', *HaCF*, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero' initiate a 'sensory dialogue with the past', as theorised by Keblinska (2017: 127). Moreover, in response to Jameson's (1989) criticism that the imitation of historical styles in popular culture reflects a crisis of historicity, Keblinska (Ibid.: 129) argues that 'meaning does lie at the surface' of stylised television images of the past, leading to 'historical and theoretical insight'. The three case studies of this chapter evidence Keblinska's claims because they engage with emotional and political realities experienced during the 1980s and the 2010s through a self-consciously televisual aesthetic (stylised mise-en-scène and soundscape). As a

[113] For example, in *Black Mirror* 1.01 the British Prime Minister is blackmailed into sexual acts with a pig.
[114] For more on sensory nostalgia, see Nadkarni and Shevchenko (2016), Bégin (2016), and Low (2015).

result, their depiction of the 1980s speaks to historical changes in lifestyles and media technologies.

HaCF, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero' often engage viewers' sense of touch and hearing simultaneously to reconstruct the 1980s. As a result, the position of the body as it listens to music and participates in sex contributes to the evocation of nostalgia. As nostalgia is a highly contested term, defined in the Literature Review, this chapter refers to Boym's (2001: xvi) understanding of it as 'a historical emotion', Holdsworth's (2011: 97) assertion that television's 'dynamics of closeness and distance can be seen to correspond with understandings of nostalgic desire', and Bayman's (2019) theories of progressive nostalgia and temporal layering. In addition, pop soundtracks in film and TV have been linked to the reconstruction of the past and the evocation of nostalgia by scholars including David R. Shumway (1999), Faye Woods (2008), and Michael D. Dwyer (2015). Shumway (1999: 40) argues that popular music is 'the most important ingredient in the production of the affect of nostalgia.' However, he (1999: 38) also observes that some films set in the past do 'not use music to create nostalgia'. The distinction made by Shumway is relevant to the way in which music evokes nostalgia in *The Americans* and 'San Junipero', whilst it evokes empathy, but not nostalgia, in *HaCF*. Woods (2008: 29, 32), whose work refers to Shumway in the context of American television, suggests that TV programmes set in the past feature 'popular song strongly as part of their aesthetic' and use music during sequences about 'political or personal revelations'. With detailed reference to NBC's 1960s-set *American Dreams* (2002-2005), she (Ibid.: 30) states that music is often dismissed as simply a surface signifier of the past; however, it is actually used to convey critical issues and has 'a powerful emotional role'. Dwyer's (2015) work on pop nostalgia during the Reagan era similarly links nostalgia to music, emotional affect, and 1980s MTV videos (see Literature Review). In the case studies of this chapter, pop music conveys an emotional connection, between characters and between viewers and the past, eliciting either a nostalgic or an empathetic response.

To unpick past and present anxieties about the changing conditions of the human body (see Thompson 2007: 20) and the changing television image (see Caldwell 1995; Newman and Levine 2012: 100-128), *HaCF*, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero' signpost critical issues synecdochic of the 1980s, as follows: (1) sex and sexuality, which represent physical intimacy and create a connection to the past beyond the boundaries of the political and racial constrains of the 1980s (as discussed in previous chapters); (2) pop music and MTV aesthetics, which connect viewers to the cultural atmosphere of the 1980s through sound and television style and, at times, the evocation of nostalgia; and (3) the AIDS crisis, a prominent 1980s issue

linked to sexuality, the human body, and empathy, which faciliates a strong emotional connection to the past.

The Haptic 1980s: Sex and LGBTQ Representation

HaCF 1.01, *The Americans* 1.01, and 'San Junipero' each feature a sex scene that foregrounds a multi-sensory experience and women's sexual pleasure. The evocation of a 'sense of touch' (Donaldson 2014: 4) is pronounced in these sex scenes. Linda Williams (2008: 2,15) suggests that sex in the cinema is 'a constructed, mediated, performed act' and posits that 'our bodies [are] engaged through vision and sound in a kind of vicarious touch, taste, smell' during cinematic depictions of sex. In light of Williams' remarks, it is useful to read haptic sex within the 'constructed, mediated, performed' 1980s environment of period television programmes. Williams (Ibid.: 326) only addresses television in her conclusion, noting that 'the very act of screening [sex on TV] has become an intimate part of our sexuality.' Hence, the analysis below addresses gaps in emerging scholarship regarding the detailed analysis of sex on period television in relation to intimacy and sensory affect on the viewing body.[115]

In the programmes examined here, sex scenes connect viewers to the past by positioning sexuality in the context of Reagan's conservative 1980s from the perspective of 2010s America. Before the close analysis of these scenes, it is necessary to outline the historical context that the programmes engage with. Thompson (2007: 20) observes that '[n]eo-conservative religious and political leaders were constantly fascinated by sex and sexuality during the 1980s.' A preoccupation with sex and sexuality specifically within the media was the focus of a 1986 ABC news special *Sex, Violence & Values: Changing Images* (T86_0258). Interviews with media personalities of the time, including, for example, *Falcon Crest* (CBS, 1981-1990) actor Morgan Fairchild, illustrate divergent attitudes towards the topic. Reporter Carole Simpson begins the special by highlighting that:

> Since Ronald Reagan was elected President in 1980 social scientists have been telling us how conservative the American people have become […]. Yet, during this same period […] social scientists have been telling us how popular culture in America has become flashier, trashier, more vulgar, violent, and exploitative. And by popular culture they mean the movies, commercial and cable TV shows, pop music, video cassettes.

The framing of the TV special reflects the then-conservative 'fascination' with sex noted by Thompson (2007: 20) and highlights the frequency of portraying sex on TV at the time.

[115] To date, Cassidy's (2020: 32-38) analysis of manipulative sex as a method of espionage in *The Americans* is the only scholarly work with a similar focus on TV viewers' embodied response to a programme set in the 1980s.

This fascination with sex permeated 1980s culture in America; even the advertising of everyday products such as perfume were linked to sex. For example, an advert for Andron perfume and cologne aired during the first hour of MTV, just before a commercial for Atari video games (discussed below). The advert included images of naked bodies in silhouette and claimed that the fragrance was 'created to attract' the opposite sex ('First hour of MTV' 1981 [T85_0496]). The use of sex and associated imagery in an advert for perfume on MTV links the sensory experience of smell to touch and hearing within a 1980s cultural context. American media in the 2010s, including television programmes that reconstruct the 1980s, still carry echoes of this multi-sensory, sexually charged facet of 1980s culture. Sensory depictions of sex have become increasingly relevant today due to growing sex-positivity, more acceptance for LGBTQ sexuality, and feminist concerns about women's pleasure (see Comella 2017; Beecham and Unger 2019). Hence, it is through programmes that situate viewers in the context of the 1980s that we can engage with similar issues that American society continues to face.

As the explicitness and frequency of sex increased in the media during the 1970s and 1980s, so too did its impact on television programmes. If as Williams (2008: 326) posits 'the very act of screening [sex on TV] has become an intimate part of our sexuality', we must consider what types of sex have been represented on television and what this says about cultural views on sexuality in America. Elana Levine (2007: 1-2) discusses the 'new sexualized popular culture' of 1970s America, proposing that this sexualization was most prominently felt 'in commercial network television'. In the 1980s a growing number of cable providers such as HBO started featuring more adult-oriented content and nudity because they did not have to rely on the same regulations and censorship as networks (see Jones 2008). The production and distribution contexts are notable here because what started as more freedom for sexual content on networks that depend on advertisers found further expression on less regulated cable and, most recently, on online streaming platforms such as Netflix whose censorship of sexual content tends to be even less. *The Americans* and *HaCF*, two basic cable dramas, and 'San Junipero', an episode from a streaming programme, feature sex prominently, calling to mind the growing sexualisation in the media throughout the 1980s. Sapolsky and Tabarlet's (1991) quantitative study of the frequency of sexual content (including touching, hugging, kissing, explicit or implied intercourse, and verbal sexual innuendo) on American network television from 1979 to 1989 demonstrates how representations of sex changed during the 1980s. Their (Ibid.: 513) findings indicate that heterosexual intercourse was more frequently implied or presented (with actors' bodies partially hidden) on 1980s TV programmes compared to the 1970s. However, Sapolsky and Tabarlet do not measure

depictions of sexual pleasure or orgasm either for men or women. Focus on female pleasure on TV has only recently become more frequent, starting with cable programmes such as *Sex and the City*, but it has not yet received much scholarly attention.[116] In response to this gap in scholarship, this chapter considers how programmes set in the 1980s foreground female pleasure during sex through the evocation of sensory affect such as haptic images (fingers and lips) and the soundscape (breathing).

Pioneering televisual representations of homosexuality and physical intimacy between people of the same sex also started appearing during the 1970s and 1980s, albeit with limitations. Whilst Sapolsky and Tabarlet (1991: 508) provide a notable quantitative illustration of how representations of sex developed throughout the 1980s, it is equally as important to stress that they refer to homosexuality as an 'atypical' sexual practice. This outdated, hegemonic rhetoric should be read critically as it assumes that heterosexuality is a norm against which other sexualities and sexual practices are to be measured. Without following this exclusionary rhetoric, the analysis below considerers how 'San Junipero' depicts sensation and lesbian sex, whilst *HaCF* 1.01 and *The Americans* 1.01 feature sensory depictions of heterosexual sex. Moreover, in the sex scene in *HaCF* one of the participants, Joe, is a bisexual man. These programmes uncover 'authentic sexuality' within the historical setting of the 1980s, recalling Monk's (1995: 120) discussion of identity politics in heritage film and television. Darlene M. Hantzis and Valerie Lehr (1994), Bonnie Dow (2001), and Sara Baker Netzley (2010) all observe that pressure from LGBTQ activists led to one-off depictions of LGBTQ characters on American television from the 1970s onwards, such as in episode 1.05, 'Judging Books by Covers', of the popular sitcom *All in the Family* (CBS, 1971-1979). These representations usually treated homosexuality as a 'social issue' (Netzley 2010: 969). Furthermore, Dow (2001: 129-130) emphasises that on 1980s television:

> Homosexual characters are rarely shown in their own communities, homes, or same-sex romantic relationships but are depicted in terms of their place in the lives of heterosexuals. Finally, and perhaps most crucially for a commercial medium like television, representations of gay or lesbian sex, or even desire, are absent.

She (Ibid.: 130) adds that exceptions to this rule included *Dynasty* and medical drama *HeartBeat* (ABC, 1988-1989), which featured a bisexual man and a lesbian woman as protagonists, respectively. *HaCF* and 'San Junipero' insert 'gay or lesbian sex, or even desire' (Ibid.) into the reconstructed 1980s whilst paying attention to continuities from 1980s

[116] Gerhard (2005) and Drucker (2018) address female pleasure and orgasm in relation to *Sex and the City* and *Masters of Sex* (Showtime, 2013-2016), respectively.

programming on American TV.[117] This is reflected in their visual style, soundscape, and intertextual references to 1980s television.

The 'fascination' with sex in 1980s America observed by Thompson (2007: 20) was exacerbated because of the increase in patients with AIDS, especially gay men. The contemporary implications and depiction of the 1980s AIDS crisis are discussed at the end of this chapter, illustrating how associations between AIDS, sensory imagery, and the use of popular music can work together to encourage contemporary viewers to emotionally engage with an issue that they might not otherwise relate to. Before exploring the role of AIDS as a signpost of the 1980s, the analysis of sex scenes considers the position of LGBTQ and non-heteronormative sex(uality) in the context of both the Reagan era and the 2010s. American media in the 1980s informed the extent to which public views on LGBTQ sexuality were conservative (Ibid.). Contemporary perspectives on the 1980s engage with this conservatism through a critical lens that takes into consideration twenty-first century sociocultural developments. This results in a subtle but sustained critique of neoconservative political movements in the 2010s (such as the 'Cowboys for Trump' and 'Unite the Right' movements discussed in Chapters 2 and 3). Having said this, depictions of LGBTQ relationships are still much less frequently portrayed on American television than heterosexual storylines, reflecting the prevailing heteronormativity of American society.[118] Hence, working through contemporary social anxieties about sexuality is central to recent television programmes about the 1980s.[119]

The haptic framing of sex scenes in *HaCF*, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero' establishes an audiovisual engagement with the past through a sensory dialogue with 1980s representational practices. After the 1980s, cable providers such as Showtime were central to the increase in media representations of LGBTQ people and sex, especially gay and lesbian relationships in programmes such as *Queer as Folk* (Showtime, 2000-2005) and *The L Word* (Showtime, 2004-2009). This follows the increase in sexualized heterosexual content on basic

[117] As discussed in Chapter 2, 'putting back' (Dyer 1995: 205) LGBTQ characters into the 1980s is also central to *Red Oaks*, a programme that depicts the gay community through satire, rather than through emotionally resonant sensory experiences.

[118] The 2019-2020 GLAAD diversity report concludes that 10.2% of regular characters on primetime scripted television in the USA were LGBTQ (GLAAD Media Institute 2020: 5).

[119] Besides *HaCF* and 'San Junipero', *Red Oaks* portrays Judy's coming out (see Chapter 2); *The Carrie Diaries* depicts several gay and bisexual characters, including Bennet (Jake Robinson), an HIV-positive gay man, and Larissa (as stated in Chapter 3); seasons 2 and 3 of *Glow* explore Bash's sexuality, including a plot about AIDS, and feature a lesbian couple; and *Stranger Things* season 3 introduced the programme's first openly LGBTQ character, Robin (Maya Hawke). A more explicit critique of Trumpian anti-LGBTQ politics can be found in *Pose*, a programme that falls outside the scope of the thesis (as discussed in the Introduction). This chapter unpicks implicit critiques of conservative political and media history, focusing on the sensory affect of television images.

and premium cable from the 1980s onwards. The availability of more explicit LGBTQ sex on television with less dependence on advertisers demonstrates that dominant attitudes towards sexuality, such as those advocated by the Reagan administration in the 1980s, influence what type of media content gets produced.[120] Keblinska (2017: 131) states that Korean period drama *Reply 1994*:

> points back to a complex history of popular image technologies and their interwoven modes of mediating experience through viewers' eyes and bodies. Together, these media engage the viewers' senses, soliciting participation, activating memories.

These remarks resonate with the 'soliciting [of] participation' during heterosexual and lesbian sex scenes in the case studies of this chapter, all of which aired on basic cable or streaming. Donaldson (2014: 4) states that films often 'touch us, impacting on our watching bodies', linking this impact to the haptic visuality of certain images. Both Keblinska's and Donaldson's research expands upon Laura U. Marks' (2000: 175) suggestion that films which 'contain more visual texture than the eye can apprehend, have the effect of overwhelming vision and spilling into other sense perceptions.' In *HaCF*, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero' haptic images of sex and touch, as well as the soundscape, 'overwhelm' the 1980s story-world and 'spill' into the audience's present-day viewing experience.

For example, characters in 'San Junipero' constantly navigate the boundaries between reality and virtual reality, demonstrating that the human body and physical connection are perceived as anchors of the real. Throughout the episode touch and sensation repeatedly validate the emotional reality of the virtual past. When Yorkie (Mackenzie Davis) asks Kelly (Gugu Mbatha-Rawe) to accept their same-sex love within the simulation, she encourages Kelly to consider that the virtual environment looks 'so real. It feels so real.' She urges Kelly to physically engage with the environment, asking her to 'Look at this! Jesus, touch it!'. Yorkie's insistence on physical connection to the virtual 1980s hints at her awareness about the significant role of bodily sensation for successful immersion into the past. As Keblinska (2017: 131) says: 'mediating experience through viewers' eyes and bodies' can solicit their participation in the reconstructed past. 'San Junipero' explicitly frames the past as something to be experienced through touch (mediated via virtual technology).

[120] Dow (2001: 130) observes that in the 1980s 'representations of gays or lesbians that have taken the risk of depicting actual gay and lesbian sexual interaction […] have predictably run afoul of sponsors and conservative interest groups.' She (Ibid.) cites a 1989 episode of *thirtysomething* (ABC, 1987-1991) which 'featured a brief scene of two gay men in bed together' prompting advertisers 'to pull their sponsorship of the show'.



fig. 4.1 Kelly touches Yorkie's face inside the VR simulation



fig. 4.2 Kelly caresses Yorkie's hand outside the VR simulation

Physical connection to other people and, by extension, the past can, to an extent, collapse the temporal gap between the 1980s and present-day America. Inside the VR simulation, Kelly repeatedly touches Yorkie's face to convey affection, reinforced in figure 4.1 through composition and lighting, because the brightest point within the frame is the mirror image of Kelly's hand against Yorkie's face near the middle of the shot. Outside of the simulation, Kelly holds Yorkie's hand and her touch lingers on Yorkie's skin when they meet in person (fig. 4.2). In the latter sequence, touch reinforces the closeness of Kelly and Yorkie's emotional bond as they have previously only met in the simulated virtual past. Here, the notion of touch as something portrayed in earnest provides validation of connection. Nonetheless, the

notion that touch in the twenty-first century is an unreliable marker of reality carries significant weight when considered in light of contemporary technological misrepresentation and misinformation (including AR and VR; see Chesney and Citron 2019). It is an understanding of touch as portrayed in its physical reality that 'San Junipero', as well as *HaCF* and *The Americans*, follow. In these programmes, touch is not used as a tool which can lead to deception through technological manipulation, rather, it symbolises a very real connection. Sex scenes in each programme tease out links between the cultural preoccupation with sex and sexuality in the 1980s and contemporary America through a self-consciously stylised focus on bodies in delicate motion and tactile interaction between lovers.[121]

Touching the 1980s Through Television's 'skin'[122]

The haptic depiction of sex in *HaCF* 1.01, *The Americans* 1.01, and 'San Junipero' resonates with viewers because these programmes portray the 1980s through close-ups of hands, skin, and lips, chiaroscuro lighting, emphasis on women's sexual pleasure, nostalgic references to the 1980s arcade, and the soundscape (figs. 4.3-4.14). Each programme connects the present to the 1980s through the erotic materiality of human skin on the television screen, itself a type of skin according to Keblinska (2017: 136). Following Keblinska's observation – which develops Marks' (2000: 243) comments on the cinema screen as a 'membrane that brings its audience in contact with material forms of memory' – it is the central positioning of skin in these programmes that creates an intimate connection between television viewers and the 1980s. Marks (2002: 2) argues that haptic visuality appeals to a sense of eroticism because 'the eyes themselves function like organs of touch'. All sex scenes shown in figures 4.3 to 4.14 establish a sensory dialogue with the past through close-ups of hands, arms, and fingers (figs. 4.4-4.5, 4.7-4.10, 4.12-4.13) whilst depicting kissing and sexual pleasure (figs. 4.3-4.4, 4.6, 4.7-4.8, 4.11, 4.14). Emphasis on hands and skin implicitly suggests the sensation of touching and being touched. By extension, this visual setup frames sex and intimacy as a type of connective tissue between the 1980s and the present.

[121] The examples in this chapter reflect implicit memories of 1980s media through sensation and audiovisual style. Chapter 5 examines how *The Americans*, *The Goldbergs*, and *Stranger Things* reconstruct the 1980s by drawing on explicit media memories such as archival 1980s television broadcasts.
[122] See Keblinska (2017: 136).

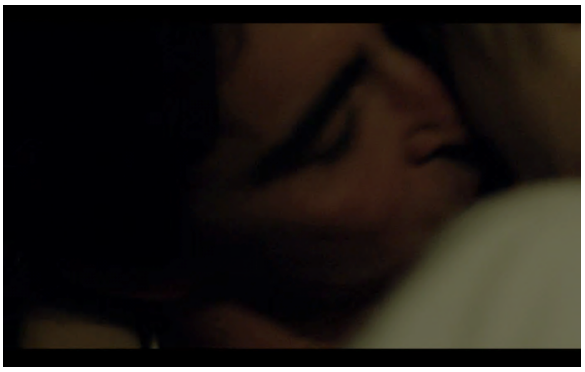


fig. 4.3 Joe and Cameron kissing



fig. 4.4 Focus on Cameron's arm during sex



fig. 4.5 Close-up of Cameron's skin

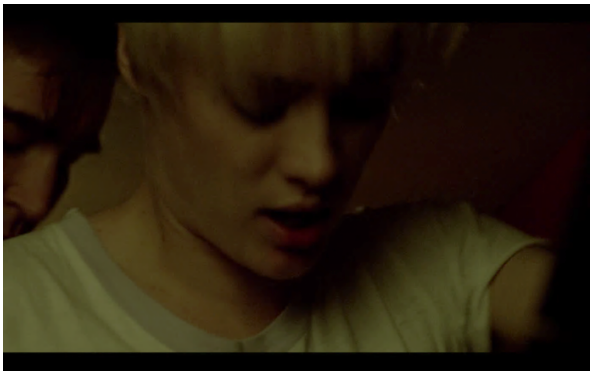


fig. 4.6 Cameron's parted lips during orgasm

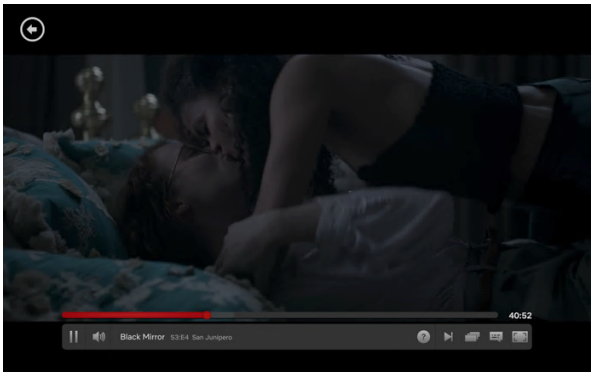


fig. 4.7 Yorkie and Kelly kissing in bed

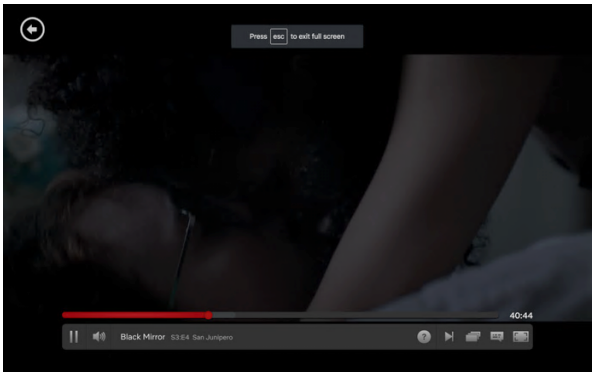


fig. 4.8 Focus on Kelly's arm during sex



fig. 4.9 Close-up of Yorkie's hand touching Kelly's arm

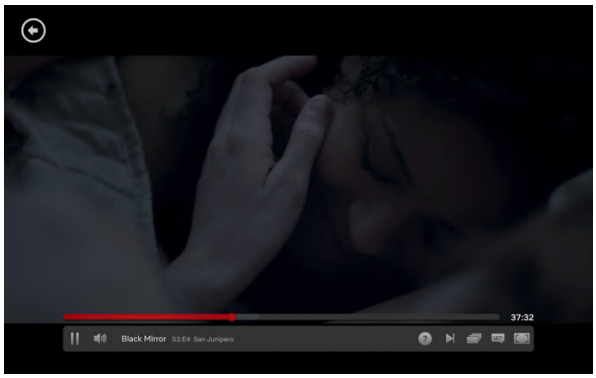


fig. 4.10 Yorkie caresses Kelly's face after sex



fig. 4.11 Philip and Elizabeth kissing



fig. 4.12 Focus on Philip's hand when he grabs Elizabeth's waist during sex



fig. 4.13 Close-up of Philip and Elizabeth's hands during sex

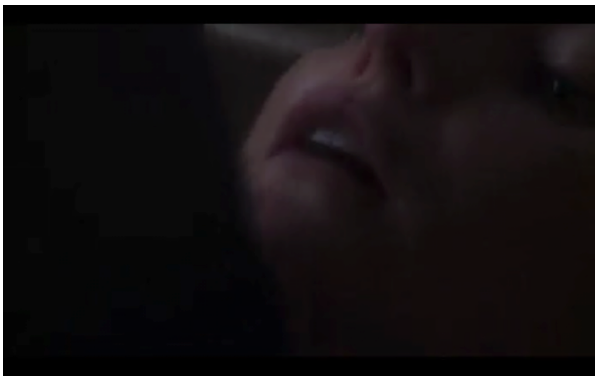


fig. 4.14 Elizabeth's parted lips during orgasm

In contrast to other televisual reconstructions of the 1980s, such as the neon colour schemes of *Glow* and *The Carrie Diaries* explored in Chapter 3, the sex scenes in *HaCF* 1.01, *The Americans* 1.01, and 'San Junipero' do not draw viewers' attention to flashing lights, ornate and colourful props, or 1980s period detail such as costuming. Instead, the audience can focus on the bodies and emotions depicted due to chiaroscuro lighting. In all three scenes the lighting design foregrounds skin to skin contact, as the softly lit skin of characters stands out against dark backgrounds and minimal sets (figs. 4.5-4.6, 4.7-4.10, 4.12-4.13). Darkness heightens the intimacy that is created by the haptic imagery, giving each scene greater privacy. This aids viewers' connection to the fictional past even further because darker images make immersion into the scene easier by obscuring background details. The lighting contributes to viewers' uncertainty as to which body part belongs to which character. This implies that sensation and touch are more central to these sequences than the specificities of the plot. In these sensual moments, the 'mediated carnal knowledge' of seeing sex on screen, as theorized by Williams (2008: 6), synthesises with the production of 'historical knowledge' which Landsberg (2015: 69) links to 'the format and the specificities of the audiovisual medium [of

television]'. The representation of sexual intimacy through dark, low-lit images enables a new type of knowledge to emerge, contextualising the 1980s in relation to contemporary issues surrounding sexuality, including persistent political conflict about sexual autonomy and LGBTQ rights in the USA.

HaCF 1.01, *The Americans* 1.01, and 'San Junipero' reposition women's pleasure during sex within the 1980s to engage with Reagan-era conservatism about sexuality from a 2010s perspective. Emphasis on emotional realism in contemporary TV programmes recalls Ien Ang's (1985: 47) argument that in *Dallas* realism is 'produced by the construction of *psychological* reality, and is not related to its (illusory) fit to an externally perceptible (social) reality' (emphasis in original). Taking into account Ang's comments, the 'perceptible (social) reality' of a given time period such as the 1980s does not need to be represented in a factually accurate way in order to be psychologically realistic and emotionally resonant for contemporary audiences. This is evident in the scenes analysed in this chapter. Each sex scene includes close-ups of women's faces with parted lips (figs. 4.6, 4.14) and characters kissing (figs. 4.3, 4.7, 4.8, 4.10). These shots foreground female sexual pleasure by focusing on Cameron (fig. 4.6), Yorkie and Kelly (figs. 4.7, 4.8), and Elizabeth (fig. 4.14). Williams' (2008: 15) suggestion that sex scenes engage viewers' bodies 'through vision and sound in a kind of vicarious touch, taste, smell' resembles Landsberg's (2015: 69) discussion of screening the past, in particular how TV programmes set in the past 'have the capacity to orchestrate a complex mode of address (visual, aural, even tactile).' The multiple resonances between Williams' and Landsberg's scholarship illustrate how the analysis of sensory sexuality is highly relevant to the analysis of televisual reconstructions of the past.

In *HaCF* and *The Americans*, images of Cameron's and Elizabeth's parted lips symbolise pleasure and substitute a more explicit depiction of heterosexual intercourse by connoting the parted lips of the vagina (figs. 4.6 and 4.14). Writing about the lack of realistic depictions of sex with regards to female pleasure in pornography, Williams (2008: 325-326) concludes: 'however much I would root for the sight of a few more convulsing clitorises to answer the seeming ubiquity of money shots, I do not really believe that more realistic depictions of female pleasure are the answer.' Contributing to Williams' analysis of visual signposts of the female orgasm, sensory and sensual depictions of sex on TV can portray 'a more realistic' female pleasure. *HaCF* and *The Americans* place women's pleasure in the context of the 1980s, when televisual portrayals of sex started to become more explicit yet were still constrained by prevailing conservative ideologies. As a result, they use the 1980s to speak to viewers' present-day experience. The setting of the past in these programmes

emphasises the discord between an emotionally realistic understanding of female sexual satisfaction and false images of female orgasm as seen in pornography (see Séguin, Rodrigue, and Lavigne 2018).

Similarly, in 'San Junipero' shots of Yorkie's and Kelly's hands and fingers (figs. 4.9-4.10) are interspersed with images of the women kissing (figs. 4.7-4.8) and caressing each other's faces (fig. 4.10). Here, the haptic portrayal of lesbian sex symbolises digital penetration. In their discussion of the lack of homosexual sex and desire on 1980s television, Hantzis and Lehr (1994: 112) observe that *HeartBeat*'s lesbian protagonist 'never expresses sexual desire or passion' and that the programme renders lesbianism 'as nonsexuality'. Other popular 1980s programmes including *The Golden Girls* (NBC, 1985-1992) and *Moonlighting* (ABC, 1985-1989) featured lesbian characters usually only in a single episode (for example, *The Golden Girls* 2.05, *Moonlighting* 3.06; see Moritz 1994: 126). Depictions of lesbian desire and sex became more explicit with the 2004 premier of *The L Word* which centred on a group of lesbians.[123] It is important to read the sex scene in 'San Junipero' through the lens of *The L Word*'s legacy whilst also paying attention to the temporal and representational gap between the 1980s and contemporary American television.[124] According to Moore (2007: 139), '*The L Word*'s portrayal of manual sex makes clear how a hand, as opposed to a penis, allows for the size of the vaginal penetration to change quickly on demand.' Whilst 'San Junipero' does not portray sex explicitly, the overabundance of haptic images, including shots of hands, arms, fingers, and skin, implies a similar preoccupation with the manual and pleasurable experience of lesbian sex. This positions lesbian desire and sexuality in the conservative, heteronormative context of the 1980s, heightening viewers' awareness of the prejudice that is still prevalent in some parts of American society such as widespread homophobia in political circles, including Vice President Pence (see Nixon 2019) and Mayor Michael Bloomberg (see Kiley 2020). Brooker states that the idea to centre 'San Junipero' on a same-sex couple 'informed a whole other layer because these people couldn't have got married as two women in 1987' (qtd. in Brooker, Jones and Arnopp 2018). The emotional affect of the same-sex love story and sex scene is therefore contingent upon viewers' awareness of the temporal and sociocultural gap between American culture in the 1980s and the 2010s. The discrepancy between 1980s and

[123] In spite of its focus on lesbian characters, Moore (2007: 132) suggests that at times the positioning of lesbian identities on *The L Word* enabled the 'co-opt[ing]' of lesbianism by straight viewers.

[124] In the 1980s there was little to no lesbian desire shown on television, whereas the GLAAD Media Institute (2020: 8) reports that in the 2010s American TV has 'notably improved […] in the representation of lesbian characters.' Programmes including *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix, 2013-2019), *The Fosters* (ABC Family/Freeform, 2013-2018), and *The L Word*'s sequel *Generation Q* (Showtime, 2019-) frequently portray lesbian sex in a respectful manner.

contemporary representational practices regarding LGBTQ stories on TV foregrounds ongoing problems faced by the LGBTQ community. 'San Junipero' alerts viewers to this gap because it focuses on Yorkie and Kelly's relationship within a simulated, virtual version of the 1980s. The episode intentionally makes audiences aware of progress that has occurred since the time period that it depicts, at least in terms of the scope of representation in the media. Hence, the episode comments on the implicit responsibility of television to represent sexuality in a non-prejudicial manner.[125]

Each sex scene examined emphasises heterosexual and lesbian women's sexual pleasure to convey its historical significance. As Williams (2008: 325) observes, the point of screening sex is not to bring us 'so much closer, spatially or temporally, to "real sex." Rather, it should be to discover that viewers […] have become habituated to these new forms of mimetic play with, and through, screens.' Contemporary programmes' insistence on screening sex in the context of the 1980s does not need to 'spatially or temporally' approximate real sexual encounters in the 1980s or 2010s. Instead, it pulls viewers into the fictional past through sensory imagery that encourages 'mimetic play'. Ang (1985: 45) argues that: 'what is recognized as real [by TV viewers] is not knowledge of the world, but a subjective experience of the world.' *HaCF*, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero' construct the world of the 1980s subjectively, highlighting the role of bodily sensation for affective engagement with the past. Vidal (2012a: 29, 65) argues that the 'self-conscious stylisation' of recurring imagery in period drama often foregrounds 'the rituals and mores of the past'. Yet, this type of audiovisual engagement can also reflect socio-cultural change, rather than established 'mores'. In the process of connecting the 1980s with the 2010s through television's 'skin' (Keblinska 2017: 136), *HaCF*, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero' challenge heteronormative and patriarchal traditions of portraying sex.

To highlight the role of memory and reflection for coping with historical changes in American society, characters in 'San Junipero' self-consciously question how nostalgia works. Kelly sarcastically refers to the virtual 1980s as 'immersive nostalgia therapy'; she frames VR as a tool for momentary escapism but not lasting escape from the present. Kelly's diegetic comments about nostalgia's therapeutic potential, combined with Gugu Mbatha-Rawe's acerbic vocal delivery of this line, signals that the programme is aware of critical issues surrounding nostalgia. As Linda Hutcheon (2000: 20) observes, nostalgia 'exiles us from the

[125] Studies by Gillig and Murphy (2016) and Waggoner (2018) found that the representation of LGBTQ people on American television has an impact on viewer engagement and fan response.

present as it brings the imagined past near.' 'San Junipero' presents the 1980s as a virtual theme park where characters forget their everyday lives and have fun, for example by going to the arcade, drinking alcohol, or experimenting with non-heteronormative sexuality. The meta-textual tone of the episode, however, emphasises that it only depicts an 'imagined' (Ibid.) version of the 1980s, incorporating self-reflexive comments on nostalgia and portraying the past as virtual (and therefore transient).

'San Junipero', *HaCF*, and *The Americans* speak to the audience's potentially nostalgic engagement with the 1980s by foregrounding the body's sensory qualities. In so doing, the programmes do not create nostalgia for the past as 'actually experienced' (Ibid.: 195). Rather, they depict the 1980s as, to varying extents, 'idealized through memory and desire' (Ibid.). Considering Holdsworth's (2011: 97) suggestion that nostalgia expresses a desire for the past which maps onto the dynamics of closeness and distance inherent to television, viewers of *HaCF*, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero' can experience a nostalgic connection to the 1980s through emotional engagement with televised sex scenes. These scenes extend beyond the cerebral rationality of cultural or political similarities between the present and the 1980s, and instead use emotions such as desire, satisfaction, and relief to connect the audience to America's past. As a result, for some viewers, the sex scenes function like the 'immersive nostalgia therapy' presented in 'San Junipero', constructing the televisual experience of the 1980s as an emotional release valve for anxieties in the 2010s.

In addition, references to the video game arcade, an archetypal 1980s space, strengthen sex scenes' sensory and nostalgic dialogue with the 1980s in both 'San Junipero' and *HaCF*. Yorkie and Kelly meet at an arcade before having sex inside the virtual reality simulation (itself a type of multi-sensory computerised game).[126] Yorkie loses her virginity during the sex scene; earlier in the episode, she is shown playing an arcade game for the first time. Both scenes link touch to discovery and portray it as a key factor that connects people, to others and to objects, in public as well as private spaces. Carly A. Kocurek (2015: 6) observes how arcade gameplay relies on 'physical and sensory phenomena' (touch, sound, vision, and manual dexterity). This resembles the sensory physicality of sex, especially the manual skilfulness of lesbian sex described by Moore (2007: 109) in relation to *The L Word*. Before Yorkie starts playing at the arcade, she engages with the coin token in a tactile manner, resembling the emphasis on touch during the sex scene. Figure 4.15 illustrates how Yorkie reaches into her

[126] Indeed, the term 'haptics' is used in computer science to refer to multisensory immersion into VR spaces (see Adams and Hannaford 2002).

pocket to take out a token. The shot focuses on her hand rummaging in her pocket and foregrounds contact between her hand and the cotton of her trousers. In both the sex scene and the scene at the arcade, touch connects the human body, and by extension the body of viewers, to the 1980s environment. As Keblinska (2017: 128) states in relation to *Reply 1994*, the past 'is made so viscerally available that we sense it as a touchable and enveloping surface.' 'San Junipero' similarly makes the 1980s 'viscerally available' through touch, sex, and video games. *HaCF* 1.01 achieves a comparable affect by setting its sex scene in the storage room of an arcade so that video game sounds can still be heard during Joe and Cameron's encounter (discussed below). Kocurek (2015: xxii, 5) suggests that arcades are prominent symbols of nostalgia for the 1980s in the twenty-first century, remembered as a space of 'sight, sound, and play'. Video games were associated with sensation and immersion in the 1980s already: a commercial for pioneer game brand Atari was played during the first hour of MTV, just before the commercial for Andron perfume cited above. It included a description of Atari's games as 'so ingenious, so involving, so intense' ('First hour of MTV' 1981 [T85_0496]). 'San Junipero' and *HaCF* elicit a nostalgic longing for the 1980s during sex scenes by reminding viewers of the 'intense' and 'involving' experience of playing arcade games.

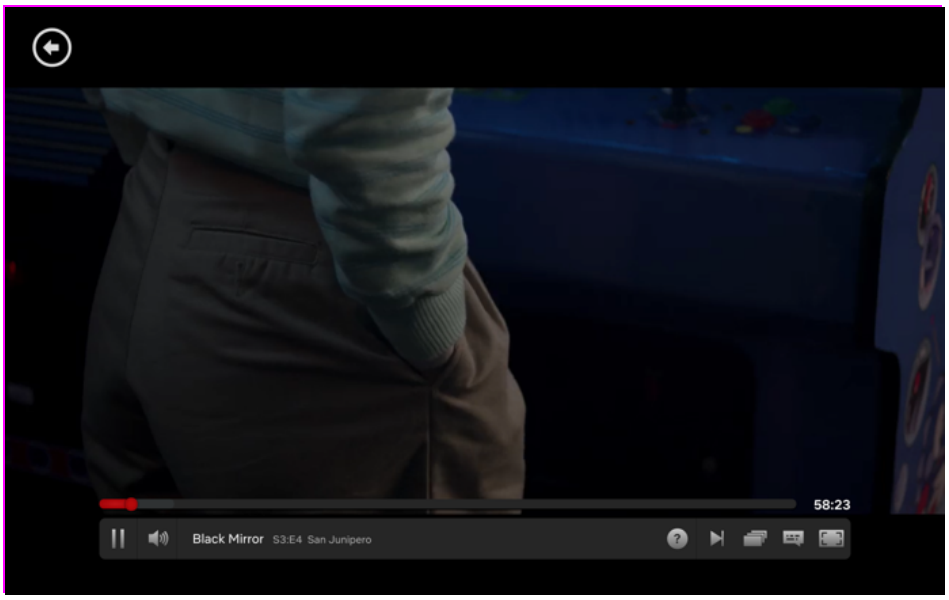


fig. 4.15 Yorkie rummages in her pocket for a coin token

The layered soundscape of the sex scene in *HaCF* 1.01 extenuates tensions between public and private experiences associated with the 1980s. As detailed in previous chapters, Marcus (2004: 26) suggests that 'the past can be remembered as a collection of intensely personal memories, but more often also contains elements of group or public memories.'

Throughout the sex scene in *HaCF* 1.01, characters' loud, heavy breathing dominates the soundscape. Here, the aural texture of the sound of breathing is synecdochic of the sexual intercourse because breaths both belong to and exist outside the body similarly to sexual fluids. Personal sounds of breathing are mixed with ambient diegetic sounds of Joe and Cameron's bodies knocking against storage boxes, a bass beat from the music played at the arcade, and the subtle chiming and beeping of 1980s 8-bit video game sound effects. These ambient sounds – especially the diegetic beat, the rhythm of which mimics characters' quickening heartbeat during sex – sonically expand this scene from a personal (sex, breathing) to a public (arcade) portrayal of the 1980s. Thus *HaCF* links the nostalgia associated with the arcade to its portrayal of intimacy through sound mixing. The body's connection to intimate touch alongside the arcade frames it as the site of not only the sexual encounter but specifically of connection to the 1980s.

Aural textures intensify the sensory affect of each sex scene analysed in this chapter, creating a more immersive experience for viewers and furthering the position of sex as central to viewers' engagement with the past. Indeed, Donaldson (2014: 114) notes that sound waves 'vibrate parts of the ear, making the act of hearing itself a tactile experience.' Heavy breathing and the rustling of clothes feature in all three sex scenes, with the addition of the sound of unbuckling belts in *The Americans* 1.01 and 'San Junipero', and the ambient diegetic soundscape in *HaCF* 1.01. In *The Americans*, these diegetic sounds are mixed with Phil Collins' popular 1981 hit 'In the Air Tonight', which contributes significantly to sensory dialogue with the 1980s (explored below). Each scene evokes a 'vicarious' (Williams 2008: 15) multi-sensory experience of sex, especially female pleasure, through haptic visuality (touch), focus on lips (taste), and the soundscape (hearing). The repetition of sensory images and soundscapes in three different contemporary programmes implies that the evocation of sensory affect via audiovisual stylisation is consciously included to reconstruct the 1980s' cultural heritage.

High-definition images enable viewers to see reconstructions of the 1980s more clearly than image technologies during that decade allowed. Keblinska (2017: 136) observes how contemporary television's 'skin makes present a past in high definition' by foregrounding the contrast between the high and low image qualities of digital and analogue media. Since high-definition images do not resemble the standard-definition, grainy aesthetics of 1980s television, the quality of the image self-consciously emphasises that the 1980s is seen from a contemporary point of view, potentially as a site of nostalgic longing for an 'imagined' past

(Hutcheon 2000: 20).[127] In particular, the 'expensive and technically complex' shift from 'standard analog NTSC to digital high definition' programming throughout the 1990s and the 2000s (Newman and Levine 2012: 123) serves as a stark dividing line between the status of the television image in the 1980s and the 2010s.[128] *The Americans* and 'San Junipero' rely on their high-definition image quality when referencing aesthetic practices of 1980s television, especially the MTV music video. They cite MTV aesthetics and prominently feature 1980s songs to expand their sensory dialogue with the decade, so that their use of popular music positions the portrayal of intimacy in relation to the soundscape and evokes varying degrees of nostalgia for the 1980s.

MTV Aesthetics and 1980s Pop Nostalgia

Visual citations of 1980s television programmes and MTV music videos in *The Americans* and 'San Junipero' illustrate how pastiche can facilitate what Cook (2005: 199) refers to as 'historical enquiry', outlined in the Literature Review. Dyer (2007: 137) also stresses that pastiche entails 'aesthetic and political value'; when televisual reconstructions of the 1980s reference historical media iconography, they unpick the cultural legacy of 1980s television style. The self-aware stylisation of the reconstructed 1980s is rooted in the changing 'presentational demeanour' and increased 'formal sophistication' of television programmes during that decade (Caldwell 1995: 4). Hence, contemporary programmes that stylistically evoke the aesthetic of 1980s television reinforce the predominance of televisual culture at that time, thereby connecting the 1980s with today's heavily visual culture. By incorporating Collins' 'In the Air Tonight' and Belinda Carlisle's 1987 hit 'Heaven is a Place on Earth', *The Americans* 1.01 and 'San Junipero' evoke nostalgic longing for a version of the 1980s from the perspective of contemporary political and emotional divisions in the USA. In so doing, these programmes call to mind Bayman's (2019: 3) discussion of *Pride* as a film that is 'simultaneously nostalgic and progressive'. In light of Bayman's (Ibid.) research, the analysis of *The Americans* and 'San Junipero' does not 'exempt nostalgia from criticism, nor ascribe to it some supposed predetermined political effect.' Instead, it focuses on the ways in which the soundtrack of these programmes elicits a nostalgic response alongside themes of desire,

[127] Occasionally, contemporary programmes recreate the grainy aesthetics of 1980s television broadcasts. Chapter 5 examines how 1980s home video cameras and VHS tapes elicit a nostalgic response.
[128] NTSC (National Television System Committee) refers to the standardisation of analogue colour television in the USA until the late 2000s, when the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) regulated a transition to digital television.

death, and sexuality in order to unpick the lasting impact of 1980s television on present-day media culture.

The analysis below focuses on popular music and does not take scoring into account. This is an important distinction as popular music acquired newfound and significant connections to visual images in the 1980s due to the launch and popularity of the cable channel MTV. As a signpost of the 1980s, MTV is crucial to take into consideration. Dwyer (2015: 16) calls it an 'era-defining cultural juggernaut' that was 'one of the most important developments in the film and music of the Reagan Era' and identifies a direct link between 1980s MTV videos and the construction of pop nostalgia for the 1950s. The aesthetic of MTV's videos has since transformed the relationship between popular music and the television image. Caldwell (1995: 13) suggests that the 'look of MTV […] popularized a mode of production that changed the very way television was produced beginning in 1981.' He (Ibid.: viii) observes that 'MTV marshaled many of the looks and tactics of the avant-garde – the appropriation of mass-culture images, intertextuality, fractured subjectivity, and yes, even, irony.' Kay Dickinson (2003: 144, 147) characterises MTV aesthetics mainly in terms of tempo, rhythm, and editing.[129] *The Americans* 1.01 and 'San Junipero' reference 1980s music and MTV aesthetics (as discussed by Caldwell, Dwyer, and Dickinson), and highlight how MTV's stylistic conventions have shaped and continue to shape the very medium which now attempts to reconstruct them.

Alongside touch, music adds another layer of sensory affect that facilitates viewers' connection to the 1980s. From its beginnings in 1981, MTV emphasised its preoccupation with sexual content and sensation to appeal to a young demographic. Bradley S. Greenberg and Linda Hofschire (2000: 104-106) discuss the frequency of sexual content in MTV videos, especially during the 1980s, and the presumed negative impact of such content on young people's attitudes towards sex and sexuality. MTV also used commercials and channel idents that foregrounded sensory experience such as the tagline quoted in the epigraph to this chapter: 'Announcing the latest achievement in home entertainment. The power of sight: video. The power of sound: MTV. Music television' ('First hour of MTV' 1981 [T85_0496]). Commercials about the immersive video games of Atari and about Andron perfume, which is supposed to 'attract' the opposite sex, both aired during the first hour of MTV's broadcast (Ibid.; discusseed above). These adverts connect MTV to technological innovation and sex. The same connection is made apparent by an intertextual reference to the stylistically

[129] For a study on the lasting impact of MTV's style in popular culture, see Korsgaard (2017).

innovative 1980s TV drama *Miami Vice* (NBC, 1984-1990) during the sex scene in *The Americans* 1.01 and the localisation of lesbian sex and desire within a virtual environment in 'San Junipero'. All of the above suggests close links between popular music, television aesthetics, the 1980s, and sensory affect.

The Americans 1.01 and 'San Junipero' layer meaningful intertextual references to 1980s popular culture by using well-known songs to signal that the past is not strictly a visual construction. Aesthetic and musical signposts enable viewers to experience a longing for the 1980s that mirrors the way in which TV programmes can create nostalgia through references to past television. As Robynn J. Stilwell (1995: 97) suggests in relation to 'In the Air Tonight', the intertextual potential of a song '[gains] strength as the intertextual references grow.' Stilwell's comments recall Holdsworth's (2011: 34) discussion of the relationship between television and nostalgia when she observes that: 'Central to this relationship is the idea of the television viewing experience as one of accumulation, where viewing experiences and references are built up over time.' She (Ibid.: 98) remarks that 'the recovery of the original broadcast or viewing experience' is not as significant for 'textual re-encounters with past television' as the positioning of past TV 'within new frames and contexts.' Furthermore, Dwyer (2015: 117) argues that pop nostalgia can result in a 'productive affective engagement' with the past that facilitates a 'reckoning with the historical present'. He (Ibid.: 127) states that this engagement characterises 1980s MTV videos, especially the videos of Michael Jackson which honour 'the legacy of Fifties entertainers and critically [reflect] on idealized versions of the Fifties.' *The Americans* 1.01 and 'San Junipero' prompt a 'productive' (Ibid.: 117) and 'critical' (Ibid.: 127) engagement with nostalgia for the 1980s through their complex combination of intertextual references to an easily recognizable pop soundtrack, 1980s television programmes, and the style of MTV.

The sex scene in *The Americans* 1.01 imitates the use of 'In the Air Tonight' in two popular 1980s media texts. It references the 1984 pilot episode of *Miami Vice*, 'Brother's Keeper' (1.01), where the song accompanies the protagonists as they drive around in a car towards a violent encounter, and a sex scene from the 1983 comedy *Risky Business* (dir. Paul Brickman). When it first aired, *Miami Vice* was pitched to television executives as a programme about 'MTV cops' due to its youth-oriented, pioneering televisual characteristics such as frequent use of popular music, stylised mise-en-scène, and fast-paced, urban subject matter (Bignell 2009: 21). During the sequence set to Collins' song, *Miami Vice* 1.01 features minimal dialogue and a stylised combination of visuals and sound with seemingly little narrative motivation. Style is foregrounded due to the length of the sequence, featuring three

and a half minutes of the song including a ten second take of only the bonnet of the car and repeated fifteen and ten second takes of the car's front left wheel and headlight (fig. 4.16). In these instances, following Caldwell's (1995: 4) discussion of televisuality, *Miami Vice* evidences that it is 'extreme[ly] self-conscious' of its audiovisual construction.

The Americans positions itself in the tradition of aesthetically self-conscious television programming by using 'In the Air Tonight' in a similar narrative context to *Miami Vice.* Caldwell (1995: 13) suggests that *Miami Vice* exemplifies how 'the very technologies that gave MTV national audiences allowed for and encouraged a different kind of look and stylistic expectation' beyond the music channel. In *The Americans* 1.01, Philip and Elizabeth drive to an abandoned warehouse, dispose of a dead body, and then have sex in their car. Collins' song accompanies slow-paced images of their drive, the corpse, and their sexual encounter; there is no dialogue. Stilwell (1995: 67) discusses the influence of 'In the Air Tonight' in American popular culture and concludes that the song 'wormed its way into the popular culture of the 1980s and became one of the most distinctive and definitive sounds of the decade.' In relation to the use of the song in *Miami Vice*, Stilwell (Ibid.: 283) argues that '[i]n much the same way that the recording of "In the Air Tonight" changed the sound of popular music in the 1980s […] *Miami Vice* changed the look of television.' The inclusion of this song in *The Americans*, therefore, evokes the soundscape of America during the 1980s and references the programme's preoccupation with televisual style from the past.

The Americans connects contemporary viewers to the 1980s through musical signposting, expanding its sensory dialogue with the past. Episode 1.01 displaces the 'unresolved tension' which Stillwell (1995: 73) identifies in the musical structure of 'In the Air Tonight', and which is exploited in *Miami Vice*. The lead up to the sex scene in *The Americans* 1.01 echoes *Miami Vice* 1.01 with shots of Philip and Elizabeth's car from various angles and the couple quietly staring at each other whilst driving (figs. 4.16-4.19). Yet, whilst the characters in *Miami Vice* are headed towards a violent altercation with criminals, Philip and Elizabeth are disposing of a dead body as the violence has already taken place. *Miami Vice* constructs tension between the protagonists (cops) and the enemy (criminals); *The Americans* constructs tension between the protagonists who are husband and wife and also the criminals. This is evident in the tighter framing and focus pull of shots depicting Elizabeth and Philip in the car (fig. 4.19), compared to similar setups in *Miami Vice* (fig. 4.17). The tightness of figure 4.19 reflects the tension between Elizabeth and Philip, whilst focus pulling and lighting highlight only one of them at a time (in this figure Elizabeth). This visual separation contrasts to the comradery of the characters in *Miami Vice*, implied by the medium close-up

and the level framing with even focus on both men's apprehensive expressions in figure 4.17. After the drive, *The Americans* further evokes the use of 'In the Air Tonight' during a sex scene in *Risky Business*, which uses the song to convey a 'taut sense of anticipation' in relation to sex (Stilwell 1995: 78). Because this sensual sex scene, explored above, takes place during Collins' song, it forms an emotional relief to the initial frigidity of the protagonists' arranged marriage as KGB spies.



fig. 4.16 Stylised shot of a car in *Miami Vice*



fig. 4.17 Characters' shared apprehension during the car scene in *Miami Vice*



fig. 4.18 Shot of a car imitating *Miami Vice* in *The Americans*



fig. 4.19 Tension between Philip and Elizabeth during the car scene

The use of 'In the Air Tonight' in the retrospective 1980s context of *The Americans* speaks to the programme's themes, even for viewers without any awareness of the intertextual references to *Miami Vice* and *Risky Business.* Stilwell (1995: 73) suggests that 'In the Air Tonight' became widely used across different texts because 'it is so ambiguous that it can accommodate almost any of the meanings which people want to attach to it.' Thus *The Americans* can engage viewers through the experience of listening to Collins' song, taking this musical moment beyond its intertextual significance. Visually, the depiction of sex (figs. 4.11-4.14) and a dead body being burned with acid in extreme close-up (fig. 4.20) facilitate

heightened emotional impact during this sequence. Figure 4.20 depicts the pouring of acid over the corpse in gruesome detail through a visceral emphasis on texture: the lighting design and framing highlight the softly lit pink acid burns across the corpse's pale white skin, whilst the background and the bottle of acid are black and difficult to see. These visual moments are juxtaposed to the tone and lyrics of Collins' song which focuses on the act of 'feeling' as Collins sings: 'I can feel it coming in the air tonight, Oh Lord / And I've been waiting for this moment all my life, Oh Lord'. In particular, there is a reverb effect on Collins' vocals giving his voice an echo-like texture. Thus the song's lyrics and vocals and *The Americans*' impactful visuals all express the 'fractured subjectivity' that Caldwell (1995: viii) links to the MTV music video.



fig. 4.20 Lighting and framing foreground the flesh of a corpse as it is burned with acid

'In the Air Tonight' contributes to *The Americans*' sensory affect through its musical structure, irrespective of intertextual references to 1980s popular culture. A focus on feeling and immersion is present in Collins' song, as ambient synthesized sound mixes with a repetitive high-pitched tone, rhythmic percussion, and the lack of melodic variation in Collins' vocals. These elements are layered to construct the sensation of suspense, so that when the drum solo is played, a vital energy bursts forth. This musical progression mimics the quickening of characters' heartbeats as they experience desire and pleasure during sex, similarly to the diegetic bass beat in *HaCF* 1.01 (discussed above). The musical evocation of beating hearts matches the slowly building sexual tension between Philip and Elizabeth,

followed by a sudden surge of drumbeats that reaches its climax at the end of the sequence. This exemplifies Williams' (2008: 15) argument that both vision and sound are necessary for the construction of 'vicarious touch, taste, smell' during sex scenes. In *The Americans* 1.01, the interplay between haptic visuals and the use of the soundtrack establishes a layered sensory affect. Here, the programme frames its 1980s world in terms of a multi-sensory experience.[130]

Nonetheless, by featuring 'In the Air Tonight' *The Americans* 1.01 creates **'**extratextual association' with several 1980s texts, a characteristic that Woods (2008: 38) links to nostalgic uses of popular music in television. The closing sequence of 'San Junipero', featuring 'Heaven is a Place on Earth', provides another richly textured example of this auditory signposting of the 1980s. Both programmes evoke a degree of nostalgia through the palimpsestic accretion of meaning associated with popular 1980s songs.[131] They feature the songs at length, encouraging the audience's full enjoyment rather than sampling the music for a few seconds. Nostalgia is constructed in these moments not necessarily by the tone or narrative positioning of the songs, but the pleasure of listening and the memory of having heard the song before. Following Bayman (2019: 8), this process can be conceptualised as the 'temporal layering' of past and present musical experiences to evoke progressive nostalgia. Nostalgic affect extends to millennial viewers, who could not experience the songs when originally released, because the widespread use of these songs in the media has made them immediately recognizable through viewers' prosthetic memories (as per Landsberg 2004).[132] Woods (2008: 30) argues that 'through the cultural processing and recycling of nostalgic images and texts, some kind of "nostalgic" memory process can work upon all generations of audience.' The inclusion of songs with strong cultural permeation in reconstructions of the 1980s suggests, therefore, that programmes self-consciously attempt to stimulate 'all' viewers' feelings about and memories of the past.

The sequence that features Carlisle's **'**Heaven is a Place on Earth' in *'*San Junipero' also references 1980s television style and music in order to evoke a sensory and potentially nostalgic affect and connect viewers to the past. The scene makes use of MTV aesthetics such

[130] This multi-sensory stylistic register is subsequently developed and 'textured' throughout later episodes of *The Americans*, evidencing Donaldson's (2016: 5-6) claims about the layering of 'fine detail' in TV programmes over time (as explored in Chapter 2).

[131] A similar accretion of meaning is characteristic of pop music itself, according to Burns and Lacasse's (2018) work on *The Pop Palimpsest*.

[132] 'In the Air Tonight' was featured or referenced in *The Hangover* (dir. Todd Phillips, 2009), the video game *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories* (2006), a 2007 advert for Cadbury chocolates, and Eminem's 2000 song 'Stan'. 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' was featured or mentioned in *Wild Child* (dir. Nick Moore, 2008), *Love & Other Drugs* (dir. Edward Zwick, 2010), Lana del Rey's song 'Video Games' (2012), and a 2018 commercial for Progressive Insurance.

as 'editing to the customary tempi of popular music' and the 'aesthetization of *speed*' (Dickinson 2003: 144, 147; emphasis in original). It takes place at the end of the episode and juxtaposes Yorkie and Kelly's virtual and real lives. During the VR moments, Yorkie plays Carlisle's song from a cassette tape in her car whilst she happily drives into the sunset with Kelly and they go dancing at the arcade (figs. 4.21, 4.22). Outside the VR, the scene depicts Kelly's euthanasia and funeral after which her consciousness is permanently uploaded into the virtual simulation. This is followed by shots of the power bank that digitally stores people's consciousness (fig. 4.24). The sequence is interspersed with the black-and-white end credits of the episode, listing the production crew and cast (fig. 4.23). The scene constructs tension between the visual signposting of the 1980s and the audience's auditory experience of the music. The medium close-up in figure 4.21 draws attention to Yorkie inserting a cassette of 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' into the tape player of her car. However, the subsequent loud volume and crisp sound-quality of the song are not consistent with its diegetic origin as a 1980s cassette played on a car's sound system. Instead, a clean recording is played, enabling the song to overwhelm the action. The auditory displacement signals how viewers are witnessing a reconstruction of the 1980s, rather than historically authentic moments. Contemporary viewers, therefore, can only engage with the 1980s in part: aural signposting simultaneously points them in the direction of the 1980s through the intertextual reference to the song and reminds them of their distance from that decade through the aural texture of the soundscape. The way in which the soundscape can resituate a viewer in a different time period mirrors VR's simultaneous repositioning of Yorkie and Kelly in the past whilst, of course, never actually facilitating time travel.

'San Junipero' portrays listening to music within the virtual 1980s as a sensory activity. This facilitates a musical dialogue with the past, which reflects viewers' nostalgic desires. The framing of the final scene foregrounds Yorkie's hand as she pushes the cassette into the tape player (fig. 4.21). Several shots depict the quick movements of her fingers to establish a physical connection between her and the music. The haptic emphasis on Yorkie's fingers reminds of the focus on manual dexterity during arcade gameplay and lesbian sex elsewhere in the episode. Shumway (1999: 40) suggests that popular music is 'the most important ingredient in the production of the affect of nostalgia or the recollection of such affective experience in the viewer.' Moments that simultaneously foreground the sensation of touch and hearing are, therefore, doubly affective in engaging viewers emotionally and producing a nostalgic longing for the 1980s. The quick changes in imagery during this sequence – cutting from the women inside the car, to credits, to Kelly's death outside the VR, then back to the

car, to more credits, to the VR power bank, to the club, and to further credits – imitate the MTV music video conventions of rhythmic editing and speed identified by Dickinson (2003: 144, 147). The impact of the editing tempo is strengthened by the strong rhythmic beat and musical dynamism of 'Heaven is a Place on Earth'. The song's happy mood (it is played in a major key with power chords on guitar loudly accompanying Carlisle's upbeat voice) highlights the episode's happy ending as Kelly and Yorkie get married inside the VR simulation. The song starts with loud singing and drumbeats playing the refrain instead of an instrumental lead-in. This instantly overwhelms the visual world of 'San Junipero' with a sense of excitement and intrigue. Whilst the sequence's audiovisual construction resembles the multi-sensory interplay between popular music and haptic imagery in the sex scene from *The Americans* 1.01, its mood contrasts to the slowly building tension and ominousness of 'In the Air Tonight'.

The 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' sequence can be read in light of Woods' (2008: 34) point that: 'Whilst a song maintains a level of cohesion through its structural unity, the relationship it has with the image is either supported or disrupted, creating differing readings of the music/image relationship.' When Yorkie and Kelly are energetically dancing inside the virtual arcade nightclub during this scene, they have already passed away, and have been forever uploaded into VR space (fig. 4.22). At first glance, this implies that the lyrics of the accompanying song should be taken to connote that 'heaven is a place on earth' inside the VR simulation or when somebody nostalgically imagines being in another time and place. However, the final image of the sequence is a shot of the data bank that stores people's digitised consciousness, arranged in seemingly endless wall-to-wall lines at the VR company's headquarters (fig. 4.24). This shot ends the sequence on a note of disconnection from the past as well as from characters' bodies. Whilst the 1980s music continues, the image presents futuristic aesthetics of a monochrome building and flashing computer lights. Rapid changes between images of the virtual 1980s and the diegetic future reflect the temporal dynamics of nostalgia, illustrating a dissonance between returning to the past and moving towards the future. This effect is achieved by using the MTV aesthetics of the fast-paced juxtaposition of divergent images connected through a song. The effect of dissonance is strengthened by the depiction of computers that host human consciousness. These machines symbolise the loss of the physical body through immersion into the past, suggesting that 'immersive nostalgia therapy' (as Kelly remarks) cannot co-exist with physical human life.



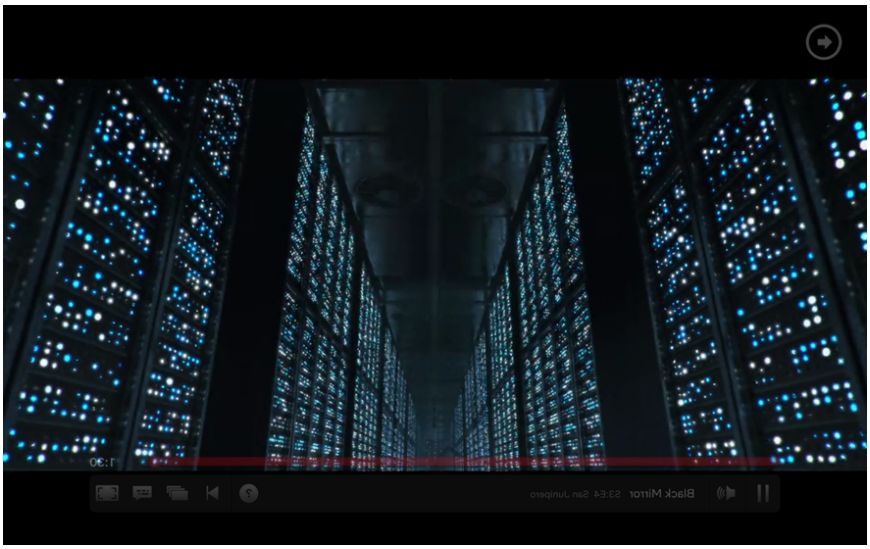
4.21 Yorkie inserts a Belinda Carlisle cassette tape in her car's tape player



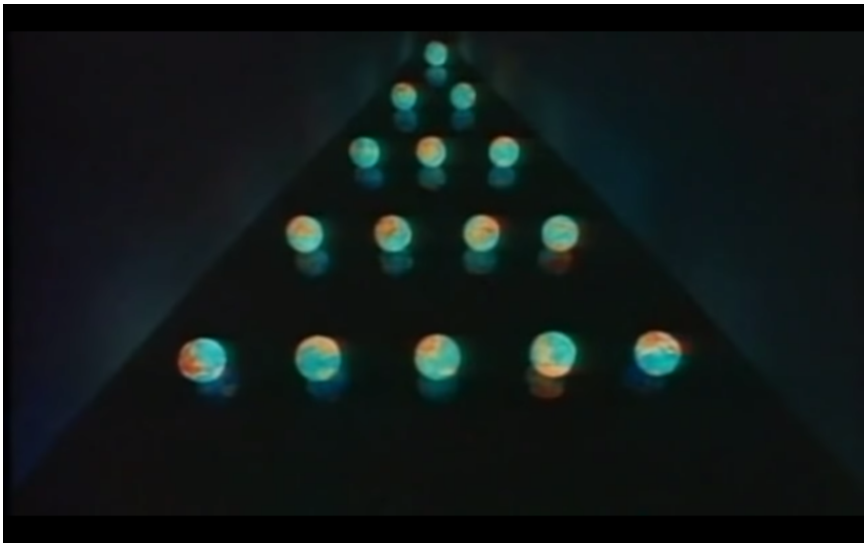
4.22 Yorkie and Kelly dance to 'Heaven is a Place on Earth'



4.23 End credits interspersed with the final scene of 'San Junipero'



4.24 VR data bank storing people's digital consciousness at the end of 'San Junipero'



4.25 Glowing globes in Carlisle's 1987 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' music video

The positioning of this sequence at the edge of the text, interspersed with the closing credits, means that images of the virtual past and diegetic future are constantly interrupted by black credit frames (fig. 4.23). The decision to edit the credits into this sequence fundamentally alters its meaning. These interruptions prohibit consistent immersion into the action of the sequence by continually pulling viewers' out of both the fictional 1980s as well as the narrative future. On the one hand, this reflects the influence of the visual disruption in MTV music videos on the aesthetic of the episode. On the other hand, the constant disruption and oscillation between the narrative of the episode and the material conditions of its

production frame the happy ending of Yorkie and Kelly's love story inside the VR as anything but seamless. The inclusion of the paratext together with the pace of the editing enable viewers to leave the fiction (and the 1980s) and, echoing the meta-textual tone of the episode, think about the nature of nostalgia itself. Brooker claims that Carlisle's song was chosen for this sequence as a 'joke' to mockingly suggest that computers which store dead people's consciousness equal heaven (qtd. in Brooker, Jones and Arnopp 2018). The disjointed editing and speed create space for the joke which Brooker attributes to the use of 'Heaven is a Place on Earth', encouraging viewers to reflect on the themes of the episode as the music accompanies images of computer servers (fig. 4.24) and paratextual information (fig. 4.23). The unification of disjointed visuals and a playful sense of irony directly borrows from the style of MTV music videos and, therefore, indirectly creates a sense of a 1980s aesthetic.

In 'San Junipero', MTV aesthetics are an important signpost of 1980s heritage. Vidal (2012b: 4) argues that heritage film and television are 'a hybrid genre […] informed not only by literature and painting, but also by fashion, popular music and television.' References to 1980s pop culture iconography such as music videos in contemporary programmes highlight the lasting impact of televisuality, as defined by Caldwell (1995), on the American media industry. The original music video for 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' already features disjointed visuals which are unified by the music and lyrics rather than depicting a coherent narrative. The video includes various images of Carlisle, women in masks holding globes, and the same glowing globes floating in space. Figure 4.25 shows how glowing globes are used in the video to engage with the song's themes of heaven and earth. The image of glowing blue circles against a dark background arranged towards the depth of the shot resembles the shot of the computer bank at the end of 'San Junipero' (fig. 4.24). This visual echo between the original music video and the sequence set to the same song creates a link between 1980s MTV aesthetics and contemporary digital television images. By extension, it connects the past (Carlisle's video in 1987), the present (viewers watching Netflix's release of 'San Junipero' in 2016), and the future (when the episode takes place). This mirrors the dynamics of nostalgia which according to Boym (2001: xvi) expresses 'fantasies of the past' that are 'determined by the needs of the present' and 'have a direct impact on realities of the future.' Thus parallels between Carlisle's music video and the final sequence of 'San Junipero' evidence how 'media are formative of the aesthetics of the nostalgic world they portray' (Niemeyer and Wentz 2014: 129). The imitation of 1980s iconography contributes to a self-reflective engagement with nostalgia in 'San Junipero': whilst the original image from the music video is not necessarily

recognized by many viewers, and consequently does not elicit a strong nostalgic response, there is a possible feeling of reward for those who can recall the image.

The Americans and 'San Junipero' do not create nostalgia for the 1980s Cold War environment or the hedonistic 1980s arcade and nightclub. Rather, they prompt a longing for a lost emotional connection, symbolised by desire and sexuality. This closeness is diminishing in present-day America due to social alienation linked to such issues as digital technologies, neoliberal capitalism, and the rise of extremist political hate groups in the Trump era (see Lemma 2017; Lavalette and Ferguson 2018; Neiwert 2017). The nostalgia elicited in the programmes examined is not aimed at the socio-political conservatism of 1980s America, which resembles today's political status quo, but for visceral, earnest relationships and liberated sexuality beyond the boundaries of the 1980s. References to 'In the Air Tonight' and 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' are not simply surface signifiers of the 1980s.[133] The inclusion of these songs and the citation of MTV aesthetics is evidence of programmes' awareness that the televisual remediation of 1980s heritage requires stylised audiovisual detail. In *The Americans* and 'San Junipero', nostalgic longing characterises the emotional core of the story, which, through music, is aestheticized in ways that link sensation to 1980s soundscapes. For Shumway (1999: 42), '[m]usic is the primary means by which an alternative world […] is produced for the viewer', especially an alternative and sensory world of the past. In order to fully consider the role of music in recreating the 1980s, the remainder of this chapter explores how a contemporary song immerses viewers in the 1980s world of *HaCF* without eliciting a nostalgic response. Expanding Christopher Hogg's (2013: 85) arguments about 'musical anachronism' in period cinema to television, the analysis illustrates that the use of contemporary music in a reconstruction of the 1980s offers a rich source for the analysis of American heritage, as the soundscape contributes to the programme's emotional texture.

Musical Anachronism, Empathy, and the AIDS Crisis

Like the ending of 'San Junipero', a scene in *HaCF* episode 3.05, 'Yerba Buena', combines popular music and LGBTQ themes with the effect of strengthening contemporary viewers' sensory engagement with the 1980s. The synergy between song, framing and perspective, and the theme of disease in this scene enables viewers to emotionally engage with 1980s concerns about AIDS regardless of the temporal gap between the time period represented and the time

[133] Woods (2008: 29-30) discusses how popular music is often dismissed as a surface signifier of the past, even though it carries a significant emotional charge.

period of production/consumption. During the scene, Joe takes a phone call from the San Francisco City Clinic (figs. 4.26-4.27). After thirty-five seconds Joe drops the phone, walks onto the balcony (fig. 4.28), and slowly smiles (fig. 4.29). Previously in the episode Joe was visited by his sombre ex-boyfriend; during the phone call, the only dialogue audible to viewers is a health professional saying that she wants to discuss 'the results of [Joe's] HIV antibody test.' The rest of the call is silenced as the soundscape foregrounds the music that had been playing softly in the background thus far: Cullen Omori's 2016 song 'New Misery'. Donaldson (2014: 113) observes that sound is often thought of 'as supporting the image', but, in fact, 'threading sound and image together' contributes to the construction of texture in film. Textured television images similarly thread sound and image together. This is significant for the reconstruction of historical settings because, as Landsberg (2015: 69) remarks, TV programmes set in the past orchestrate a 'mode of address' that is not only visual but also aural and tactile. In *HaCF* 3.05, the textured sound-image relationship renders the 1980s AIDS crisis through the construction of empathy.

HaCF 3.05 contributes to a lengthy and complex tradition of representing homosexuality and AIDS during and since the 1980s. In his work on representations of AIDS in film and television Kylo-Patrick R. Hart (2013: 8) argues that '[m]edia representations of AIDS provide ideological guidance to American audience members; as such, the codes, conventions, symbols, and visuals they offer contribute significantly to the social construction of the pandemic.' He (Ibid.: 61) discusses the 'persistent representational link between gay men and AIDS', concluding that television portrayals of the disease in the 1980s reflected the negative, socially conservative attitude towards homosexuality during the Reagan era. As Thompson (2007: 21) observes, during the 1980s 'for many on the conservative and religious Right in the US the emergence of AIDS was seen as evidence of the inherently dangerous (and potentially fatal) nature of male homosexuality.' This assumption 'provided the Right with the ammunition it needed to project AIDS as a gay plague' (Ibid.). For instance, in the episode 'A Big Disease with a Little Name' of the popular, youth-oriented police procedural *21 Jump Street* (Fox, 1987-1991), Officer Hanson (Johnny Depp) is assigned to protect a teenager with AIDS (2.13). The boy's father initially claims that he contracted the disease due to a blood transfusion with an infected needle, but at the end of the episode it is revealed that he is in fact gay. The revelation is therefore framed as a plot twist that is meant to generate shock and shame. By contrast, contemporary media has begun to address HIV and AIDS in a more empathetic light. In particular, Landsberg (2015: 65) argues that:

> The type of engagement that televised or filmic historical representations might foster – of feeling connected to but different from some other person or historical situation, of feeling both compassion and distance – is the structural condition for empathy.

Many TV programmes set in the 1980s, including *HaCF*, *The Carrie Diaries*, *Glow*, *Deutschland 83*, and *Pose*, insert emotionally resonant storylines relating to the AIDS epidemic into their reconstruction of the past, subverting the ignorance about and demonization of this issue in 1980s media.[134]

The 'New Misery' sequence in *HaCF* 3.05 constructs suspense and empathy by withholding information about Joe's HIV status, contributing to the emotional realism experienced by television viewers (as per Ang 1985). The audience is finally given relief when Joe smiles, implying that his test results are negative (fig. 5.31). Thompson (2007: 25) suggests that 'AIDS became an important dimension of life in the 1980s because it tested the capacity of American society to cope with the unknown.' The intensity of the experience of contracting HIV during the 1980s is mirrored in the slow-paced long take and the soundtrack playing 'New Misery' between the start of the phone call and Joe's smile. The use of music in this scene 'test[s]' viewers 'capacity' to 'cope with the unknown' (Ibid.) by keeping the information about Joe's HIV status from them for the duration of the song. This aesthetic contrasts with the fast-paced editing style of MTV that creates visual disruption, nevertheless forging a link with the 1980s in an altogether more serious and self-aware tone, appropriate for the theme of the episode.

By using a contemporary song in a narrative set in the 1980s *HaCF* frames the AIDS crisis from a twenty-first century perspective. The use of a 2016 song during such an important sequence furthers *HaCF*'s 'sensory dialogue with the past' (Keblinska 2017: 127), facilitating a continuation between the 1980s and today that is not nostalgic but is still impactful. The depiction of a serious topic such as disease, however, runs the risk of alienating the audience. Empathy for those affected by the AIDS crisis is prompted by the use of contemporary music, rather than a song from the 1980s. This is because the song can evoke feeling without taking the viewer through a series of layered intertextual references to specific moments from the past.[135] 'New Misery' features ambient sounds which are carried across the beat as if from

[134] Throughout the 2010s, popular movies such as *Dallas Buyers Club* and TV programmes set in the present day such as *How to Get Away with Murder* also constructed an empathetic depiction of HIV and AIDS.

[135] This is in contrast to the strong cultural permeation and multiple intertextual references surrounding 'In the Air Tonight' and 'Heaven is a Place on Earth'. Even if viewers assume that Omori's 'New Misery' is a 1980s song because its synth-heavy musical structure mirrors 1980s musical conventions, a nostalgic effect is not created. This is due to the fact that the song is not widely known.

another place and time, whilst Omori's singing follows a broadly descending scale pattern that creates a sense of going back in time. The performance uses sustained notes to stretch the rhythms of the piece. For the listener, this creates a sense of looking back, an atmosphere exaggerated by the use of reverb, or echo sound effect. This fosters a sense of being removed from the time of listening. Thus using a contemporary song evokes 'a sense of past time and place' by immersing viewers 'in the sensibilities of a different age' (Hogg 2013: 86). Hogg (Ibid.) argues that this typical of anachronistic music in period drama.

The sequence layers Omori's music onto the visual presentation of Joe's tense wait for potentially life-altering news. As a result, it is the music that constructs and maintains the emotional substrata of the episode: the suspenseful wait which the viewer shares with Joe. The title of the song itself, 'New Misery', relays the emergent panic and sadness that the disease elicited in the 1980s (see Gould 2009). Omori can be heard singing the word 'new' multiple times during the sequence, emphasising the temporal gap between the 1980s, when the disease was first recognized, and its more commonplace understanding in contemporary America. Shumway (1999: 40) explains that 'songs need not literally bring the past to life for the viewer but give the impression of such an experience, creating a fictional set of memories.'[136] The 'New Misery' sequence creates a 'fictional set of memories' (Ibid.) which lead to television viewers' 'subjective experience' (Ang 1985: 45) of the AIDS crisis from a 2010s perspective. The empathy elicited by the music is contrasted to a visual distancing effect that occurs whilst Joe takes the phone call from the clinic. During the call the camera slowly zooms out, isolating Joe as he deals with the news about his test results (figs. 4.26-4.27). This effect contributes to feelings of disembodiment that might be felt by viewers for whom AIDS is an unfamiliar topic that they find hard to comprehend. As a visual juxtaposition to the lyrics, the zoom makes Joe's body appear gradually smaller which hints at the possible gradual decline of a body suffering from AIDS.[137] In this regard, the audiovisual texture of *HaCF* recalls Donaldson's (2014: 114) argument that 'the relationship between sound and emotion' draws attention to 'the physicality inherent to responsiveness to sound (and image)', resulting in blurred boundaries 'between self and the world'. The soundscape of the 'New Misery' sequence

[136] For Shumway, this applies to the evocation of a nostalgic response in younger audiences who do not have first-hand experience of the time period or the music. During *HaCF*'s depiction of the AIDS crisis, the inclusion of 'New Misery' encourages both older and younger viewers to feel empathy (not nostalgia) for the 1980s LGBTQ community. The song's contemporariness and low cultural permeation requires viewers to connect it to a fresh set of historical memories (such as *HaCF*'s fictional narrative).

[137] These shots resemble those of Bash taking a phone call about the death of a friend from AIDS in *Glow* episode 2.10, also from a San Francisco-based clinic. In *Glow*, the plot about AIDS brings to the surface Bash's own closeted sexuality for the viewers.

facilitates viewers' sensory immersion into the programme's 1980s world so that they respond to the emotive subject matter (AIDS) with empathy. Meanwhile, the visuals detach them from the 1980s, creating dissonance between the sound and the image. Whereas 'San Junipero' prompts viewers' reflection on their nostalgic tendencies through audiovisual disjunction (as discussed above), the long zoom in *HaCF* 3.05 reminds them of the programme's contemporariness so that they do not respond to the sequence nostalgically. Here, the construction of nostalgic desire would undermine the soundtrack's empathetic present-day perspective on AIDS.



4.26 Joe takes a phone call about his HIV results



4.27 A long zoom tests viewers capacity to 'cope with the unknown' whilst Joe waits for his HIV results



4.28 Contrast between the 'gay dystopia' of urban living and nature



4.29 A medium close-up of Joe smiling reveals that he is healthy

The sequence references established representational practices in relation to AIDS. Hart (2013: 74) suggests that cities frequently appear in film and television as 'AIDS dystopia' from the 1980s onwards. By contrast, 'countryside and beach communities [are] places where gay men can escape the stresses associated with urban life and the far greater chances of contracting HIV/AIDS in the city' (Ibid.). In *HaCF* 3.05, Joe walks from his apartment to the balcony where he looks out at the mountains. The imagery and movement display an awareness of 1980s conventions of portraying HIV/AIDS: Joe's movement is clearly divided by the balcony doors between the darker inside of his apartment and the well-lit sunny outside (fig. 4.28). At the beginning of the scene, Joe is working on his computer inside his apartment. He has a job in the technology industry, a line of work associated with urban lifestyles. Whilst

he stays indoors the audience likely leans towards believing Joe to have HIV, an assumption prompted by the song choice 'New Misery' and the inaudible phone conversation. Once outside in the clean air, however, viewers see Joe's relief via a medium close-up of him smiling in the bright sunlight, framed against the dark backdrop of the balcony doors (fig. 4.29). This setup conveys the assumption that nature helps gay men to 'escape the stresses associated with' contracting HIV or AIDS in the city (Hart 2013: 74), alluding to a common trope in historical media representations of the epidemic. In combination with the emotionally resonant musical structure of Omori's song, *HaCF*'s iconography reconciles the discord between 1980s and 2010s perspectives on AIDS.

HaCF encourages viewers to feel empathy for its bisexual protagonist. It does not, however, elicit a nostalgic response. Unlike sequences in *The Americans* 1.01 and 'San Junipero', *HaCF* 3.05 does not reference MTV aesthetics or feature well-known 1980s songs to establish a sensory dialogue with the past. Instead, it synthesises textured soundscape, visual distancing, and historical representational practices surrounding the AIDS crisis to connect contemporary viewers with the 1980s. Regardless of stylistic differences, the 'New Misery' sequence and the sex scenes discussed earlier in this chapter all move away from conservative portrayals of sexuality as they appeared on 1980s television, stressing their own contemporariness and highlighting the importance of intimacy to the remediation of the 1980s.

Conclusion: Sexuality and Televisuality as Heritage

In *HaCF*, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero', stylised high-definition images and high-resolution soundscapes constantly remind the audience of the programmes' 2010s production context. In so doing, they prompt viewers to reflect on the socio-political consequences of the heteronormative policing of sexuality and on the prejudices faced by the LGBTQ community during the 1980s and today. The chapter's analysis of these parallels answers the thesis' first research question. The programmes use a number of signposts which require touching or listening to connect viewers to the 1980s, including sex, the arcade, MTV videos, pop music, and AIDS. They highlight that anxieties about the human body in an ever-changing society are not only characteristic of American society in the 1980s (see Thompson 2007: 26), but also shape American identity in the 2010s. Furthermore, sensory soundscapes strengthen immersion into the past either by promoting nostalgia and historically traceable (MTV) aesthetics or by conveying feelings of empathy. Through their multi-sensory engagement with the 1980s, the programmes examined illustrate how gendered and sexual hierarchies circumscribe people's lives in the USA. Due to their longstanding prejudices, right-wing

political groups in America repeatedly contest the legal and human rights of the LGBTQ community, reflected, for instance, by the 'political homophobia' of Mike Pence, Trump's Vice President (Moreau 2018: 629). Through their reimagination of the 1980s, *HaCF* and 'San Junipero' question Trump's attempts to resurrect the Reagan era, such as Trump's campaign slogan and his record of appointing conservative judges (the 'worst' record of judicial diversity since Reagan [Tobias 2018: 402]). Along with *The Americans*, these programmes challenge historical media representations of sexuality through the stylised surface of high-definition digital television images.

HaCF, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero' engage with aesthetic practices of 1980s television through their 'extreme self-consciousness of style'; a key feature of televisuality as defined by Caldwell (1995: 4). Each programme self-consciously foregrounds the constructedness of the 1980s within fictional settings. Following Vidal's (2012b: 4) claims about the political and emotional affect of heritage films and television programmes that cite historical pop culture iconography, this chapter argues that the extreme stylisation of television images and soundscapes epitomises reconstructions of 1980s America in the 2010s, responding to the second and third research questions. Television played a primary role in shaping the cultural landscape of the 1980s (see Feuer 1995), and the ontological status of the television image itself changed drastically throughout the decade (see Caldwell 1995). From a contemporary perspective, televisual citations structure the return to the 1980s, expanding upon Vidal's (2012a: 111) claim that 'painterly' and 'photographic' visual citations structure stylised returns to the nineteenth and early twentieth century in period drama. It is therefore not only the content and arrangement of the television mise-en-scène that conveys the 1980s' political and cultural importance. The act of televisual stylisation belongs, in and of itself, to 1980s American heritage.

This chapter develops Keblinska's (2017) theories of sensory nostalgia, especially her research into the stylisation of high-definition television images that depict the past. The next chapter takes Keblinska's findings about analogue technology in portrayals of recent history as a steppingstone for its analysis of the media's role in canonising the 1980s' heritage. To do so, Chapter 5 discusses how the inclusion of archival television and home video footage creates an affective connection between today's audiences and the 1980s. It illustrates how the act of watching television informs people's understanding of the 1980s' historical significance, in relation to more broadly recognisable signposts of the decade such as the Cold War and Reagan's reverence of family values.

CHAPTER 5

Nuclear Apocalypse, Nuclear Family: Televised Images of the Cold War and 1980s Childhood

> 'Before the movie begins, we would like to caution parents about the graphic depiction of nuclear explosions and their devastating effect. The emotional impact of these scenes may be unusually disturbing and […] we'd like to suggest that the family watch together.'
>
> *The Day After* (ABC, 1983)

In 2017, tensions between President Tump and Kim Jong-un, the leader of the communist party in North Korea, reawakened Cold War-era fears about nuclear war, recalling similar fears that were central to the Reagan administration's conflict with the USSR throughout the 1980s. When North Korea threatened the USA with nuclear action several times during 2017 (see Skutsch 2017; Bowden 2017), *CNN* and *The Washington Post* published articles on 'How to Cope with Fears of a Nuclear Disaster' (LeMotte 2017) and 'How to prepare for a nuclear attack' (Bump 2017). These headlines echo Cold War-era rhetoric, such as articles in *The New York Times* during the 1980s on 'Planning for the Worst' (Wald 1982) and 'How to Save the World' (Cohen 1982). This chapter answers the thesis' first and second research questions as it examines how the sitcom *The Goldbergs* (ABC, 2013-), spy drama *The Americans* (FX, 2013-2018), and science fiction horror *Stranger Things* (Netflix, 2016-) respond to uncertainty and traumas in the 2010s by focusing on political and domestic turbulence during the Cold War in the 1980s. It focuses on the impact of nuclear anxiety on the family and explores how this experience shapes viewers' understanding of the political situation in the 1980s and its resonances today.

As viewers watch the programmes examined in this chapter, the act of watching becomes a mediatory experience between the nuclear family and nuclear war. These programmes frequently portray critical political issues through the inclusion of analogue TV sets, archival 1980s broadcasts, and home video footage. In so doing, they foreground television's significant presence in households across the USA, both in the 1980s and today, and emphasise the role of TV as a determining factor in the construction of historical memories (as explored in the Introduction). Keblinska (2017: 131) argues that digital high-definition programmes in the 2010s often feature images of old media technology to recall 'the aesthetics of a media environment different from the contemporary moment, [which] beckons us to

remember.' In *The Goldbergs*, *The Americans*, and *Stranger Things*, the inclusion of archival footage and home videos self-consciously highlights the process of reconstructing the past on TV. This facilitates the audience's engagement with the Cold War and with changing definitions of American identity over time, and it raises questions about historical authenticity in period drama. As a result, these programmes 'beckon' (Ibid.) viewers to remember the past and to experience an emotional connection to the 1980s.

In the programmes examined in this chapter, the Cold War and nuclear threat are repeatedly used as metaphors for family disintegration and intrusion into domestic spaces. The entry of Cold War-era fears into American homes disrupts family harmony and emotionally and at times physically threatens children's wellbeing. By exploring memories of the Cold War across three genres (espionage, sitcom, and science fiction), this chapter examines a range of emotional responses to nuclear threat.[138] The Cold War appears as a contributing factor to the breakdown of the nuclear family (see Popenoe 1993: 540), a construct reinforced by heteronormative Republican expectations during the 1980s (as explored in Chapters 2 and 4). A possible consequence of this breakdown is the erosion of childhood naïveté. There is tension between this erosion and adult tendencies to look back at childhood with fondness. Over time, negative memories of past fear can become watered down so that childhood is remembered nostalgically as a period of innocence. This chapter discusses these issues to expand upon scholarship surrounding the social construction of childhood and the nuclear family (see Cunningham 2014; Popenoe 1993; Lavelle 2016), particularly in relation to media consumption (see Livingstone 2002; Holland 2004; Wesseling 2018). In several contemporary programmes, a return to the 1980s is framed as a potentially nostalgic return to childhood: *The Goldbergs* and *Stranger Things* have pre-teen and teen protagonists, whilst *The Americans* gives the Jennings' teenage daughter Paige (Holly Taylor) more prominence each season (outlined in Chapter 2). Hugh Cunningham (2014: 2) argues that 'we need to distinguish between children as human beings and childhood as a shifting set of ideas', charting Western historical perspectives on childhood since the 1500s. His analysis highlights that perspectives on childhood are constantly changing in accordance with sociocultural parameters. Taking into account Cunningham's claims, contemporary standpoints on children in American society (in terms of, for instance, parents' caring responsibilities) influence how 1980s childhood is conceptualised on television.

[138] Espionage is significant as spies were a key symbol within the Cold War media landscape (see Kackman 2005). In sitcoms, the comedic tone complicates notions of fear and disaster. Moreover, as Seed (1999: 1) observes, science fiction has a long history of engaging with the Cold War.

The fact that *The Americans*, *The Goldbergs*, and *Stranger Things* draw viewers' attention to the constructedness of images and events that they associate with the 1980s means that in these programmes the experience of childhood is seen as a 'masquerade', as theorised by Patricia Holland (2004: 20).[139] As a result, identity politics emerges as a core concern relating to media images from the 1980s and recollections of childhood and the Cold War. This chapter explores the construction and 'masquerade' (Ibid.) of childhood to highlight the significance of generational shifts and childhood media exposure to the remediation of the 1980s' heritage, *via* television. Following Marcus' (2004: 26) arguments about public and private cultural memories of the past, childhood is similarly understood to function publicly and privately. For instance, Holland (2004: 51) suggests that children have to navigate family structures which are 'at once the most private and the most public' because they merge intimacy and closeness with legislation and social policy. Stuart Hanson (2000: 146) identifies several public and private issues concerning representations of childhood on film which are relevant for this chapter's analysis, including: 'the child en route to adulthood'; 'the child as vulnerable and in need of protection'; and 'the condition of children and childhood as comment on contemporary society'. Whilst Hanson focuses on the representation of childhood in the cinema, this chapter responds to the third research question by arguing that television programmes can explore the social construction of childhood by foregrounding the medium itself. In so doing, they critically engage with the impact of television, and media exposure more broadly, on children's lives since the 1980s.

The Americans, *The Goldbergs*, and *Stranger Things* develop existing traditions of television period dramas that enable a return to childhood. An example of this is *The Wonder Years*, one of Marcus' (2004) case studies and a popular programme that ran from 1988 until 1993, portraying a man's recollections of growing up in the 1960s. A similar temporal gap is used in the programmes studied in this chapter, and, like *The Wonder Years*, each programme negotiates the conflict between nostalgic recall and the events that took place. By focusing on children's experience of nuclear threat via media exposure, these programmes exemplify Cunningham's (2014: 189) observation that in the late twentieth century 'hopes and anxieties about the modern world became focused on children'. Cunningham (2014: 172) attributes these shifts in the social construction of families and childhood to the proliferation of mass media and neoliberal capitalism:

> In the second half of the twentieth century it was the sense of an erosion or even disappearance of childhood which dominated discussion: [some] children […] failed

[139] As outlined in the Literature Review, Cook (2016 [1996]: 57) similarly describes history as 'masquerade'.

> spectacularly to live up to the innocence supposedly innate in all children; many more, perhaps all, seemed to be losing their childhood early under the pressures of the twin forces of the media and of mass consumption.

If as Holland (2004: 6) suggests public images of childhood are 'an important part of *negotiations* around social meanings, continuously creating new versions of contentious concepts such as "childhood"' (emphasis in original), then the programmes analysed here are shaped by past media images of childhood at the same time as contributing to widespread understandings of childhood in present-day America.

The 1980s is also significant in terms of changes in family structures and their impact on children. In 1993 David Popenoe (540) identified 'American family decline' in the twentieth century, referring to a reduction from large, extended families to smaller, nuclear families and, by the end of the 1980s, to even smaller, disintegrated family units (such as single-parent households). More recently, Ashley Lavelle (2016: 1-18) suggests that whilst the concept of family remains a central structuring device in Western society, the nuclear family itself has continued to change since the 1960s. In light of today's expanding understandings of family structures – evident in more widespread media depictions of same-sex parenting in *The Fosters* and *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005-) and of single-parent households in *Single Parents* (ABC, 2018-) and *One Day at a Time* (Netflix / Pop TV 2017-present)[140] – the nature of the fast-changing family unit is particularly relevant to this chapter's analysis. Cunningham (Ibid.: 184) argues that the 'significance of parenting' became particularly central to families in the 1980s, a consideration that this chapter addresses at length in relation to *The Americans*, *The Goldbergs*, and *Stranger Things*.

The chapter explores the centrality of television and home video technology to the 1980s' heritage (including nostalgic reminiscing about the past), and the role of parenting as protection against nuclear threat, in terms of both nuclear war and the break-up of the nuclear family. To do this, it discusses the 'affective potential' (Landsberg 2015: 89) of archival television footage from the 1983 nuclear disaster television movie *The Day After* (ABC, 1983) in *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs*. The inclusion of this footage strengthens contemporary viewers' connection to the past and reinforces how media images from the 1980s impact present-day understandings of American history. The chapter then argues that *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs* frame the Cold War as a disruptive catalyst within the family unit, particularly affecting children's sense of security and accentuating parents' role as caretakers.

[140] *One Day at a Time* is a reboot of a popular sitcom of the same name (CBS, 1975-1984).

Archival television and home video footage underscore the representation of nuclear disruption, whilst they also foreground the (often inaccurate) remediation of historical facts within fictional narratives. In its engagement with analogue media technologies, the chapter considers how *The Goldbergs* uses original 1980s home videos to prompt childhood nostalgia.

As *Stranger Things* deals with 1980s nuclear threat allegorically through its obviously fictional monsters, the programme is analysed on its own terms in the final section of the chapter. As this chapter makes clear, whilst *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs* contain scenes where the family engages with archival television depicting nuclear war (watching 'live' broadcasts together), in *Stranger Things* families encounter the same threat through a monster's attack and otherworldly experiments. Hence, the exploration of the chapter's themes – the emotional affect of the Cold War on families and childhood nostalgia – in *Stranger Things* requires a distinct framework. Although the genre tropes of *Stranger Things* are radically different to those used in *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs*, its commentary on serious political issues makes it a thematically comparable study. The section on *Stranger Things* contributes to recent scholarship that reads the programme's preoccupation with the 1980s as highlighting 'terrifying similarities between the 1980s and now; speaking to the present as much as the past' (Butler 2017: 196) to suggest that science fiction tropes and nuclear imagery are an integral element of *Stranger Things*' return to childhood in the 1980s.

The Day After and the Disruption of the Nuclear Family

As television contributes to present-day understandings of twentieth-century history (see Hoskins 2001: 336; Edgerton 2000: 7), programmes set in the 1980s can comment on the function of the medium itself whilst performing the same purpose. In particular, the inclusion of *The Day After*, which aired in November 1983, in *The Americans* 4.09, 'The Day After', and *The Goldbergs* 4.22, 'The Day After *The Day After*', highlights political and personal aspects of nuclear fear during the 1980s. It exposes how cultural memories of 1980s America are mediated through television images. The contrasting genre conventions and tone of these programmes draw viewers' attention towards media use in the home and parental responsibility for children's safety in distinct but comparable ways.

In a 2011 article on the remediation of the past in CNN's documentary series *Cold War*, Staffan Ericson (149, 147) discusses the necessity of a 'future anterior tense' for the retelling of stories about the Cold War, which, Ericson argues, is effectively 'a story waiting for its event – nuclear Armageddon – to happen.' He (Ibid.: 147) identifies a difficulty in mediating the threat of nuclear annihilation for a contemporaneous audience who '*know* by

now, it did *not* [happen]' (emphasis in original). The emotional impact of images of nuclear destruction on a contemporary audience, however, has become exacerbated and re-evaluated since 2017, within the context of new political tensions between the USA, Russia, and North Korea. For example, *The Goldbergs* aired its episode about *The Day After* less than three weeks after the USA dropped the 'Mother of All Bombs' on Afghanistan in April 2017 (see Wright 2017). The proximity of this event to the air date of the episode suggests a degree of intentionality on the part of the creator, Adam F. Goldberg, drawing strong parallels between today's nuclear threat and that of the 1980s. By contrast, episodes of *The Americans* that take place during November 1983 aired a year before these renewed tensions arose, rendering parallels between past and present nuclear conflicts subtle rather than specific. The inclusion of *The Day After* in *The Americans* 4.09 provides a narrative space for viewers to reflect upon the central role of family and childhood in present-day memories of the past, a theme repeatedly emphasised in interviews by the programme's creators Joe Weisberg and Joel Fields (see Keller 2016; Li 2017).[141]

The centrality of the Cold War and of nuclear fear to the heritage of the 1980s can be seen in the narrative foregrounding of November 1983 in the programmes examined in this chapter. The appearance of the events of November 1983 is an important moment that emphasises the parent-child dynamic, and for the most part the chapter focuses on depictions of this month.[142] With the exception of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, November 1983 was the most tense period of the Cold War as the world came close to nuclear altercation between the USA and the USSR. In November 1983, the American military in West Berlin tested its response to a potential nuclear attack through a simulation exercise codenamed 'Able Archer'. Soviet authorities nearly mistook this military exercise for a real nuclear attack and prepared for a nuclear counterattack (see Doward 2013; Iskander 2016).[143] In the same month, the broadcast of *The Day After*, a film about nuclear war between the USA and the USSR from the perspective of a small Midwestern town, influenced America to the extent that Reagan's administration cited it in their nuclear agenda (see Hänni 2016). Hence, *The Day After*'s cultural impact is so significant that when it is incorporated into contemporary period dramas it continues to carry an emotional as well as political weight.

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[141] *The Americans* has been retrospectively interpreted as reflecting timely political issues. In 2017, late-night talk show host John Oliver compared the plot of the programme to the leaking of classified information to Russia under President Trump (*Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* 4.13) and *Esquire* called it 'the most relevant show on television' (Thurm 2017), in spite of the first four seasons prefiguring the Trump administration.

[142] *Stranger Things* season 1 also takes place during November 1983. Hence, this chapter considers season 1, with illustrative references to relevant moments from seasons 2 and 3 (set in 1984 and 1985, respectively).

[143] The 'Able Archer' simulation is central to the plot of *Deutschland 83*, discussed in Chapter 2.

Engagement with television from the past in contemporary historical programmes is highly self-referential. When *The Americans* 4.09 and *The Goldbergs* 4.22 include archival footage from *The Day After* and foreground analogue 1980s television sets, this has a similar affect to the use of historical TV broadcasts in *Mad Men* as discussed by Landsberg (2015: 86-91; see Literature Review). Landsberg (Ibid.: 62) observes that television period drama can feature old broadcasts to make viewers 'reconsider what the project of history looks like in the contemporary media landscape.' Footage from *The Day After* connects contemporary viewers to the historical and emotional landscape of watching television in 1980s America. It encourages the audience 'to engage affectively with the material and conditions of the past' (Landsberg 2015: 90), an effect strengthened by the function of television as a technology of intimacy.[144] In *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs*, the diegetic inclusion of television broadcasts from the past highlights that the 1980s is self-consciously recreated from a contemporary perspective. Thus episodes featuring *The Day After* do not simply 'provoke historical consciousness in their viewers', as Landsberg (2015: 62) theorises in relation to *Mad Men*. Rather, *The Americans* 4.09 and *The Goldbergs* 4.22 'provoke' viewers' consciousness about the role of media images in the construction of the 1980s' cultural heritage.

When *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs* present the experience of watching *The Day After* they portray it as an emotionally overwhelming television event. The programmes take advantage of the way in which analogue television technology 'infects daily life with its participatory potential', as noted in Keblinska's (2017: 126) analysis of *Reply 1994*. Their engagement with both the family and the Cold War means that depicting the intimate effects of *The Day After* in detail encourages reflection not only on the subject matter but also on the process of public information entering the home through the television set. These programmes depict the 'participatory potential' (Ibid.) of analogue television footage about nuclear war as particularly dangerous towards children. Parents are framed as responsible for helping their children navigate the potentially troubling impact of television consumption. This reflects the growing sense of parental responsibility and the erosion of childhood innocence that Cunningham (2014: 172) connects with the influence of mass media in late twentieth-century discourse about childhood.[145] Return to this erosion activates viewers' engagement with

[144] As Newcomb's (1974: 245) foundational work on television and intimacy reminds us: 'Television is at its best when it offers us faces, reactions, explorations of emotions registered by human beings.'
[145] In her work on children and media psychology, Valkenburg (2008: 58-82) also discusses children's potential 'fear responses to news and entertainment'.

memories of moments when they lost their sense of childhood innocence. This also brings forth present-day fears about domestic security due to contemporary nuclear tensions.

The experience of nuclear fear in relation to childhood is foregrounded in a parental guidance segment that aired before the original broadcast of *The Day After* on ABC, included in *The Americans* 4.09 (see epigraph). In this segment, John Collum (who plays Jim Dahlberg) directly addresses viewers, forewarning them about the upsetting nature of the content:

> Hello, I'm John Cullum. In this evening's ABC Theater presentation of *The Day After* I play a father in a typical American family who experienced the catastrophic events of a full-scale nuclear war. Before the movie begins, we would like to caution parents about the graphic depiction of nuclear explosions and their devastating effects. The emotional impact of these scenes may be unusually disturbing, and we are therefore recommending that very young children not be permitted to watch. In homes where young people are watching, we'd like to suggest that the family watch together so that parents can be on hand to answer questions and discuss issues raised by the movie.

As Collum's monologue highlights, his role is 'to caution parents' about the 'affective potential' (as per Landsberg 2015: 89) of *The Day After* and alert them to their role as mediators between television programmes and their children. In *The Americans*, viewers witness how the TV movie impacts the Jennings and Beeman families as parents try to settle their children's anxieties. During the original broadcast, Collum's speech ended with a notice to viewers about a special episode of *Viewpoint* (ABC, 1981-1997) that aired after the film, featuring a discussion with a panel of experts about nuclear politics (see 'ABC Theater: The 2' 1983 [T84:0208]). This is omitted from the monologue in *The Americans* 4.09. Instead, the parents mediate what the family has seen on television by debating nuclear proliferation and downplaying its threat (analysed below).

By directly addressing the audience, Collum breaks the fourth wall (fig. 5.1). This connects contemporary viewers of *The Americans* with the viewers within the programme.[146] This either prompts viewers' recollection of their own fist-hand experience of watching *The Day After* as children or it triggers the 'prosthetic memories' of younger viewers (see Landsberg 2004).[147] The composition of figure 5.1, however, complicates the scene's directness by using a frame within frame set up. This doubling image of a 1980s television set showing Collum's address manifests the 'clearly discernible historical frame' that Landsberg

[146] This resonates with Keblinska's (2017: 131) analysis of *Reply 1994*, as she states: 'The viewer of the analogue television appears in *Reply* in at least two places, one visible on the screen, and one not. She is, one, a character within the show, and two, a remembered viewer position of the viewer watching *Reply 1994*.'

[147] As discussed in the Literature Review, Landsberg (2004: 2) defines prosthetic memory as a person's 'deeply felt memory of a past event through which he did not live', relating the formation of such memories to the relationship between parents and children.

(2015: 69) attributes to historical television programmes. This is significant because the framing of Collum's warning becomes relevant to both the contemporary situation (direct address) and that of the 1980s (analogue television set). It is this tension between the intimacy of Collum's direct address and the distancing effect of the frame within frame image that facilitates contemporary viewers' affective engagement with the material. As Landsberg (2015: 178) notes when discussing sets in *Mad Men*, such affective moments have the potential 'to make the event or situation of the past meaningful'. Through stylised mise-en-scène, this moment in *The Americans* 4.09 becomes 'meaningful' as it makes the loss of childhood in the 1980s resurface in contemporary viewers.



fig. 5.1 The television broadcast of *The Day After*, as seen in *The Americans*

Later, the scene also features *The Day After* without the use of diegetic framing (figs. 5.2, 5.4, 5.6). These moments are interspersed with close-ups of characters' reactions to the TV movie (figs. 5.3, 5.5, 5.7). Considering how 'television programming frequently works to diminish the sense of distance between the "spectator side of the screen" and the onscreen world' (Smit 2015: 893), the inclusion of full screen images from *The Day After* draws in contemporary viewers, enabling them to identify with the characters watching the same scenes. In *The Americans* 4.09, a selection of shots from the TV movie show ambiguous images of destruction including unidentifiable objects burning or exploding (figs. 5.2, 5.6) and figures of families and children (fig. 5.4). These shots juxtapose nuclear annihilation with the dissolution of the family. The images of nuclear destruction are almost always vague enough to engage viewers' imagination and leave room for individual fears to foster. The selection of

scenes from *The Day After* in *The Americans* illustrates that associations between nuclear threat and the loss of childhood were already established in the 1983 television movie. Thus the contemporary TV programmes analysed here do not create these connections so much as they capitalise on them to tell their own stories about the loss of childhood from the perspective of present-day America. Holdsworth (2011: 5) suggests that 'paying attention to the way in which past television is re-contextualised […] we might begin to investigate the construction of television's own memory cultures and our engagement with them.' The layered composition between archival footage and the contemporary programme in *The Americans* 4.09 and *The Goldbergs* 4.22 (examined below) speaks to the formative role of television in the creation of cultural memories of the 1980s.

Reactions to *The Day After* in *The Americans* are varied as they range from: Paige, a teenage girl who, following her participation in an anti-nuclear protest in episode 2.12, 'Operation Chronicle', is worried about her parents because they are Soviet spies (fig. 5.3); to Elizabeth (Keri Russell), Paige's mother who continually endangers her life to fight the Cold War for the USSR (fig. 5.5); and Stan (Noah Emmerich), a father working for the FBI to defeat the USSR (fig. 5.7). Each character has something personal at stake, should nuclear war break out. And each has strong, distinct personal beliefs regarding the objectives of the Cold War. The characters' eyes are fixed steadily on the screen, demonstrating *The Day After*'s infectious 'participatory potential' (Keblinska 2017: 126). The tight close-ups of their faces reveal the deeply personal impact of the images and reflect Collum's warning that such emotional impressions 'may be unusually disturbing'. There is a stark contrast between the chaotic assembly of quickly changing sample images from *The Day After*, which often use bright colours like orange as affective examples for a contemporary audience, and the unchanging, low-lit, green-brown hues of the Jennings' home. Thus *The Americans*' editing of the 1983 broadcast emphasises *The Day After*'s capacity to cause emotional and physical chaos as it contrasts with the potential stability of the family home.[148] Whilst this juxtaposition communicates the message that the Cold War is endangering the stability of the nuclear family, the Jennings' family home is in fact already unstable.

[148] Today's viewers may not experience the same sense of communal family viewing, as television is more often consumed on personal devices and in accordance to individual tastes and schedules. To some extent, the destabilisation of the family has already taken place with regards to media consumption.



fig. 5.2 Nuclear explosion in *The Day After*, as seen in *The Americans*



fig. 5.3 Paige's concerned reaction to *The Day After*



fig. 5.4 A child in danger in *The Day After*, as seen in *The Americans*



fig. 5.5 Elizabeth's concerned reaction to *The Day After*



fig. 5.6 Nuclear blast in *The Day After*, as seen in *The Americans*



fig. 5.7 Stan's concerned reaction to *The Day After*

The Americans highlights the domestic disruption caused by the Cold War by inserting a re-establishing shot of the Jennings' house after *The Day After* ends (fig. 5.8). This suggests that the family home should offer a safe space in contrast to the deadly disaster presented in *The Day After*. This attempt to stabilise the home environment with a re-establishing shot, however, is futile as the Jennings' house is home to KGB spies, making the loss of American 1980s childhood inevitable. This false sense of security is most prominently exemplified

through the repeated use of the laundry room, a space for domestic chores, as a secretive hiding space for spy equipment (as seen, for instance, in episodes 1.04 and 1.13). Throughout the programme, the laundry room is frequently seen as a domestic space of disruption, especially with regards to the threatening effect of the Jennings' spy work on their children. After several large-scale spy operations that lead to the FBI getting close to capturing Philip (Matthew Rhys) and Elizabeth, the first season of *The Americans* ends on an unexpected and ambiguous shot of Paige suspiciously looking around the laundry room (1.13). Here, the programme foreshadows her future as a spy-in-training, a testimony to her loss of childhood due to Cold War tensions. It also foregrounds the centrality of family to the spy programme, as noted by creators Weisberg and Fields.

The infiltration of the family home by Cold War-era espionage practices was already represented in the 1980s TV programme *Scarecrow and Mrs. King* (CBS, 1983-1987), about a suburban single mother who becomes a CIA operative, which similarly suggested that the suburban American home is under threat.[149] As illustrated in figures 5.8 and 5.9, the look of the Jennings' house – with its triangular frame, many windows, white picket fence, and brown-coloured car parked in the driveway – resembles Amanda King's (Kate Jackson) home in *Scarecrow and Mrs. King.* Vidal (2012a: 65) suggests that the detailed narrative and aesthetic exploration of the home (in this study, the suburban 1980s family house) is typical of self-consciously stylised engagement with the past in period drama. *The Americans*' subtle evocation of portrayals of suburbia on 1980s television through location scouting and set design, particularly in comparison to a 1980s espionage programme, evidences its investment in stylised period mise-en-scène. The similarity between the Jennings' and Mrs King's homes highlights the complex and intricate legacy of historical media images for contemporary reconstructions of the 1980s.

[149] See Jenkins (2009) for a discussion of 1980s suburbia in *Scarecrow and Mrs. King*.



fig. 5.8 The Jennings' suburban 1980s home



fig. 5.9 Amanda King's home in *Scarecrow and Mrs. King*

The Americans and *The Goldbergs* both depict *The Day After* through families' viewing its broadcast together in their suburban homes. *The Goldbergs'* treatment of *The Day After* is based on its creator Adam Goldberg's personal memories from the 1980s. This is evident in the programme's satirical depiction of nuclear war. Although the tone of the two programmes differs in response to footage from *The Day After*, the themes that arise from this footage are the same. By naming its episode 'The Day After *The Day After'*, *The Goldbergs* 4.22 temporally positions its narrative in the wake of the TV movie. Yet, the use of repetition in the title also conveys the programme's comedic tone. As a voiceover of Adam Goldberg as an adult (voiced by Patton Oswald) narrates the scenes of his childhood that the viewer sees

(played by Sean Giambrone), *The Goldbergs* creates a layer of humorous commentary on historical events.[150] By contrast, *The Americans'* episode title 'The Day After' (4.09) conveys no such humour and deals with the impact of nuclear fear in a more strait-laced fashion. Expanding upon the analysis of tone outlined earlier in the thesis, the contrast between these programmes' portrayal of watching *The Day After* attests to the difference in their genres and, by extension, in their 'stylistic register' (Pye 2007: 7).

In *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs* there is a multi-generational reaction to the threat of nuclear war. Generally speaking, children react with greater fear than their parents who pacify them. In *The Goldbergs* 4.22 the sequence featuring *The Day After* is edited to create a sense of comedy, which emerges out of the stark contrast in reactions to the event between parent and child. Murray Goldberg (Jeff Garlin) watches the movie with his teenage son Barry (Troy Gentile) and a group of his friends from school. The discord between the threat of nuclear annihilation and the comedic aims of the sitcom is reflected in the discrepancy between Barry's expectations of what is meant to be an exciting and 'gnarly made-for-TV movie' as opposed to the reality of *The Day After*'s 'unusually disturbing' images highlighted by Collum ('ABC Theater: The 2' 1983 [T84:0208]). This is exemplified in the following quick-paced dialogue, in which an expression of excitement is immediately rephrased and repeated for comedic effect:

> BARRY [excitedly before the movie]: This is gonna rock!
> ADULT ADAM [sarcastic voiceover]: But it did not rock.

Barry's excitement is comically subverted by Adult Adam's sarcastic voiceover. The contrast between a teenager's excitement over the potential drama of a nuclear war and an adult's serious response to nuclear fallout clearly displays how disturbing media images mark a turning point in the 'erosion' of childhood (as per Cunningham 2014: 172).

[150] In this chapter, Goldberg refers to the real Adam F. Goldberg, creator of *The Goldbergs*, Adam refers to the character of young Adam Goldberg in the programme, and Adult Adam refers to the narrator.



fig. 5.10 The television broadcast of *The Day After*, as seen in *The Goldbergs*



fig. 5.11 Rob's scared reaction to *The Day After*



fig. 5.12 Andy's scared reaction to *The Day After*



fig. 5.13 Matt's scared reaction to *The Day After*



fig. 5.14 Geoff's scared reaction to *The Day After*



fig. 5.15 Murray's light-hearted reaction to *The Day After*

The schism between Barry's expectation and the reality of *The Day After* is amplified by the contrast between the seriousness of the broadcast and the fast-paced, comedic presentation of reactions to it. The fast-paced editing splices hyperbolic humour between subject matter in relation to nuclear war. The space that this creates between comedy and fear fosters the critical evaluation of generational differences. This differs from the sequence in *The Americans* 4.09 which shows the emotional reactions of characters with personal stakes in the Cold War, making contemporary viewers aware of the complexity of 1980s nuclear fear.

The Goldbergs 4.22 isolates select images from *The Day After* (fig. 5.10) to hint at a similar sense of destruction and chaos as the images in *The Americans* 4.09 but includes several quick reaction shots (figs. 5.11-5.15). The use of quicker pace and slightly wider framing than that of *The Americans* reduces emphasis on facial expressions of shock and worry, prioritising the exaggerated expressions and alert or anxiously hunched upper bodies of Barry's friends (figs. 5.11-5.14). Meanwhile, Murray is seen comfortably leaning back in his chair; his smile suggesting that he is not worried (fig. 5.15). This is mirrored in the short verbal reactions which accompany each shot:

> ROB (Noah Munck): Too real.
> ANDY (Matt Bush): War is bad.
> MATT (Shayne Topp): So scared.
> GEOFF (Sam Lerner): I'll never be okay.
> MURRAY: I like that Steve Guttenberg. He's got a lot of range.[151]

Played for laughs, Murray's light-hearted reaction is a concerned parent's attempt to ease tension created by the movie and mask his own worry, revealed to audiences later in the episode. Taking on Jeremy Butler's (2015) suggestion that in *The Goldbergs* 'style is expressively helping create humor', this sequence takes its use of style and humour even further by engaging with the theme of the Cold War through careful editing. In his work on America's lengthy 'relationship' with nuclear warfare Paul Boyer (1998: 201) discusses the 'nuclear jitters' felt by many Americans during the Cold War. In this sequence, the fast editing of reactions to *The Day After* presents a similarly 'jittery' aesthetic, marrying the historical content to the sitcom's representational practices.

The Goldbergs 4.22 and *The Americans* 4.09 depict the role of television in mediating public concerns such as war and illustrate how media consumption can impact the personal lives of young people. Both programmes position *The Day After* as a signpost of 1980s nuclear threat, one that brings together political fears and the disintegration of the nuclear family (who watch the TV movie together). Thus they represent the interrelationship between the nation and the family as two separate but overlapping structural units in American society.[152] The programmes' emphasis on these issues evidences how '*micro-personal*' and '*macro-social*' concerns are simultaneously brought into focus in historical television programmes, as

[151] Steve Guttenberg, who plays Stephen Klein in *The Day After*, is one of the few actors from the TV movie whose name remains recognisable to contemporary viewers due to his ongoing film and television career, such as his role on HBO's *Ballers* (2015-). Guttenberg has also appeared on *The Goldbergs* as Barry's chemistry teacher Dr Katman (in episodes 6.18, 6.21, 7.06, 7.09, and 7.12).

[152] As Chapter 2 demonstrates, familial relationships have a significant impact on people's understanding of the imagined national community (as per Anderson 2006 [1983]).

suggested by Creeber in relation to *Roots* (2001: 443; emphasis in original). Furthermore, by focusing their engagement with *The Day After* on the distribution of responsibility in the parent-child relationship, these programmes highlight the importance of parental guidance (alluded to in Collum's monologue before the 1983 broadcast).[153]

Parents' Gendered Responsibilities Throughout History

Philip, Elizabeth, Murray, and his wife Beverly (Wendy McLendon-Covey) are all responsible for children's welfare during the episodes that feature *The Day After*. Parental caregiving emerges as a historically significant support system for children who have to navigate socio-political 'erosion', as discussed by Cunningham (2014: 172), whether in the 1980s or today. More specifically, *The Americans* portrays historical shifts in parental gender dynamics through Philip's nurturing role and Elizabeth's power and authority as a working mother. Comparably, *The Goldbergs* satirises the traditional gender dynamic between Murray and Beverly, exposing the performativity inherent in patriarchal family structures.

In one of the only studies on the representation of the Cold War in *The Americans*, Lars Koch (2016: 35) observes that the programme sets its story of espionage against its story about parental responsibility. This is demonstrated by the following conversation between Philip and Paige in episode 4.09 after he sees that his daughter is visibly distressed by the experience of watching *The Day After*:

> PHILIP: What's wrong?
> PAIGE: That *Day After* movie.
> PHILIP: Yeah, it's upsetting.
> […]
> PAIGE: That movie was pretty real, right?
> PHILIP: That's why your mother and I do what we do, to keep things like that from happening.
> […]
> PAIGE: I just hope we're all together when it happens […] It's better if we just get wiped out straightaway than get sick or anything.
> PHILIP: You shouldn't have to think like that.

The focus pulling during this conversation suggests that the Cold War has left a sense of distance between Paige and her parents. During the first half of the scene Paige stays in focus at the front plane of the shot, with Philip in soft focus in the back even though he also speaks (fig. 5.16). The focus pulling symbolises the increased 'importance of childhood' in the late

[153] By contrast, in *Stranger Things* most parents fail as caregivers in response to Cold War-era threat (discussed later in the chapter).

twentieth century (Cunnigham 2014: 185). This is mirrored by Philip's attention to Paige's wellbeing throughout the episode. The visual setup and dialogue reinforce Collum's warning before *The Day After* that 'in homes where young people are watching, we'd like to suggest that the family watch together so that parents can […] discuss issues raised by the movie' ('ABC Theater: The 2' 1983 [T84:0208]). During such a discussion, Paige not only expresses concern over the real possibility of nuclear threat ('that movie was pretty real') but connects her worries with the potential loss of her family. Her anxiety over international events is rooted in personal, domestic concerns, highlighting how television blurs the boundaries between public and private as it relocates political fear into the living room.



fig. 5.16 Focus pulling foregrounds Paige's fears about nuclear war

Paige's emotional investment in her national and cultural identity – upset by her parents' revelation of their Soviet identities – is unusually serious behaviour for a teenager on television (explored in Chapter 2).[154] This is reflected during her conversation with Philip through Holly Taylor's acting choices such as a sombre facial expression with eyes turned downward and furrowed eyebrows (fig. 5.16), and it positions Paige as an important object of critical inquiry. In *The Americans*, Paige embodies Soviet-American conflict in the 1980s as she straddles feelings of loyalty towards both sides without fully comprehending the

[154] Another politically engaged teenager on American TV is the popular character Alex P. Keaton (Michael J. Fox) in the 1980s sitcom *Family Ties* (NBC, 1982-1989). In contrast to Paige, Alex is a devoted Reaganite Republican, exemplifying Feuer's (1995) claim that many 1980s TV programmes reflect Reagan's political rhetoric. Paige's budding communist beliefs in *The Americans* reflect the programme's contemporariness, because the distance from the 1980s enables a more comprehensive, retrospective critique of the Reagan era.

complexity of the situation. Hanson (2000: 154-55) suggests in his research into the construction of childhood in feature films that there is a frequent thematic 'sense that the loss of innocence is directly related to growing up' and that by transitioning into an adult 'formerly innocent and incorruptible children become complicit and corrupted, and […] it is largely adults who are responsible.' These themes are prominent in Paige's arc, but due to the long-form narrative structure of *The Americans*, they occur over an extended period of time, depicting the process of growing up in greater detail. For instance, Paige witnesses Elizabeth killing a stranger (4.11) and spies on her church group leader Pastor Tim (Kelly AuCoin) to help her parents (5.10). Moments like this exemplify how 'adults […] are responsible' for Paige becoming 'complicit and corrupted' (Ibid.). Her journey depicts the loss of innocence as a consequence of becoming an adult, as she ages from innocent preteen girl (seasons 1 and 2) to a KGB agent studying at university (season 6).

The Americans' depiction of the impact that Cold War-era fears have on the parent-child dynamic exemplifies shifting genre tropes of espionage thrillers. Wesley Alan Britton (2005: 185) observes that during the 1980s spy television programmes, such as *Scarecrow and Mrs. King*, increased their emphasis on 'more down-to-earth domestic lives and concerns about the cost of spying on its participants'. Philip's answer to Paige's concerns about *The Day After*, 'You shouldn't have to think like that', communicates the opinion that responsibility and worry over the family should lie with the parent, not the child. If 'ideas about childhood which exist in the public domain act as a framework within which adults and children work out ways of living' (Cunningham 2014: 205), Philip's insistence that Paige 'shouldn't have to think' about the possible death of her family reinforces existing beliefs that one's childhood should remain carefree whilst worrying is an adult responsibility. Philip's pacifying statements to Paige contain a degree of parental guilt as he feels that his job as a KGB agent has destabilised the family home and Paige's sense of security. As a contemporary programme set in the 1980s, *The Americans* alludes to historical practices in the television industry in terms of style (as explored in Chapter 4) and also in terms of narrative and genre. The intergenerational conversation between Philip and Paige thus points to the legacy of 1980s television conventions from today's perspective. This calls to mind UNESCO's (2003: 5) definition of cultural heritage as something which is passed down 'from generation to generation'.

In contrast to Philip's protective and nurturing role, in episode 4.09 Elizabeth is almost completely absent as a mother. When she returns home from a KGB assignment, her only words to Paige, who excitedly tells Elizabeth that Philip let her drive their car, are: 'He did?

That's so great. You know, I have such a headache. I think I'm gonna go lie down for a little bit.' This evidences the extent to which her involvement in the Cold War has distanced her from her family. As a result of Elizabeth's absence, the weight of parental responsibility falls on Philip's shoulders. He responds by taking a traditionally feminine-coded role in the home. This is evidenced when Elizabeth tells Philip during the same episode: 'You should plan dinner for the kids because I'll be home late.' Whilst contemporary viewers receive this as part of changing gender dynamics in the family, the same role reversal is portrayed satirically in several 1980s sitcoms such as *Growing Pains* (ABC, 1985-1992) and *Who's the Boss?* (ABC, 1984-1992). These 1980s programmes emphasise that this parental gender dynamic used to be perceived as unnatural.[155] In *The Americans*, however, the parental dynamic mirrors Elizabeth and Philip's different degrees of devotion to the USSR.

The Americans 4.09 interrogates how fears about the security of family and politics underscore the actions of the protagonists. For example, Elizabeth has to break apart a family in order to complete a KGB assignment. The mother of this family is the Korean immigrant Young-Hee, one of Elizabeth's targets with whom she forms a genuine friendship (as discussed in Chapter 2). Completing this mission, therefore, does not only threaten Young-Hee's family but also fuels Elizabeth's conflicted sense of duty as a spy and a mother. When Elizabeth volunteers to babysit Young-Hee's children in order to gain access to her home, the programme constructs tension by foregrounding the threat of the Cold War on children's wellbeing. During one scene, a shot depicts one of Young-Hee's daughters peacefully sleeping with her teddy bear (fig. 5.17), highlighting childhood innocence. Elizabeth unexpectedly enters the frame from below, standing over the child (fig. 5.18). She appears to be checking on the child (as any babysitter would); however, the revelation that she is already present, albeit unseen, in figure 5.17 upsets the shot's depiction of a peacefully sleeping child. The suspense is exacerbated by Elizabeth's stern facial expression and the lack of sound, except for her breathing. As viewers are aware that Elizabeth's role is not as a babysitter, rather as a spy on duty, a scene where she is depicted with a child creates a sense of fear as opposed to assuredness in her concern for the child's safety. This moment emphasises that the 'cost of spying' (Britton 2005: 185) in a spy television drama such as *The Americans* is not only the loss of security for Elizabeth's family but also that of other families.

[155] See Reep and Dambrot (1987) for an analysis of working women in American television during the 1980s.



fig. 5.17 Close-up of a peacefully sleeping child



fig. 5.18 The audiovisual setup implies threat when Elizabeth watches over the sleeping child

In this context, John Collum's parental guidance before *The Day After* would resonate with Philip and Elizabeth more acutely than it would with American parents (such as Murray and Beverly in *The Goldbergs*), since KGB spies have a more nuanced awareness about the risks in protecting their children from the dangers of the Cold War. By stating 'I play a father', Collum frames his parental warning from a paternal perspective, linking the public service guidance offered by the television movie to the longstanding hegemonic association of fatherhood with the protection of the family ('ABC Theater: The 2' 1983 [T84:0208]). This raises questions about how the 1980s serves as a productive narrative space to reflect

contemporary perspectives on parenthood. Marcus (2004: 66) observes that the idea of a strong patriarchal figure and a subservient wife recalls the parental dynamics of 1950s sitcoms such as *Father Knows Best* (CBS, 1954-1960). He (Ibid.) adds that this dynamic was publicly performed by Ronald and Nancy Reagan during the 1980s, however, society 'speculated' that the 'degree of power […] behind the scenes' between the Reagans favoured Nancy. In *The Americans* 4.09 a similar pattern can be seen between Philip and Elizabeth. On the one hand, Philip exemplifies 'paternal' protection as he pacifies Paige's anxieties about nuclear war. On the other hand, he does so whilst performing a more domestic role (cooking dinner and washing dishes). Meanwhile, like Nancy Reagan, Elizabeth uses her 'degree of power […] behind the scenes' (Ibid.), completing a covert KGB assignment that she believes will lead to the protection of her family.

Parent-child relationships and gendered divisions of caretaking responsibility are also affected by nuclear anxiety in *The Goldbergs* 4.22. The episode comically accentuates Murray's role as a protective father and Beverly's role as an emotional mother through camera angles, framing, and performance style. When Barry and his friends enter the living room to watch *The Day After*, Murray is already watching another TV programme (fig. 5.19). *The Day After*, therefore, disrupts Murray's comfortable home life, mirroring the way in which national issues like the Cold War disrupt the family unit. Later in the episode, Barry again interrupts Murray when he is watching TV to talk to his father about his worries concerning nuclear war (fig. 5.20). This doubling reinforces the central role of television within the so-called 'media-rich home' (Livingstone 2002: 119-65), as it challenges the separation of the outside world and the domestic interior. The parallel framing and angle of Barry's two entrances (both framed from Murray's point of view) emphasise Murray's protective responsibilities as a father, mirroring Collum's statement that parents should be 'on hand to answer questions and discuss issues raised by [*The Day After*]' ('ABC Theater: The 2' 1983 [T84:0208]). Thus the repetition in figures 5.19 and 5.20 functions as a stylistic representation of the 'insistence on the significance of parenting' in the twentieth century (Cunningham 2014: 184).

Later in the episode another scene between Murray and Barry reinforces the notion that *The Day After* and, by extension, the Cold War are catalysts for the erosion of childhood innocence. During this scene Murray responds to Barry's worries about nuclear war by calling *The Day After* 'just a movie', whereas Barry conveys anguish when he states: 'Look me in the eye and tell me for sure, for absolute sure, that this will never happen.' The use of 'tell me' triggers Murray's own fear as he confesses in an uncharacteristically soft voice: 'Listen, I was thinking about what you said. And the truth is, I'm scared, too. […] All I wanna do is protect

my family.' Whilst this confession may in some ways reassure Barry that his worries are valid, it takes him out of his secure, protected position as boy/son because it prompts his consideration of adult responsibility. Thus the television event accelerates the closing of the generational gap between father and son. Jeff Garlin's change in performance style from brash comedic exaggeration to frankness facilitates a moment of openness between his character and that of Barry. The shift in Garlin's usual performance style breaks away from the traditional repetitiveness of the sitcom (see Mills 2009: 28), symbolising the sudden threat of the Cold War on family harmony. This further exemplifies how national and domestic concerns, the paradigmatic subject matter of family sitcoms, intersect. The portrayal of these themes in *The Goldbergs* foregrounds linkages between public and private memories of the 1980s, epitomised by present-day recollections of watching 1980s television broadcasts such as *The Day After*.



fig. 5.19 Barry and his friends interrupt Murray whilst he is watching TV



fig. 5.20 Barry interrupts Murray for a second time whilst he is watching TV

Performance style also underpins the satirical depiction of maternal worry over children's wellbeing in *The Goldbergs* 4.22. Beverly does not comment on *The Day After* during this episode, focusing instead on Mother's Day celebrations. By including a subplot about Mother's Day, the episode places global political events and television broadcasts alongside scenes of family life and home videos, normalising the momentousness of nuclear threat.[156] Thus the episode explores how both 'local and global events seemed to make [it] more and more difficult' for parents to keep their children safe in the 1980s, which led to 'a shift towards greater protection of children, admixed with nostalgia for a world [...] which was safe for children' (Cunningham 2014: 193). To dissuade Beverly from allowing his sister Erica (Hayley Orrantia) to go to university in California, Adam creates a home video montage entitled 'Erica Goldberg: Disappearing Forever' (fig. 5.21), fading out footage of Erica to suggest that if she moves away she will lose her place in the family. Adam's video prompts his mother's 'nostalgia for a world [...] which was safe for children' (Ibid.), and projects her maternal fears about an unsafe, Cold War-era world for Erica outside of the family home.

In creating the video, Adam exploits its emotional impact on their mother, which, as figure 5.22 shows, is portrayed as being on par with, if not greater than, the emotional impact of *The Day After* on Barry and his friends (figs. 5.11-5.14; above). Beverly's exaggerated reaction to the video footage including her overly contorted facial expression and loud, nasal crying gives the scene a sarcastic tone. Yet, there is undoubtedly a link between the reaction shots in figures 5.11-5.14 and figure 5.22 as the episode intentionally positions them against each other. Although *The Goldbergs* is a single-camera sitcom, Beverly's exaggerated performance aligns more closely with multi-camera sitcom conventions such as 'a broad, theatrical performance style characterized by pronounced gestures and facial expressions, and loud, distinctive, and even obnoxious voices' (Newman and Levine 2012: 63). Thus, when Beverly reacts to Adam's video, the programme recalls the multi-camera family sitcoms that were popular on 1980s network television (including *Family Ties*, *Growing Pains*, and *Who's the Boss?*), momentarily disrupting the conventions of contemporary single-camera sitcoms. This draws attention to the performativity of Beverly's over-the-top maternal worries. Her theatrical response to threat against her family and Murray's subversion of comedy tropes via seriousness (as above) illustrate the extent to which humour destabilises a traditional gender binary in *The Goldbergs*.

[156] *The Goldbergs*' use of home videos is analysed later in the chapter.



fig. 5.21 Adam's home video, 'Erica Goldberg: Disappearing Forever'



fig. 5.22 Beverly's theatrical reaction to Adam's video

The Goldbergs 4.22 works on a comedic and a serious level. In an earlier episode of the programme, 'The Adam Bomb' (2.17), the Cold War similarly serves as an analogy for disturbance within the family. During this episode, Adult Adam's voiceover states that: 'Back in the 1980s, America had one clear enemy: the Russians. It was the age of the Cold War. Capitalism versus Communism. Reagan versus Gorbachev. […] But the only war I knew was the one with my brother.' Hence, *The Goldbergs* spells out the nexus of the political dispute in the same breath as it comments on sibling rivalries, uniting the political with the domestic. This is a recurring theme throughout *The Goldbergs* and it is also the premise of *The Americans*. Both programmes use their setting in the 1980s to unpick changing gender roles

in American families. In so doing, they present fathers and mothers whose portrayal is informed by and challenges 1980s depictions of working women and stay-at-home husbands. Through differing serious and satirical approaches to gender, *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs* foreground parental caregiving as paramount to recollections of the 1980s. They frame the loss of childhood innocence as a defining moment in one's past and correlate this to the eventual redundancy of analogue media technology.

Historical Authenticity and Analogue Media Technologies

The Americans and *The Goldbergs* present the tension between historical accuracy and fictional reconstruction through the portrayal of 1980s media technologies. They do this by inserting archival footage into fictional scenes, creating new narratives via editing. For example, children viewing *The Day After* anxiously comment on it as 'too real' (Barry's friend Rob in *The Goldbergs* 4.22) and 'pretty real' (Paige in *The Americans* 4.09). By contrast, adults try to dismiss *The Day After*'s depiction of real-life nuclear threat as 'just a movie' (Murray in *The Goldbergs* 4.22). In spite of its fictionality, *The Day After* mobilises a very real sense of nuclear threat through its dissemination via diegetic TV sets in *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs*. Landsberg (2015: 88) refers to this as 'the eruption of the "real" into what appears to be a stylized, fictional environment'. Hence, whilst *The Day After* is a fictional movie from 1983, it is the main historically based representation of Cold War-era nuclear disaster in America today.[157]

Episode 4.09 is not the only episode of *The Americans* where archival television footage connected to the Cold War mobilises the fictional narrative. In episode 3.13, 'March 8, 1983', the final sequence depicts Philip and Elizabeth as they react to seeing Reagan's 'Evil Empire' speech on television.[158] Koch suggests (2016: 36) that during this sequence, which cuts from Philip and Elizabeth to Henry (Keidrich Sellati) at Stan's house and to Paige calling Pastor Tim, the Jennings' domestic conflict becomes a 'mental map' of the Cold War through cross-cutting. Adding to Koch's (Ibid.: 37) observations, a climactic moment is created when a dissolve captures Paige on the phone in her room and Reagan on TV in Philip and Elizabeth's bedroom (fig. 5.23). Consideration of the dissolve would strengthen Koch's (Ibid.) reading about the breaking down of separation between the Cold War and the home, especially as his original German word 'auflösen' translates as 'to dissolve'. During her phone call with Pastor

[157] BBC2's 1984 broadcast of *Threads*, a similar television film that depicts a nuclear attack in Sheffield, highlights the importance of national community in the face of nuclear threat.
[158] For a discussion of the 'Evil Empire' speech in *Deutschland 83*, see Chapter 2.

Tim, Paige betrays her parents' secret by revealing they are Soviet spies. The dissolve heightens the catalysing role of archival television footage in the disruption of the family. In particular, figure 5.23 links Paige's initial refusal to accept her parents' Soviet heritage to Reagan's anti-Soviet rhetoric in the 'Evil Empire' speech. The blurring achieved by the dissolve works as a metaphor for Paige's views synching with those of the President, which upsets the Jennings' family dynamics.



fig. 5.23 Dissolve from Paige's room to a television broadcast about Reagan

The intrusion of the image of an analogue television set into Paige's bedroom also draws attention to developments in media use inside the home since the 1980s. As Sonia Livingstone (2007: 302) suggests: 'the domestic media introduced into Western homes over the past half century […] are first conceived as communal but then, as they become cheaper and more portable, they are reconceived as personal media, particularly by children and young people.' Thus by the twenty-first century television screens and computers move from the family space of the living room into the private space of the child's bedroom. As such, the execution of the 'Evil Empire' sequence in *The Americans* 3.13, especially the dissolve, exposes present-day concerns regarding children's autonomous media use in the privacy of their bedrooms.[159] This connection between the 1980s and today is brought about by the

[159] Moments like this emphatically illustrate how 'patterned, systematised decision making' in a film or television programme 'achieves significance' (Gibbs and Pye 2005: 11), affirming the importance of the close textual analysis of television images throughout this thesis.

projection of an analogue television set into a child's bedroom, and it hints at the historical development of personalised media use.

Importantly, during the 'Evil Empire' sequence Elizabeth and Philip are not watching the original broadcast of Reagan's speech but a newsreel report about it, incorporating select soundbites from the original. Contemporary viewers share Elizabeth and Philip's experience as they also watch a mediated construction of historical events on television. This reflects the complexities of portraying history, especially in fictional programming set in the past. The use of the newsreel instead of the original broadcast emphasises how 'any attempt to represent the past is inevitably imaginative work, a construction' (Landsberg 2015: 65). Consideration of *The Americans*' stylised mise-en-scène and editing in this sequence, therefore, provides a space for scholarly debate on historical authenticity in period drama. The visual construction of the scene implies that one's reception of historical events is always-already mediated. To use Baudrillard's (1995 [1991]: 27) terminology when discussing the live television broadcasts of the First Gulf War, outlined in the Literature Review, *The Americans* provides the viewer with a simulacrum of the real. Thus contemporary viewers experience 1980s events through a double mediation that self-consciously reflects the significance television has on the reception and reconstruction of history.[160]

By using achronological archival television and home video footage, *The Goldbergs* flouts potential concerns over its historical accuracy. Goldberg has stated frequently that the programme uses the 1980s thematically in order to focus on his family and childhood (see 'Paley Center for Media, The: The Goldbergs' 2014 [114236]).[161] To date, studies on the remediation of the recent past have not engaged with the narrative potential of historical inaccuracy. Yet, it is often the historical inaccuracy that creates meaning for the themes within *The Goldbergs*, such as nuclear war. For example, to distance the narrative from existing notions of authenticity, all episodes of *The Goldbergs* begin with Adult Adam's voiceover stating, 'It was 1980-something', explicitly removing the action from any specific historical moment. This is in stark contrast to the specificity of the episode title of *The Americans* 3.13, 'March 8, 1983', which foregrounds the televised remediation of prominent historical events. When *The Goldbergs* incorporates notable historical events, these are almost always offset by the subplot of the same episode. These historically inaccurate juxtapositions are signposted

[160] Another prominent example of this double mediation is the treatment of television footage about the assassination attempt on Reagan in *The Americans* 1.04, explored in Chapter 2.
[161] For example, Goldberg states that: 'once I freed myself from worrying about the chronology […] I could tell the stories that people would relate to' about family and childhood ('Paley Center for Media, The: The Goldbergs' 2014 [114236]).

via archival television footage associated with specific dates. In 'The Day After *The Day After*' Adam's voiceover explains: 'It was May 3, 1980-something, and my brother and his pals were about to watch the most famous TV movie of the decade.' As the voiceover inaccurately dates the broadcast of *The Day After* by referring to May rather than November, the episode fuses issues of nuclear threat with Mother's Day in the USA. Thus *The Goldbergs* highlights the importance of television to the retrospective definition of the 1980s as a 'consisten[t]' decade (Thompson 2007: 5), whilst embracing a loose sense of temporal correctness, as historical detail is used for narrative purposes rather than verisimilitude.

Drawing on comedic, pop culture, and historical themes, *The Goldbergs* creates a pastiche of the 1980s that facilitates a coming together of politics and the family.[162] This illustrates that the programme is self-conscious about its historical inaccuracy. The episode 'The Adam Bomb' focuses on an April Fool's storyline alongside televised news footage of the Fall of Berlin Wall in December 1989, juxtaposing events that occurred on different dates in order to stimulate comedy within the context of US/Soviet tensions. During this episode, Barry watches David Hasselhoff's New Year's Eve concert at the fallen Berlin Wall and comments:

> I saw something today that changed me. David Hasselhoff was on top of the Great Wall of China in a light-up jacket singing about freedom. And it occurred to me, if Knight Rider can make east and west Russia find common ground, maybe we can, too.

Whilst Barry's confusion plays into the scene's comedic tone, his grandfather Albert's (George Segal) reply, 'While your facts are wildly off, your spirit is right on the money', takes on metanarrative significance as it outlines the programme's own engagement with history; one that is unburdened by the factual ('wildly off') yet reliant upon the 'spirit' of the 1980s in order to tell its story. Here, the grandfather's word choice resembles Landsberg's (2015: 63) suggestion that 'fidelity to the *spirit* of the moment' is more important in television fiction about the past than factual accuracy (emphasis added).

To further complicate the programme's treatment of historical facts and archival television footage, *The Goldbergs* frequently includes home videos created by Adam, such as the video of Erica 'disappearing forever' in episode 4.22. Home videos serve as an important point of comparison to archival television footage because they are products of the home,

[162] Here, pastiche is read in terms of Dyer's (2007: 133, 137) definition, explored in the Literature Review, as that which is 'inescapably historical in two senses: it always references something before it and it always signals the fact', in order to convey 'aesthetic and political value'. As discussed below, *Stranger Things* also relies heavily on pastiche.

rather than entering it from the outside like TV broadcasts. Alongside archival TV the use of home videos supports Marcus' (2004: 26) observation that memories of the past are simultaneously public and private. Home videos add to *The Goldbergs*' complex interplay between fact and fiction, whilst they also evoke childhood nostalgia for the narrator and viewers. According to Wesseling (2018: 3-4; see Literature Review), this increasingly common form of nostalgia for material aspects of childhood is closely linked to digital/electronic images and artefacts such as media products and toys. Wesseling (Ibid.: 2-4) proposes that nostalgia is not necessarily a negative or a positive mode of engagement, but it is influential for contemporary representations of children and childhood. In its exploration of issues surrounding childhood in the 1980s, *The Goldbergs* facilitates nostalgia by re-engaging with image capturing technologies from the 1980s such as home video recording and VHS tapes. Within this framework, objects that prompt nostalgia for the 1980s (e.g. videocassette recorders) coincide with tangible signposts of 1980s cultural heritage (e.g. home videos), following Harrison's (2009: 10) definition. Thus an emotional and nostalgic connection to childhood emerges as part of the intangible cultural heritage that '"wraps" around' (Ibid.) 1980s media technologies.

The Goldbergs demonstrates that defining reality and fiction as absolute terms is very difficult. It does this by including original 1980s home videos and photographs of the Goldberg family at the end of each episode, showing that these are the basis for the diegetic home videos and photographs. For instance, at the end of 'The Day After *The Day After*' original footage of the real Adam Goldberg is inserted, demonstrating that Adam's diegetic Mother's Day video (set to Bette Midler's [1988] 'The Wind Beneath my Wings') is a reconstruction of an original video that Goldberg made for his mother, complete with the misspelled word 'benieth' (figs. 5.24-5.25). These authentic end segments, together with the inaccurate dates within episodes, undermine the importance of historical accuracy in period drama. This critical, intentional engagement with historical inauthenticity means that the analysis of *The Goldbergs* can destabilise longstanding hierarchies within television scholarship regarding authentic historical representation (detailed in the Literature Review).[163]

[163] Interestingly, *The Day After* is a fictional representation of an imagined event that, like Goldberg's home videos, is viewed as having historical credibility.

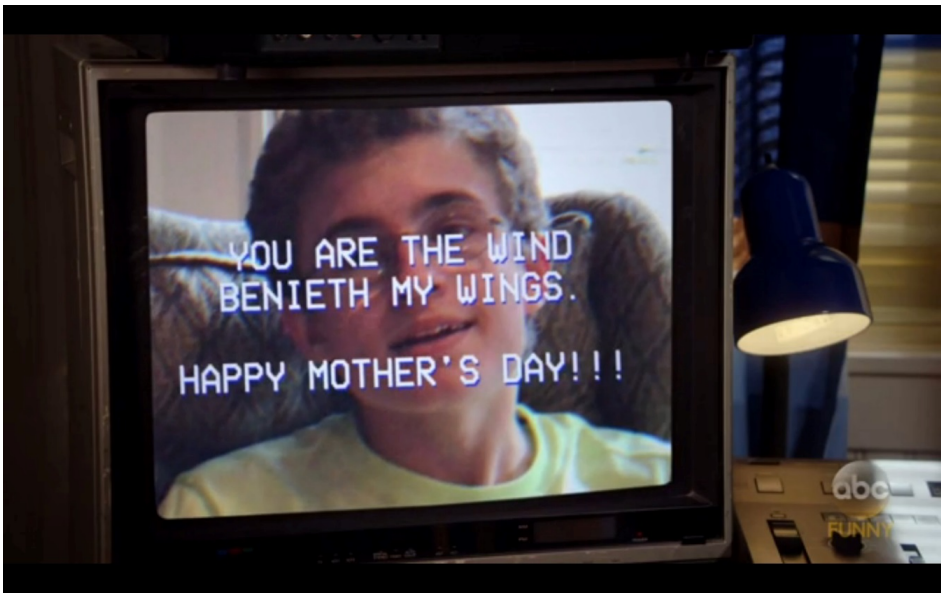

fig. 5.24 Recreated 1980s home video



fig. 5.25 Adam Goldberg's original 1980s home video

The Goldbergs itself is framed as a home video. Each episode includes an opening sequence where a VHS tape labelled 'Created by Adam F. Goldberg' is inserted into a VHS player (fig. 5.26). Moreover, Adam's video camera is a near-constant presence throughout the programme, and he is shown carrying it in many shots which emphasise the camera's important role via its central placement within the frame (fig. 5.27).[164] Alex Bevan (2012: 557) suggests that images of outdated technology in contemporary representations of the past carry with them a sense of the 'gap' between now and then. Accordingly, Adam's video camera

[164] Figure 5.27 is taken from episode 1.02 and is illustrative of similar shots throughout the programme.

connects the present to the past through home video footage, yet, its bulkiness (evident in its disproportionately large size in relation to Adam's prepubescent frame in figure 5.27) conveys its own outdatedness. This technological gap is reinforced by the syncing of the line, 'Don't know the future but the past is getting clearer every day' from the programme's theme song with the image of the VHS tape in figure 5.26. *The Goldbergs* points to the discrepancy between standard-definition 1980s NTSC television images and 'clearer' digital HDTV in the 2010s (an aesthetic disparity explored in Chapter 4). In so doing, the programme implies that, due to its contemporariness, its viewers can re-experience the 1980s as visibly crisper. This aesthetic crispness functions as a metaphor, signalling that *The Goldbergs* portrays memories of the 1980s as similarly sharp and true to life. In short, the capabilities of today's media technology are instrumental to the programme's depiction of the past.

The nostalgic quality of Adam's home videos in *The Goldbergs* does not align with Niemeyer and Wentz's (2014: 136) definition of nostalgia as 'the fantasy of what *could* have been' (emphasis in original); rather, the videos depend on the emotional impact of events that did take place (such as Mother's Day and the broadcast of *The Day After*). At the same time, they rely specifically on a construction of 'what has been' because they limit the past to the images preserved in home videos. As a result, the past they refer to has been selected from Goldberg's point of view. If television movies and news items preserve and construct contemporary notions of the history of the 1980s, then home videos are generally used to preserve and construct memories of family and childhood.[165] In *The Goldbergs,* home videos are almost always viewed on a television set, epitomising the way in which, according to Holdsworth (2015: 3), both nostalgia and television are tied to the domestic. When television programmes in the 2010s return to the 1980s, images of analogue TV sets on today's digital screens carry a personal, nostalgic significance.

[165] This is also the purpose of home videos in *Red Oaks* when David films a Bris and a Bar Mitzvah (discussed in Chapter 2).



fig. 5.26 VHS tape in *The Goldbergs*' opening titles



fig. 5.27 The central positioning of Adam's video camera

The recapturing of a lost childhood presents an emotional need for the nuclear family played out within the diegesis of *The Goldbergs*. In episode 4.22, harmony between Beverly and Erica is only restored when they watch a compilation of home videos of Erica as a baby. During this scene, Adult Adam narrates: 'My video reminded them both that even though the years fly and we never stop growing, there are some things that will never, ever change.' These comments illustrate Boym's (2001: xvi) observation that nostalgia presents 'fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the present'. In this context it is nevertheless important to read Boym's wording critically, as Adam's home videos do not show 'fantasies' of the past to alleviate tensions in the present but depend on images of the past to function as emotional

anchors. Hence, by viewing the home videos, Beverly and Erica experience nostalgia as a 'historical emotion' (Boym 2001: xvi), something that the programme's creator Goldberg also takes part in (see 'Paley Center for Media, The: The Goldbergs' 2014 [114236]). In this regard, the show's nostalgia aligns more closely with Raphael Samuel's (1994: 356) definition of 'nostalgia, or homesickness, [as] famously not about the past but about felt absences [...] in the present.' This presentness is accentuated by the audiovisual and narrative focus on 1980s media technologies in the programme, requiring viewers to reflect on the prominent role that the media plays in the lives of American people.

Wesseling (2018: 4) observes that during the 2010s a 'new nostalgic mode' has become culturally dominant in the West, one that depends on 'the availability of tangible memorabilia'. This is exemplified by the diegetic presence of analogue TVs in *The Americans* and the video camera in *The Goldbergs*, which are 'tangible' objects that function as relics of the 1980s through which childhood memories are preserved and reconstructed. Keblinska (2017: 125) argues that in such moments, by foregrounding mediation, contemporary programmes position 'a critical lens on the history of media technologies'. Today, this self-referential nod towards historical media technologies is evident in the resurgent popularity of VHS and cassette tapes (see Arkin 2020; Rashidi 2019).[166] In particular, to key into this recent interest in 1980s media technologies, *Stranger Things* has released DVDs of season 1 in a box imitating a VHS. This is itself an example of the play between historical authenticity and fictional representations of the 1980s. Whereas *Stranger Things*' engagement with nostalgia for 1980s media has been analysed by many scholars, the final section of this chapter reads the programme as an allegory of socio-political issues in the 1980s and 2010s pertaining to nuclear fear and the erosion of the nuclear family.

***Stranger Things*, 1980s Childhood, and the Cold War Monster**

Tensions between the Cold War and childhood development manifest most explicitly in *Stranger Things*. This is conveyed through the use of science fiction tropes to symbolise nuclear threat. By focusing on the United States Department of Energy, *Stranger Things* makes viewers aware of its connection between otherworldly monsters and the threat of real-life nuclear experimentation. To establish this connection and emphasise the historical significance of November 1983, the first shot of the programme displays the setting: '6th

[166] As discussed in Chapter 4, cassette tapes are highlighted in 'San Junipero' when Yorkie plays 'Heaven is a Place on Earth' on her car radio.

November 1983, Hawkins, Indiana' (1.01). The camera then pans to a concrete building identified as 'Hawkins National Laboratory, U.S. Department of Energy'. The Department of Energy has long been responsible for developing nuclear security measures (see Lantero and Wood 2015), and misuse of its resources can lead to devastating consequences, as shown in *Stranger Things* when the Department's experimentation with a young girl leads to a monster's escape. The mysterious activities of the Department of Energy are also a very real concern for Americans today. In July 2017, a journalist for *Vanity Fair* asked: 'Does anyone in the White House really understand what the Department of Energy actually does? And what a horrible risk it would be to ignore its extraordinary, life-or-death responsibilities?' (Lewis 2017). These concerns link the themes of *Stranger Things* to contemporary nuclear fears in the USA, establishing a veritable resonance between the programme's reconstruction of November 1983 and present-day America.

Stranger Things takes place both in the real world and in an alternate dimension, called the Upside Down. This alternate dimension has been quoted in public discourse to signify the political climate of the Trump era, emphasising the timeliness of the programme's sci-fi representation of the 1980s. For example, in a speech in the United States Congress in February 2017, Representative David Cicilline of Rhode Island quoted from *Stranger Things* episode 1.01, 'The Vanishing of Will Byers', to describe the Trump administration's alleged collusion with Russia as follows:

> Like the main characters in *Stranger Things* we are now stuck in the Upside Down. Right is wrong, up is down, black is white. The White House deceives the American [public] for weeks about their contacts with Russia […] Mr Speaker, mornings might be for 'coffee and contemplation' but Chief Jim Hopper is not coming to rescue us. This is not a TV show. This is real life.
>
> ('House Session' 2017)

Here, Cicilline insists that the political situation in the USA is 'not a TV show' but 'real life'. Nonetheless, his direct quotation from *Stranger Things* ('coffee and contemplation') and his use of an analogy between real-life politics and the TV programme implies that it is possible to interpret reality alongside its fictional representation. The mere fact that Cicilline feels compelled to clarify the difference between television and real life highlights the way in which *Stanger Things*' portrayal of the 1980s is significant to a discussion of contemporary American politics. Moreover, the language used by Cicilline mirrors that of characters in *The Americans* 4.09 and *The Goldbergs* 4.22 when they debate whether *The Day After* is 'just a movie' (Murray) or whether it is 'pretty real' (Paige). This emphasises the inextricable connection

between politically charged television fiction and political debate; a point central to this discussion of *Stranger Things*.

Scholarship on *Stranger Things* generally focuses on the programme's construction of nostalgia through pastiche.[167] *Stranger Things*' specific brand of intertextual references to and stylistic citations from 1980s pop culture (explored, for instance, by Sam Higgs [2019], Joseph M. Sirianni [2019], and Kayla McCarthy [2019]), exemplifies many of the characteristics that Dyer (2007) links to pastiche. Dyer (2007: 132) understands pastiche in terms of repetition that is contingent upon consumerist production and appetite. As the scholarship noted above specifies, this is pivotal to *Stanger Things*' aesthetic and its widespread popularity. At the same time, Dyer (Ibid.) stresses that repetitive capitalist cultural production typically insists on 'sameness', including 'mechanical reproduction, multiple copies, series, serials, cover versions, remakes, genres, cycles, [and] formulae'; in so doing, it facilitates 'reflection and play on sameness.' Rather than reading *Stranger Things*' frequent use of pastiche as instances of fond nostalgia for the 1980s, the analysis expands upon research by Rose Butler (2017) and Tracy Mollet (2019a, 2019b) to identify timely issues that the programme presents to today's audiences via 'reflection and play on sameness' (Dyer 2007: 132) between the 1980s and the 2010s. Butler (2017: 188) suggests that *Stranger Things* does not simply 'recall warm memories of the 1980s' but that the programme is 'more accurately read as a scathing comment on the damaging ideologies of the decade and an exploration of how these anxieties have continued relevance today'. She analyses *Stranger Things* alongside *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (dir. Steven Spielberg, 1982) and *Poltergeist* (dir. Tobe Hooper, 1982), two 1980s sci-fi/horror films, and *It*, ABC's 1990 television adaptation of Stephen King's 1986 novel of the same name. Butler (2017: 188-189) points out that 'allusions to artifacts [*sic*.] of the 1980s' in *Stranger Things* function 'as a prism through which to understand both the Reagan era and contemporary America'. As part of the thesis' overarching focus on nine contemporary programmes that reconstruct the 1980s, the present discussion unpicks *Stranger Things*' 'allusions to artefacts of the 1980s' within the broader context of canonising the 1980s' heritage on American television in the 2010s.

The programme's protagonists are Eleven (Milly Bobby Brown), a young girl with telekinetic powers, and a group of young boys, Mike (Finn Wolfhard), Dustin (Gaten Matarazzo), and Lucas (Caleb McLaughlin) whose friend Will (Noah Schnapp) is kidnapped in episode 1.01. Eleven is robbed of her childhood when she is forced to participate in

[167] See the Introduction for a discussion of the abundance of scholarly engagement with *Stranger Things*.

experiments conducted by the Department of Energy to serve America's advancement in the Cold War. Her story reflects the 'erosion' of childhood in the late twentieth century, as discussed by Cunningham (2014: 172). Several flashbacks in episodes 1.03, 'Holly, Jolly', and 1.05, 'The Flea and the Acrobat', focus on Eleven's loss of childhood as her identity is stripped away through the depersonalisation of her name and her duty to use her psychic abilities to spy on Soviet agents. In episode 1.05, Eleven is placed in a 'sensory deprivation tank', which strips her of any sensory engagement with the natural world in order to heighten her psychic capacity. Once cut off from her senses, Eleven's mind is channelled in an infinite, black space. After showing her in medium and full shots the sequence quickly zooms out to an extreme wide shot so that she appears as a white fleck in the centre of the frame, exemplifying the loss of her sense of self and her defencelessness during the Cold War experiments (fig. 5.28). Hence, Eleven's story arc in *Stranger Things* takes the suggestion that children might 'disappear forever' due to nuclear threat (as implied in Adam Goldberg's home video about his sister; above) to the extreme.

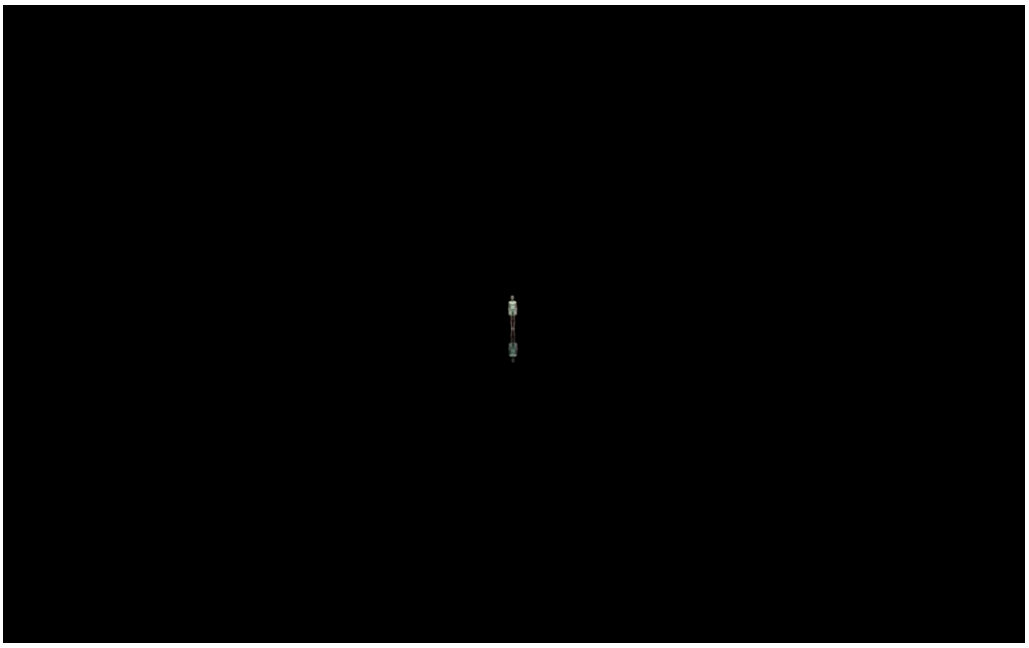

fig. 5.28 Darkness and an extreme wide shot reflect Eleven's loss of childhood innocence during sensory deprivation

In place of her mother and father, Eleven sees Dr Brenner, the leader of the experiments at the Department of Energy, as 'papa' (1.03), and is shown begging him to help her.[168] In episode 1.03 Eleven repeatedly screams 'papa' as she is forcefully dragged away by guards, whilst Brenner looks on but does not interfere. Similarly, when she is underwater in the sensory deprivation tank in episode 1.05, she screams, but Brenner chooses not to help her. During this sequence, Eleven is pictured underwater inside a small tank, wearing a restrictive diving suit that hinders her movement (fig. 5.29). It is clear from her distressed facial expression that the deprivation refers not only to her sensory faculties but also to her physical and emotional states. By deliberately going against television's tendency to create intimate scenes via close-up (see Newcomb 1974: 245), *Stranger Things* conveys Eleven's alienation whilst she is in the alternate dimension (created by the zoom in figure 5.28) to remind viewers of the lack of parent-child intimacy. The pronounced stylisation of the mise-en-scène in this moment illustrates that Eleven's deprived childhood is not only political, a result of Cold War-era experiments, but it is markedly televisual.[169] Importantly, Brenner's lack of parental care presents a new kind of nuclear threat: that of the breakdown of the nuclear family due to a 'Cold War parent', also seen in the threat posed by Elizabeth to Young-Hee's children in *The Americans* 4.09. Hence, contrary to Lucy Baker and Amanda Howell's (2019) suggestion that *Stranger Things* season 2 breaks with season 1's 'conservatively nostalgic project' in relation to the 'shape of the family' and 'modes of parenting', episode 1.05 shows that family dynamics and parental responsibility are already intertwined with the televisual reconstruction of 1980s nuclear threat in season 1.[170] Like *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs*, *Stranger Things* connects '*macro-social*' and '*micro-personal*' themes (Creeber 2001: 443; emphasis in original) in order to unpick the 1980s' heritage of nuclear anxiety and family disintegration. This highlights the considerable extent to which geopolitical conflict impacts the individual.

The depiction of Eleven's negative relationship with her father figure and its detrimental effects on her development reinforces the modern-day 'insistence on the significance of parenting' (as per Cunningham 2014: 184). After Eleven escapes from Brenner, she finds a more caring father figure in Detective Hopper (David Harbour).[171] When the

[168] For in-depth analyses of neglectful fathers in *Stranger Things*, see Mollet (2019a) and Li (2019).
[169] This recalls the stylised intrusion of an analogue TV set into Paige's bedroom as a disruptive force that alienates Paige from her parents.
[170] Similarly, whilst an explicit engagement with the USSR only occurs in *Stranger Things* season 3, the analysis throughout this chapter illustrates that Cold War-era fears characterise the programme from the outset.
[171] Baker and Howell (2019) observe that Hopper is initially over-protective and controlling towards Eleven. This nevertheless signals a parental concern for Eleven's safety that is in stark contrast to Brenner and to many other parents on *Stranger Things*.

viewer first meets Hopper, the camera pans from a child's drawing pinned on the wall to Hopper, who has passed out in front of the television surrounded by empty beer cans (1.01). Viewers only find out at the end of season 1 that his present state has been triggered by the death of his daughter (1.08). Thus *Stranger Things* foregrounds themes of parenthood, protection, and vulnerability in the very first episode. During this scene, Hopper's analogue television set is playing a local news report about unexplained power cuts, which are subsequently revealed to be connected to the programme's otherworldly monsters that signify Cold War-era destruction (discussed below). This suggests that from the outset *Stranger Things* is foregrounding the role of the media in broadcasting political news and its capacity to disturb family harmony, resembling the emphasis on 1980s media technologies in *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs*. Hence, *Stranger Things*' 1980s world reflects today's politically charged domestic lifestyles marked by the ubiquity of television sets, personal computers, and smartphones which bring a steady stream of world news into people's homes.

Stranger Things also presents the 1980s as a period of carefree childhood which is disrupted by nuclear threat, paralleling the way in which adulthood is believed to rupture childhood. In episode 1.07, 'The Bathtub', Eleven enters a makeshift sensory deprivation tank that her friends fashion out of a large paddling pool, in order to boost her powers to save the community from a monster (fig. 5.30). Unlike her previous experience in the tank at the laboratory where she is forcibly constrained underwater (fig. 5.29), Eleven enters this tank freely. The fact that it is actually a paddling pool evokes the material sense of childhood nostalgia theorised by Wesseling (2018: 4). As seen in figure 5.30, this pool is open and spacious, allowing Eleven to freely float on the surface of the water. As she floats in the middle of the pool, her outstretched arms signal unrestricted movement and call to mind imagery of Christ on the cross marking her as a potential saviour of mankind. Whilst this imagery gives Eleven spiritual significance, it is her entrance into a paddling pool which signals her desire to be seen as a child. For Anya Heise-von der Lippe (2019: 173), Eleven 'struggle[s] with her own monstrosity' as she tries to understand 'what it means to be human'. This analysis presumes that a pre-teen girl's attention is primarily directed at contemplating her ontological existence. It is more reasonable, however, to presume that Eleven is contemplating her difference from her new friends whose playing with analogue technology like walkie talkies does not appear to be circumscribed by political exploitation and parental neglect.[172] Eleven's

[172] This sense of difference is amplified by the discord between childhood experiences of technology in the 2010s and the 1980s. For example, Millie Bobby Brown states in an interview that, having grown up in the 2000s, she had no idea what a walkie talkie was when she first saw one on set (see Film Ethnographer 2016).

separation from the other children encourages viewers to see the 1980s as a time that encapsulates the breakdown of the family. Whilst Reagan was a proponent of 'family values', the 1980s was, in fact, characterised by what Troy (2005: 230, 231) calls a 'divorce epidemic' due to which 'many American children were growing up deprived' of opportunities.



fig. 5.29 Eleven screams for help from her 'papa'



fig. 5.30 A paddling pool serves as a child-friendly alternative to the sensory deprivation tank

As indicated above, *Stranger Things* uses sci-fi imagery that takes the form of several monsters to allegorise nuclear threat. During her experience of sensory deprivation in season 1, Eleven encounters a creature, known as the Monster or the Demogorgon, and inadvertently causes a rift in reality, allowing the Monster to enter the small town of Hawkins from its alternate dimension (the Upside Down). Monsters from the Upside Down serve as poignant analogies of nuclear destruction as they pose extreme danger for the children and their families. In particular, the visual design of a monster in seasons 2 and 3, known as the Shadow Monster or the Mind Flayer, connects the alternate dimension to images of nuclear warfare (fig. 5.31). As figures 5.31 to 5.33 illustrate, the Shadow Monster shares similar orange saturated hues and large arching shapes that reach towards the sky with images of nuclear destruction just as familiar to viewers in the 1980s as they are to today's viewers. Through these visual signposts, the sight of the Shadow Monster carries with it a similar 'affective potential' (Landsberg 2015: 89) as the images of nuclear destruction from *The Day After* incorporated into *The Goldbergs* 4.22 (fig. 5.32) and *The Americans* 4.09 (fig. 5.33). In contrast to the spy drama and the sitcom, by using an alternate reality as an allegory for nuclear destruction *Stranger Things* builds on a long history of science fiction that displaces Cold War anxieties onto other forces and entities such as aliens (see Seed 1991; Geraghty 2009: 19-34).[173] The sci-fi genre is therefore deeply embedded into the political subtext of the programme as it connects the shared political issues of the 1980s and today via stylised visual 'sameness', following Dyer's (2007: 132) definition of pastiche. The programme's pastiche of sci-fi iconography (e.g. figure 5.31) contributes to the reimagination of the 1980s as a decade that epitomises nuclear threat. Monk (1995: 188) states that affective depictions of heritage stem from mise-en-scène as well as 'narrative, character, performance, humour, sexuality and so on.' The analysis of *Stranger Things*' use of sci-fi tropes suggests that genre also belongs to Monk's definition of heritage through the media.

[173] Seed (1991: 1) observes that 'the US perception of the Cold War was structured around key metaphors' such as the Soviet Union as a dangerous entity waiting to attack, and these metaphors 'carried their own narrative with them […] which postwar science fiction repeatedly actualised.'



fig. 5.31 The Shadow Monster resembles a mushroom cloud



fig. 5.32 Mushroom cloud in *The Day After*, as seen in *The Goldbergs*



fig. 5.33 Mushroom cloud in *The Day After*, as seen in *The Americans*

In their resemblance to *Dungeons & Dragons* board game pieces that the boys play with, the monsters from the Upside Down straddle apocalyptic and nostalgic childhood iconography. To expand upon Butler's (2017: 188) analysis of resonances between the Reagan and Trump eras in *Stranger Things*, 1980s artefacts like toys not only symbolise recurring socio-political issues, but also speak to the importance of childhood to contemporary memories of the 1980s. With its long limbs and a head that opens out like a flower, the Monster in season 1 is comparable to the *Dungeons & Dragons* Demogorgon figurine (figs. 5.34-5.35), whilst the Shadow Monster in season 2 resembles the Mind Flayer figurine's tentacles. Such similarities between the game and the monsters are deliberate as these features are foregrounded by shots of the Demogorgon figurine in a close-up in episode 1.01 (fig. 5.34). In a later episode, Eleven explicitly likens the game and its figurine to the Upside Down and the Monster by turning the game board upside down and placing the Demogorgon on top of it (1.02). Thus the danger created by the Monster is intimately woven into the fabric of childhood through play, suggesting that not even children's playtime can escape the all-consuming threat of nuclear winter. For Megan Fariello (2019: 136), it is the soundscape of *Stranger Things* that evokes a 'disturbing' sense of nostalgia which does not '[leave] the audience with the warm feelings of a return home to safety and family.' *Stranger Things* also creates what Fariello identifies as a 'disturbing' nostalgic experience through intentionally misleading visual signals (*Dungeons & Dragons*) that lead the viewer into a false sense of security through association with 1980s childhood. As childhood nostalgia is triggered by tangible memorabilia (see Wesseling 2018: 4), *Stranger Things*' inclusion of *Dungeons & Dragons* figurines reinforces the initial surge of positive emotions evoked by memories of childhood playtime, only to exaggerate the sense of 'disturbance' created by the game's connection to Cold War threat.[174] Fond memories of 1980s childhood are complicated and reinterpreted as critical historical junctions leading up to present-day anxieties about the loss of security in the USA due to the predominance of nuclear threats in the 2010s.

The nuclear monsters in *Stranger Things* explicitly target and feed on children, exposing their vulnerability and the necessity of protective parenting. The escape of these monsters due to the Department of Energy's careless practices exacerbates the threat against childhood in the narrative. Gregory Shea (2018) reads the vulnerability of children in these scenes in relation to the 1980s 'stranger danger' campaign that emerged in response to the abduction and murder of seven-year-old Adam Walsh in 1981. In episode 1.01, the monster

[174] By contrast, in *The Goldbergs* episode 3.20 *Dungeons & Dragons* has a positive nostalgic appeal.

kidnaps Will Byers when he is alone at home. Whilst this supports Shea's 'stranger danger' analogy, the scene also illustrates how the Cold War – or, rather, the Monster it has produced – is responsible for a child's disappearance and the disruption of his family's life. This disruption of the domestic space by the Cold War, which takes place subversively in *The Americans* 4.09 and *The Goldbergs* 4.22 through images of nuclear destruction on TV, manifests prominently in *Stranger Things* episode 1.03 when the Monster breaks through the wall of the Byers home. This is a significant reversal of 'the eruption of the "real" into what appears to be a stylized, fictional environment' (Landsberg 2015: 88) which this chapter connects with the interruption of archival footage from *The Day After* into media-rich homes in *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs*. The programme's creators Matt and Ross Duffer commissioned a 'tangible' animatronic Monster for most scenes in order to evoke the effect of 1980s science fiction 'that existed before computer graphics' (The Duffer Brothers 2016). However, for scenes that surpass the boundaries of metaphysical reality, such as the sequence where the Monster breaks through interdimensional walls, they had to turn to state-of-the-art visual effects artists (see Ibid.). Cardwell (2002: 97) argues that period dramas 'actively construct meanings through the televisual synthesis of represented past and contextual present'. When the CGI Monster breaks through the Byers' wall, the 'contextual present' of 2016 synthesises with the programme's 'represented past' because the animatronic Monster (an imitation of 1980s technology) is momentarily replaced by present-day technological capabilities. 1980s concerns about the stability of the family home, therefore, synthesise on a technological level with contemporary concerns about family stability in the USA (such as the threat of nuclear war with Noth Korea; discussed above).

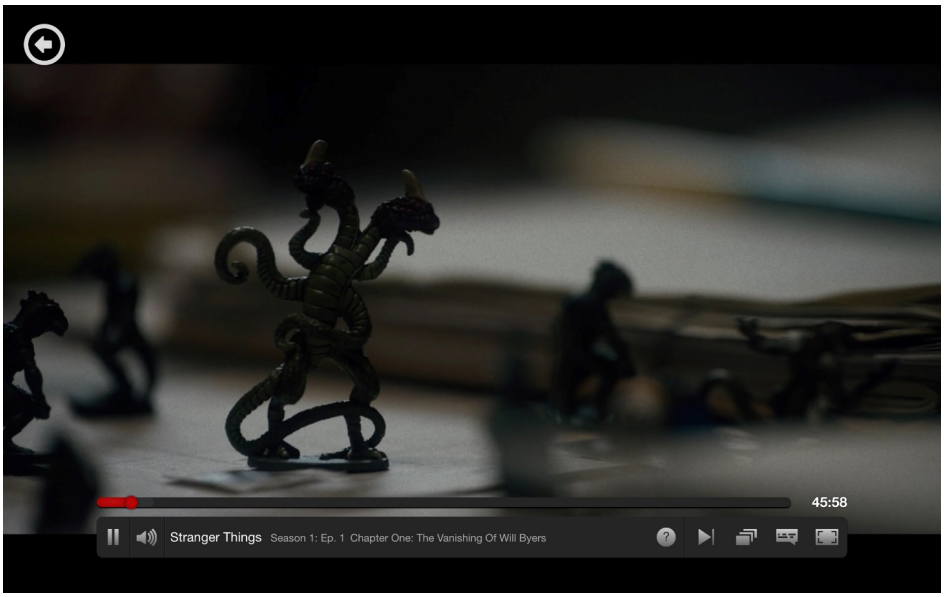

fig. 5.34 The *Dungeons and Dragons* Demogorgon figurine



fig. 5.35 The Demogorgon Monster

For Mollet (2019b: 65), the scene in which government agents enter Mike's parents' house in search of Eleven in *Stranger Things* episode 2.02, 'Trick or Treat, Freak', symbolises the programme's critique of the Reagan administration's influence over middle-class families such as Mike's (evident in the 'Reagan-Bush '84' campaign sign in their garden). In the scene from episode 1.03, analysed above, the Monster's intrusion into the Byers' home similarly presents the political and cultural fears faced by American families. The Monster, as a metaphor for anxieties about the loss of family harmony due to turbulent political and nuclear threat in the USA, connects contemporary viewers' worries to those of people in the 1980s. This breakdown of the nuclear family is accentuated by Joyce Byers' (Winona Ryder) status as a single, working mother whose determination to save Will after he is kidnapped by the

Monster challenges the heteronormative ideal of the nuclear family. This reflects contemporary attitudes towards women's power and autonomy (see Chapter 3), as opposed to the patriarchal family structure advocated by Reagan. Such fears concerning the disintegration of the family extend beyond the Reagan-era, as Mollet (2019b: 65) claims, and into the Trump-era.

Conclusion: The Cold War and Watching Television as Heritage

In season 1 of *Stranger Things*, the presence of the Monster as a nuclear weapon, its threat towards children, and its intrusion into the domestic space symbolise the acute sense of danger experienced by families and children in November 1983. As the chapter explains, this sense of danger is also experienced by the children in *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs* when they watch *The Day After*. Children's response to nuclear fear remains a critical issue in the 2010s, evidenced by the Department of Homeland Security's website *Ready.gov*, which offers advice to American citizens in the events of a disaster. The website has a subsection on 'Nuclear Blasts' which suggests that concerned citizens should 'make a Family Plan' (United States Department of Homeland Security n.d.) and provides a link to guidance on measures to be taken in order to protect your family. Notably, *Ready.gov* also has a subsection for children about getting ready for disasters entitled 'Kids' (Ibid.). The colourful design, simple wording, and games section suggest that the Department of Homeland Security considers children to have more agency with regards to their self-protection than the scholarly theories of childhood engaged with in this chapter propose, most of which emphasise the social pressures on parents to protect their children. *Ready.gov*'s children's section and *Stranger Things*, in particular, are both designed to appeal to young people today who have no prior experience of 1980s political events or cultural artefacts. To do so, they rely upon prosthetic memories (see Landsberg 2004) invoked through the pastiche of popular culture iconography to connect young contemporary audiences with the 1980s. Throughout *Stranger Things*, the children have to take responsibility for saving each other from monsters as their parents prove incapable of protecting them. Besides explicitly neglectful parents like Dr Brenner, there are a number of parents who are oblivious to the vulnerability of their children who, as a consequence, must fend for themselves.[175] In *The Americans*, Paige and Henry are often left alone whilst their parents, through their work as Soviet spies, contribute to growing political tensions. Comparably, in *The Goldbergs* the Cold War functions as an analogy for the family conflict that Adam, Barry,

[175] See Baker and Howell (2019) for a discussion of Mike's parents' oblivious behaviour.

and Erica experience. In these programmes, the loss of childhood and the disintegration of the nuclear family are a direct result of socio-political changes (specifically the Cold War) that require children to take on adult responsibilities.

In *The Americans* and *The Goldbergs*, the Cold War enters family homes through archival footage, transgressing boundaries between public and private spaces. This transgression is typical of television bringing world events into the family home (see Silverstone 1994). During the scenes in which the family watches *The Day After* on analogue television sets, a hybrid space between the public and the private is created (see Keblinska 2017). In this space, the very act of mediation becomes the subject of the scene and highlights the centrality of television in the preservation of historical images. Answering the thesis' first and second research questions, the relevance of the 1980s to today's viewers is brought about by the abundance of parallels between the political instabilities and changes to the shapes of the family then and now. In response to the third research question, this relevance highlights how the heritage of the 1980s is explicitly linked not only to the Cold War's impact on American society but also to the changing shape of the family and to the act of watching television. Moreover, each genre explored in this chapter – espionage, sitcom, and sci-fi – frames 1980s heritage through its specific conventions in order to draw viewers' attention to the role of the media in preserving and reimagining American history. Hence, the medium of television itself emerges as an important critical tool that enables viewers in the 2010s to unpick the role of the 1980s in contemporary America.

CONCLUSION

‘Oh, the Eighties. […] I wasn't born yet, but I do miss it.’
Dynasty (reboot) 1.03

In her 1987 interview with Donald Trump for the ABC news programme *20/20* (1978-), Barbara Walters states, ‘No matter what Donald Trump does these days, it seems to make the news’, alluding to a Republican sub-committee who lobbied for Trump to run for president in the October of that year (‘20/20: Fighting to Be Heard; The Man who has Everything; If You Believe in Magic’ 1987 [B_12264]). After the 2016 election, Walters’ statement would prove to be more relevant than she could have ever imagined. The original broadcast footage of this interview is held in the Paley Center archives, situated just four blocks away from Trump Tower in New York, which is where President Trump launched his campaign on 16 June 2015. Importantly, the footage highlights the historical significance of television as a medium of political insight. This thesis’ use of archival footage of 1980s television – the 1984 re-election campaign adverts for Reagan, department store adverts from 1983 centred on the beautification of women, the first hour of MTV’s broadcast in 1981, and the 1983 broadcast of *The Day After* – emphasises the centrality of the medium to one’s understanding of American heritage. For Watson (2008: 7), ‘in the second half of the 20th century, TV has been the primary means by which Americans have defined themselves and each other’. By drawing on archival television footage, this thesis argues that in the 2010s, television is a ‘primary means’ by which Americans ‘define’ the impact of the 1980s on the nation’s political and cultural identity.

The nine TV programmes examined throughout the thesis all present the 1980s as a decade of vital importance by focusing on identity politics, performativity, and the evocation of an emotional response in viewers. As a result, these programmes position the 1980s as an essential decade in contemporary understandings of American heritage, with particular regard to issues surrounding nationalism, race, feminism, LGBTQ rights, the nuclear family, and war. Their stylised audiovisual construction of the 1980s not only brings to light present-day perspectives on these issues, that include critiques of Reaganite and Trumpian politics, but also speaks to television’s ability to portray intimacy, continuity, and history, to refer back to Newcomb’s definition of the medium in 1974. The analysis evidences how these features continue to characterise the medium amidst an array of new production and distribution technologies that have drastically changed television since Newcomb’s study. For Lotz (2007:

256), the aesthetic elements noted by Newcomb are 'even more pronounced' on TV in the twenty-first century; a statement this thesis substantiates in its suggestion that intimacy, continuity, and history typify contemporary television's presentation of the 1980s. Indeed, this thesis is the first study of its kind to demonstrate how the ubiquity of the 1980s on American television during the 2010s constitutes a successful and popular trend.

To do this, the thesis unpicks recent patterns within the TV industry that designate, consolidate, and substantiate a range of narrative and aesthetic conventions paramount to media representations of American history and the 1980s in particular. It begins by discerning significant linkages between television history and American history. As explained, Landsberg (2015), Marcus (2004), Dwyer (2015), Keblinska (2017), and Woods (2008) discuss comparable linkages between 1950s, 1960s, and 1990s media history and the reconstruction of these decades on television. The remediation of the American past in terms of its televisual and political heritage, however, is largely unexplored to date. The Literature Review demonstrates that debates about heritage in the UK can inform the analysis of American history on screen, identifying parallel critical preoccupations in these two strands of scholarship regarding national identity, mise-en-scène, the politics of gender, race, and sexuality, and historical authenticity. In response to Vidal's (2012b: 9) observation that heritage drama is a 'flexible critical category', this thesis' analysis of the 1980s' place within America's cultural heritage, as seen on television in the 2010s, breaks new ground within studies of heritage and the media.

The close analysis of programmes in Chapters 2 to 5 provides comprehensive responses to the research questions outlined in the Introduction. The chapters answer the thesis' first research question as they detail how programmes' representation of 1980s America relates to the socio-political context of the 2010s, highlighting parallels between the Reagan and Trump eras. In so doing, the discussion engages with the second research question and identifies the following aspects of the 1980s as contributing factors to the cultural heritage of this decade: the perception of the American president as a media celebrity, a renewed sense of American nationalism including growing white supremacy, public debates about the meaning and significance of feminism (particularly in relation to women of colour), partisan disputes about sexuality including government policies affecting LGBTQ people, the emergence of televisuality and its impact on American media (see Caldwell 1995), anxieties related to the Cold War and nuclear weapons, changes to the patriarchal model of the nuclear family, and widespread engagement with television as an instrument of knowledge about the world. Each

chapter argues that these factors are emblematic of the 1980s due to their direct impact on present-day notions of American identity.

To evidence how medium specific features of television contribute to contemporary understandings of 1980s America (the objective of the third research question), each chapter explores aspects of cultural heritage through the close textual analysis of television images that best illustrate the representational practices of the case studies. Significantly, the programmes analysed all exhibit a consciousness of their own constructedness; a characteristic that Vidal (2012a: 29) considers typical of media depictions of heritage. This self-reflexivity gives scope for the programmes to convey politicised depictions of America's past. In short, by focusing on the close analysis of TV programmes' mise-en-scène, texture, and tone, the thesis argues that programmes purposefully impart knowledge about the 1980s' heritage to their viewers. More specifically, lingering close-ups of people and objects draw attention to the 1980s' tangible and intangible heritage, signposted by, amongst other things, a portrait of Reagan, a black woman in a leopard-print bra, body parts during heterosexual and lesbian sex, and children's toys. Sequences that foreground stylisation often last several minutes, giving time for viewers to consider the purpose of these representations. Examples of extended sequences include: a KGB spy contemplating the purchase of cowboy boots, a teen girl decorating her purse to imitate Madonna, a bisexual man taking a phone call about his HIV diagnosis, and a lost child trying to escape from a post-apocalyptic dimension. These scenes show that contemporary television programmes intentionally select socio-political aspects of the 1980s in order to cement the decade's role in definitions of American heritage. In addition, 1980s pop songs ('Material Girl', 'In the Air Tonight', 'Heaven is a Place on Earth') and analogue technology (old TV sets, video cameras, cassette tapes) are rendered via the high-definition image and sound quality of contemporary digital television, to convey the historic qualities of the decade, thereby establishing its posterity in media representations of America's past. Through satire and meta-narrative commentary to humorously portray outdated and hegemonic perspectives (including a married woman's repressed lesbian desires, the racist stereotyping of women of colour for entertainment, nostalgic longing for eternal youth, and overbearing maternal panic over children leaving home), programmes emphasise performativity and presentness.

Chapter 2 discusses television's role in defining national identity. It uses *The Americans*, *Red Oaks*, and *Deutschland 83* to illustrate that, amidst hegemonic definitions of national identity supported by the Reagan and Tump administrations, American identity is in fact multifaceted and fluid as it is circumscribed by factors such as immigration, language,

sexuality, race, and cultural traditions like cuisine. The fact that these programmes all talk about and include images of Reagan, harnessing the notion that political leaders and television were becoming synonymous during the 1980s, requires viewers to consider the political impact of present-day media consumption. In particular, Chapter 2 suggests that most citizens encounter notions of American history and identity via television. Through long-form narratives, the programmes develop a sense of the complexity of issues like national identity over time. For example, connections between Reagan's political ideology and the mythical figure of the American cowboy recur throughout these programmes, reflecting how this iconography has been used in recent years by Trump supporters. Thus programmes use their mise-en-scène to question conservative ideologies concerning homogenous national communities.

Chapter 3 argues that television has historically made visible the gendered and racial status quo in America. It uses *The Carrie Diaries* and *Glow* to evidence that a difference of just five years (from 2012 to 2017) can affect the feminist perspectives dominating the American media landscape. The contrast between these programmes' postfeminist and emergent feminist reconstructions of the 1980s illustrates that understandings of the decade's heritage are shaped by the socio-political needs of the present. The analysis highlights that advantages experienced by white women and the systemic, racist stereotyping of black women reflect feminist activism and anti-black racism during both the Reagan and Trump eras. The difference between *The Carrie Diaries*' and *Glow*'s distribution contexts (network and streaming) shows that target demographics and neoliberal capitalism play a significant role in reimaginations of the 1980s. For example, the costuming of black women in 1980s animal-print is portrayed on early 2010s network TV as an exotic and fashionable consumer choice that white women can purchase. In the context of Netflix's more diverse marketing strategy in the late 2010s, similar 1980s costumes signify the historical denigration of black women as bestial savages. Even though *The Carrie Diaries* does not scrutinise the political and racial status quo in the USA (as *Glow* does), it still relies on self-conscious stylisation to convey a politicised interpretation of 1980s America centred on neoliberal capitalism.

Chapter 4 analyses *Halt and Catch Fire*, *The Americans*, and 'San Junipero' to review historical tensions between the conservative demonization of the LGBTQ community, especially in the context of the 1980s AIDS crisis, and liberal advocacy for sexual freedom and equality. An emotional and sensory (touch and sound) engagement with heritage emerges as critical to contemporary TV viewers' experience of the 1980s. The chapter describes the ways in which 1980s televisual style, popularised by MTV, is central to programmes'

reimagination of 1980s heritage in relation to sexuality. This is evident in sequences that rely on 1980s pop music and the imitation of MTV aesthetics to evoke the viewer's nostalgia in response to narratives about sexuality. Empathy for those affected by the AIDS crisis is also elicited through music so that, in contrast to the heteronormative views of politicians within the Trump administration who advocate for Reagan-era anti-LGBTQ policies, programmes encourage a respectful interpretation of queer history. For example, the lesbian wedding that takes place within a virtual simulation of the 1980s is accompanied by Belinda Carlisle's 'Heaven is a Place on Earth'. By using virtual reality, legal barriers to same-sex marriage during the 1980s can be bypassed through twenty-first century technological innovation. Once more, the case studies' self-conscious televisual aesthetic that evokes the 1980s results in a progressive treatment of social issues that are often vilified by conservatives.

Chapter 5 adduces that during the 1980s political concerns surrounding the Cold War were brought into the home as families gathered around their television sets to watch broadcasts such as *The Day After*. This trend, the chapter argues, paved the way for today's media consumption habits. Moreover, as Reagan-era fears about nuclear war have been reawakened in light of tensions between the USA and North Korea, *The Americans*, *The Goldbergs*, and *Stranger Things* highlight the relevance of the 1980s to an understanding of today's political climate. These programmes all demonstrate the impact of nuclear fear on the nuclear family, highlighting how twenty-first century family dynamics are, to some extent, made possible by the breakdown of the heteronormative family structure which began in the 1980s. The programmes' use of archival broadcast footage and analogue technology also evidences the role of television in the preservation of history. The presence of these older technologies often elicits a nostalgic engagement with the 1980s, thereby positioning the television medium itself as central to the reimagining of 1980s American heritage. The meta-televisual positioning of analogue TV sets on today's high-definition screens evidences the contemporary perspective that these programmes take in their portrayal of 1980s America and media history. For example, the programmes' depiction of the events of November 1983, when the USA and USSR came close to nuclear war, relies on their distinct genre conventions (espionage, sitcom, science fiction) to render contemporary issues surrounding parental caregiving and children's media use. The fact that the iconography of three different genres conveys the historical significance of the same social issues highlights the pervasiveness of 1980s heritage in the contemporary cultural imagination.

In its discussion of the themes emphasised above, the thesis also contributes to scholarship on media nostalgia. It illustrates how, in the case studies, the nostalgic pastiche of

1980s pop culture and nostalgic evocations of childhood are progressive and politicised, rather than conservative (see Bayman 2019). It is through progressive nostalgia, for instance, that a programme such as *The Goldbergs* is able to flaunt its historical inaccuracy at the same time as portraying 1980s' heritage. Nostalgia characterised Reagan's rhetoric in the 1980s (see Marcus 2004; Dywer 2015). In one of his last public speeches at the Republican National Convention in 1992, Reagan states: 'We are the country of tomorrow. Our revolution did not end in Yorktown. More than two centuries later, America remains on the voyage to discovery, a land that has never become, but is always in the act of becoming.'[176] A similar sense of nostalgia marks political rhetoric in the 2010s. In 2014, the year before announcing his bid for the presidency, Trump (@realDonaldTrump) tweeted: 'I try to learn from the past, but I plan for the future by focusing exclusively on the present.' Whilst Reagan and Trump claim to prioritise the present and the future by learning from American heritage (such as the Battle of Yorktown), their statement in fact mirrors the workings of nostalgia as defined by Boym (2001: xvi). Boym (Ibid.) posits that nostalgic '[f]antasies of the past' are determined 'by the needs of the present' and have 'a direct impact on realities of the future.' Whilst this analysis does not mean to suggest that Reagan's and Trump's logic parallels Boym's, it is clear from the similarities between these statements that both presidents advocate for a nostalgic engagement with American heritage in order to address contemporary and future issues.

As this example shows, political nostalgias are, to a large extent, cyclical and generational. Arguing that Reagan's nostalgia for the 1950s influenced the representation of the nation's past in film and television, Dwyer (2015) characterises 1980s media through 'pop nostalgia'. He (Ibid.: 22) suggests that:

> nostalgia must be understood not as a reduction or denial of history but as a fundamentally *productive* affective engagement that produces new historical meanings for the past as a way of reckoning with the historical present.
>
> (emphasis in original)

Thus contemporary TV programmes' construction of nostalgia *for* the 1980s is self-referential in its recycling of a prominent cultural practice from this decade. It is in light of Dwyer's understanding of nostalgia's relevance to 1980s television that the thesis highlights a more widespread preoccupation with America's past in the 2010s. More than a dozen television programmes in the 2010s return to the 1980s, depicting multiple interpretations of the decade. On the one hand, growing interest in the decade indicates that it is familiar to many viewers

[176] American troops led by George Washington achieved a critical victory at the Battle of Yorktown (19 October 1781) during the War of Independence.

because a significant proportion of the US population lived through the 1980s. Younger generations are also able to relate to the decade because of its countless iconic and lasting pop culture images. On the other hand, the 1980s might appeal to today's viewers due to its perceived incongruity with today's culture, as its archetypal fashions, hairdos, and technologies seem outdated. Most viewers can, therefore, relate to the 1980s through a sense of familiarity and/or as an alternative to present-day concerns. As a way of 'reckoning' (Ibid.) with the socio-political atmosphere in America in the years immediately preceding and following Trump's election, the case studies of the thesis produce 'new historical meanings' about the 1980s' heritage for today's viewers. Importantly, these programmes show that alongside recognisable signposts like 'Ronald Reagan and shoulder pads' (as stated in *The Carrie Diaries*), 1980s heritage is also made up of controversial and dramatically compelling factors such as racism, television style, and political danger. Contrary to several 1980s TV programmes that reflect Reaganite views (see Feuer 1995), none of the contemporary programmes analysed throughout the thesis follow Trumpian standpoints. Instead, these programmes draw attention to timely social issues faced by underrepresented communities and to topics that speak to present-day anxieties in the lives of the American people.

The thesis' focus on television style as a meaningful component of remediating American heritage links and thereby develops longstanding critical strands within television studies relating to, on the one hand, issues of representation and, on the other hand, issues of aesthetics. These strands of scholarship were themselves established during the 1980s when academic work on television began to combine 'theoretical and methodological approaches from mass communication, sociology, film studies, and English to grapple with television both as a textual and a social force' (Newman and Levine 2012: 156-157). Since the 1980s, television scholarship has been characterised by the 'increasing segmentation' (Ibid.: 157) of scholarship that analyses the industrial and social contexts of TV and studies of aesthetic properties of the medium (which often categorise specific types of 'Quality' programming as stylistically interesting [Ibid.]). This thesis highlights that, in order to understand the canonisation of the 1980s' heritage on contemporary American television, industry trends, social issues, and unique aesthetic traits of television need to be considered jointly. Through analysing these aspects of television, each chapter's findings in relation to American heritage on TV support interdisciplinary interventions into scholarship beyond television studies, including American studies and political theory (Chapters 2 and 5), feminist media studies and intersectional feminist thought (Chapter 3), critical whiteness studies (Chapters 2 and 3), queer media theory (Chapters 2 and 4), and studies of childhood and the media (Chapter 5). Relevant

to this study, the programme creators discussed throughout the thesis responded to escalating political and cultural tensions in America during the 2010s (surrounding, amongst other things, nationalism, race, and sexuality) amidst rapid changes to industry structures. These changes included the increased competition in attracting audiences due to the proliferation of both streaming and of cable channels with narrow target demographics. As the analysis shows, the case studies establish distinctive ways to reconstruct the 1980s within their specific production and distribution contexts. For example, most of the programmes provide multiple entry points into their narrative via ensemble casts which target a varied audience demographic.

As discussed in previous chapters, an interest in the 1980s has considerable bearing on younger generations of television viewers who did not live through the 1980s and therefore do not have their own memories of the decade, relying instead on prosthetic memories shaped by 1980s media. It is in this context that Fallon Carrington (Elizabeth Gillies) in the reboot of *Dynasty* (The CW, 2017-), the iconic 1980s programme of the same name, remarks: 'Oh, the Eighties. […] I wasn't born yet, but I do miss it' (see epigraph). This evidences the emotional resonance of 1980s issues in America today, regardless of people's knowledge about the decade's social and political subtleties. This example from The CW's *Dynasty* demonstrates one of the ways in which the findings of the thesis apply to further case studies that include reboots and revivals of 1980s television programmes set in the present day (as outlined in the Introduction).[177] Other examples of the thesis' ongoing relevance include *Snowfall*, *Pose*, *Mixed-ish*, and *Black Monday*, which were all released after 2017. Notably, these programmes centre underrepresented communities, particularly African Americans and LGBTQ people. Though the thesis does not cover these programmes, its findings can serve as a starting point for future exploration of the reconstruction of the experiences of marginalised groups in the 1980s, as depicted on television programmes created after 2017. Specifically, this study's conclusions about the self-consciously performative depiction of whiteness, racism, and lesbian desire in remediations of the 1980s from 2012 until 2017 initiate research questions that have a use beyond the case studies discussed. Hence, this thesis provides new analytical directions for subsequent research into the 1980s' heritage on the latest TV programmes. Future research could frame its analysis of American heritage and the 1980s within newly emerging scholarly trends in television studies, focusing, for instance, on the global audience of streaming platforms or on the de-centring of the Western/Anglophone television canon.

[177] Indeed, a *Dynasty*-themed perfume advert aired during Walters' 1987 interview with Trump (discussed above), indicating that the programme's cultural impact is intimately woven into the fabric of America's political history ('20/20: Fighting to Be Heard; The Man who has Everything; If You Believe in Magic' 1987 [B_12264]).

Following Harrison's (2009: 1) contention that heritage is not about historical facts but about 'deliverable political objectives', the thesis provides detailed evidence about the 'objectives' of television programmes in the 2010s to interpret, challenge, and comment on the heritage of the 1980s amidst turbulent contemporary socio-political shifts. In particular, the close analysis of TV programmes demonstrates that present-day perspectives on America's past entail a number of explicitly televisual 'objectives'. As this thesis shows the resonances between the 1980s and the 2010s to be pronounced, recent television programmes point to aspects of the 1980s' cultural heritage to establish what Thompson (2007: 5) describes as a retrospectively 'consisten[t]' decade. Whilst the canonisation of 1980s America as heritage was still absent from critical discourse in 2007, as noted by Thompson (Ibid.: 36), the decade was canonised in television programmes throughout the 2010s. As the analysis of the case studies demonstrates, 1980s' heritage in twenty-first century America is intrinsically linked to the medium of television as the original site of historical meaning-making about the decade.

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