

Television Dramas as Memory Screens

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Abstract: Within this article I am focus upon the construction of both social and personal memories within the television drama, drawing upon Landsberg's notion of prosthetic memory and King's identification of 'afterwardsness' as ways of comprehending the construction of memory and the past within texts. The examples are *The Long Walk to Finchley* (Tony Saint, BBC 4, 2008) and *Life on Mars* (2007-8). Both dramas share a number of concerns yet each has a very different context within British television. The relationship between viewers' adopting memories from the dramas and incorporating these into their own sets of memories, including my own memories of the dramas is considered. Equally, the negotiation of the media and public discourses as memory screens with which we interact is a primary concern.

Résumé: Cet article analyse la construction de souvenirs à la fois sociaux et personnels dans les séries télévisées. Il s'appuie sur le concept de "mémoire prothétique" (Landsberg) ainsi que sur la manière dont King définit le concept de "afterwardness" ("postériorité") comme une manière de comprendre la construction de la mémoire et du passé à l'intérieur de textes. Les exemples choisis sont *The Long Walk to Finchley* (Tony Saint, BBC 4, 2008) et *Life on Mars* (2007-8). Ces deux séries ont beaucoup en commun, mais se distinguent par la place très différente qu'elles occupent à l'intérieur de la télévision britannique. L'article analyse le rapport entre la manière dont les spectateurs s'ouvrent aux souvenirs qui viennent des séries et la manière dont ils leur donnent une place dans leurs souvenirs personnels (et l'auteure de cet article y inclut ses propres souvenirs). Corollairement, l'article accorde aussi une grande importance à nos rapports avec les médias et les discours publics qui appariassent comme des écrans mémoriels avec lesquels nous sommes sans cesse en interaction.

Key words: television drama, experience, prosthetic memory, memory screens, identification

Mediating Memory Screens

The mediation of memory screens, the negotiation of television, film, novels and other media, contributes to our understanding of our selves and our society. In order to read, view and encounter these memory screens we need to interact with them. In relation to television drama, the relationship between the viewer and the text encompasses the viewer's own memories and a circulation of meaning both in relation to the text itself and in terms of other social and personal influences upon the viewer. Audience members may remember when they first encountered a drama, what it is similar to or different from, how it relates to their lives and what they deem it to mean. Such forms of mediation encapsulate the place of memory within viewing practices. A drama may also expose a number of associative memories and recollections which emanate from its viewing yet do not overtly relate to the drama itself. As Annette Kuhn has argued in her discussion of *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination*, culturally we need to look back and 'tell stories' about the past. This includes our personal past as well as shared communal recollections. (*Family Secrets*, 2) However, although the negotiation of such memory stories is essential, an exploration of certain dramas can indicate the specific kinds of effect they may have as provocative texts. As well as telling stories in a more general sense, such dramas may contrast national or regional narratives, or they may construct shared stories for the audience. As Myra McDonald has noted: 'Television regularly forges cultural memories through its celebration of heritage and national commemorations, its recycling of programmes across generational divides, its forays into 'history', and its sometimes incestuous invoking of its own role in the construction of a national 'past' (327). However, although versions of a national past are often invoked in such programmes, there are other factors influencing the effect of such programmes as television dramas can become spaces within which we can negotiate our own individual pasts.

Expanding upon the refunctioning of memory, Alison Landsberg argues that memories may be implanted or constructed for audiences. Landsberg describes the way in which social memory can be established through prosthetic memory, a form of

media implanting or refunctioning of memory. (*Memory and Methodology*, 95) Both Landsberg and Robert Burgoyne argue that the mass media can formulate prosthetic memory which works to improve or even to improvise collective identification and memory construction in relation to the past. Following Herbert Blumer's findings in his exploration of cinema viewers, Landsberg argues that prosthetic memory enables spectators to experience 'emotional possession' (*Prosthetic Memory*, 29). Such emotional possession enables the experiences viewed on screen to become internalised as memories for viewers, to be felt as though they have lived through them. By internalising such memories from the text it is assumed by Landsberg that 'the experience of the film might be as formative and powerful as other life experiences' (*Prosthetic Memory*, 30). This process of emotional possession complements the trope of traditional spectatorial identification where audiences can identify with experiences of individual characters on screen. Even though a person may lose themselves in identification with a character, the power of such identification lies in the ability to empathise with others in history which may then contribute to a progressive political reaction. However, taking this formative and affective experience further, such memory construction does not only emanate from what is happening on screen but is negotiated by existing personal memories which might be triggered and recalled in response to the screen. Therefore the emotional possession is not a one way process as memories can intermingle in an intertextual manner between viewer and text. A prosthetic memory can become part of you but your own memories can become part of the viewing experience. Alison Landsberg sees prosthetic memory as memories that are not necessarily from lived experience: 'they circulate publicly' so audiences are 'taking on memories that are not one's intended heritage'. (*Prosthetic Memory*, 25-6) To develop the notion, the prosthetic memory asks the viewer to believe that they have experienced the event, to internalise and own it; gaining investment in the text. However, the associative embedding of circulating cultural memories can also allow for the possibility that the events on screen are galvanised by the viewer's memories of other moments, thus resituating the programme's meanings.

The ability to incorporate prosthetic memory is still intrinsically related to the extent to which our own memories, senses and emotions can allow for or enable such a memory. For examples, I do not remember Kennedy's assassination first hand but I

am familiar with documentaries, live footage and fictional accounts which enable me to feel as though I am a witness to these events: I was there. In addition, this event is so momentous in within cultural discourses that it can become an underlying marker for all future events related to Presidential and political life in the U.S. A. Similarly the Vietnam War also claims such status in relation to the media and fictional narratives coming after it. In Europe, the fall of the Berlin wall is becoming a more contested cultural marker. Representations of the fall of the wall make us feel as though we were there as, in liberal representation, 'we' were. Therefore, as Nicola King has recognised, there is a sense of 'afterwardsness' (Nachträglichkeit) embedded within this relationship. King recognises the way in which this sense of knowing now what was not known then—illustrates the way in which the past is not unproblematically recalled to make links between past and present selves (12). I would argue that a sense of afterwardsness can then work as an act of remembering; but it is a specific form of remembering that enables our own memories to become embedded within our response to the dramas. This allows for the additional response of 'we didn't know that then' but we do now' with the possibilities of, 'what would have happened if we had know that then' as in hindsight. However, it may be the case that something was known but not in the same way, as the contemporary context has changed the very scenario that is being 'recollected'. Such 'afterwardsness' can instigate extremely poignant moments for the 'knowing' audience. Dramas depicting the past, particularly the recent past, embody a sense of 'afterwardsness' in order to establish their emotional impact and a social context with which to engage the audience. The relationship between the past and present is viewed as an oscillating one where personal recollections embed a relationship between what happened then and what happens now. This oscillation between the past and the present can expand the function of prosthetic memory as the past/present dialogue is necessary in order to accept or incorporate the prosthetic memory as one's own.

The examples I consider include *Life on Mars* broadcast on BBC1 as an innovative primetime time travel, detective drama looking back to the 1970s and *Margaret Thatcher: The Long Walk to Finchley*, a biopic of Thatcher's early attempts to enter politics in the 1950s screened on BBC4. Both dramas illustrate the role of television as an act of 'remembering'. The former, *Life on Mars*, ran as two series of six parts, depicting the fictional story of Sam Tyler and his colleagues as he 'time travels' back

into the 1970s after suffering a traumatic accident. The latter, *The Long Walk to Finchley*, is a single drama depicting the early rise of Margaret Thatcher as she becomes an MP in the 1950s. The analogy of prosthetic memory and viewing is originally found in relation to film. However, the process of identification within television drama may work in a similar manner, at best in a single drama and one where there are few characters with whom to identify. In contrast to such close identification, and expanding upon Roger Silverstone's notion of television and the everyday, John Tulloch argues that a significant relationship between the viewer and television might be one of familiarity. This is particularly the case where programmes run for a number of episodes or within serial drama which allows viewers to become familiar with the world of the story and the ensemble cast over a period of time. Therefore the elements of this fictional world become familiar because it is repeatedly revisited. For Tulloch, television also offers 'an endless play of generic formulae (which) create a memory.' (64). If this is the case, then it may work differently in terms of the act of viewer identification and familiarity both with particular dramas and with genre conventions in general.

Life on Mars

Although there is initially a clear protagonist in Sam Tyler, *Life on Mars* takes the time to explore the mise-en-scene and ensemble cast more effectively and displays competing perspectives. The additional reference to past television programme and films within *Life on Mars* adds to the process of familiarity of cultural references which I can negotiate from my own memories. Instead of identifying the single drama most closely, it may be the case that familiarity with a character and their world provides additional textual memories in relation to the character's own narrative which blur the lines between the source of memories from within the drama and memories about its world. *The Long Walk to Finchley*, focusing on Thatcher's early political career in a single play form, draws upon the process of identification where we are called to identify with her character as the main protagonist. This process, however difficult it might be politically, draws me to understand her motivation and feelings and to make sense of these in terms of my own memories.

As part of a wider process of memory construction, the relationship between popular

media and personal memory can become an active process which reflects upon the desire to engage with and re-articulate shared social memories in relation to one's own. When watching and discussing these dramas I have a sense of both memory construction and of emotional and cognitive possession to the extent that they are dramas which provoke thought and discussion. As Macdonald recognises: 'most commentators now agreeing that memory, however individualized in its articulation, is always a social and cultural process' (328). The cultural nature of such memories implies a shared constituency, even if we are not sharing the sharing of exactly the same memories. Equally the source of memories might be wide ranging and diverse: 'Cultural memory' also testifies to the complexities of disentangling where our memories come from: whether from direct experience, oft-repeated accounts by friends or family, or from the mediation of the popular media' (329). As MacDonald recognises, cultural texts form part of a larger process of memory construction, reinforcement and negotiation.

Traditionally a key criticism of emotional possession in the audience is that it is potentially non-analytical or non-critical in response to the text. However, within television drama the process of identity or empathy can be fruitful. As Pam Cook recognises: Audiences can 'emotionally connect with representations of the past' (4): In this sense, we return to Landsberg's notion of emotional possession which, rather than lead the viewer to accept the world on screen may cause them to feel the need to act in relation to what is depicted before them. If we accept what has happened in the past within a drama as part of our own remembering then we may become empathetic to the character and actively interact with what we view. There is also a need to consider the specific nature of such an encounter. The Bahktinian chronotope, which describes the material coalescing of time and space, provides an expression of what is occurring when we make the intersections with and between texts. In a discussion of biography and autobiography, Bakhtin argues that the 'internal chronotope' of an individual life or the self, is significantly transformed within 'the exterior real life chronotope in which the representation of one's own or someone else's life is realized' and 'made public' (131). The account encompasses Bakhtin's interest in the Greek transition to 'rhetorical autobiography and biography', such as memorial public speeches made about a person's life. The shift to represent the life of the individual retrospectively serves to redefine this life and, under such scrutiny, 'the individual is

open on all sides, he is all surface' (132). Although this description encapsulates the role of the ancient Greek state and the status of public discourse, it also captures the extent to which these dramas provide a platform for versions of biographical remembering for consumption and display. The status of these biographies is ideological and public in nature.

Set predominately in the 1970s, the drama series, *Life on Mars*, depicts a penchant for nostalgia and for retro styling, past television and films, pop music and the continuous raiding of the past in order to 'feed' the present. There are many popular cultural references within the drama which enable it to gain cultural credibility and currency. A BBC commission for Kudos productions, it was a high quality drama spanning two 6 episode series on BBC1. Within *Life on Mars* memory and location are key; acts of remembering and physical location are important to the narrative. The ways in which the protagonist's lives engage with wider cultural history expresses the relationship between media and everyday existence which, in Kuhn's terms, 'transcend(s) the life of the individual' (*Family Secrets*, 167). Sam Tyler is a deeply sympathetic character, partly due to the nature of his car accident and partly due to his need to find a place within which he can belong. Also, the relationship between individual and shared memory, the private and the public, is expressed in the negotiation of past and present. In a consideration of the nature of memory studies, Roediger and Wertsch are concerned about 'how events from the outside world might be represented in the mind' (13). This issue is particularly pertinent to *Life on Mars* as Sam oscillates between the past and present worlds and wonders: 'Am I mad, in a coma or back in 1973?' The aesthetic and narrative choices made within the drama are significant in structuring how he views the world. I have discussed Sam Tyler's specific construction of memory work within drama elsewhere (see *Life on Mars*). The focus in this article is on the ways in which the viewing process also becomes an act of remembering and how identification and familiarity with the drama might enable this process to take place.

Life on Mars constructs layers of memory and recollection as an injured police officer, from the 21st century, Sam Tyler, subconsciously 'time travels' back to the 1970s. The subsequent recollections consist of a series of histories as personal,

collective and cultural. As Kuhn has argued in her discussion of family secrets, culturally we need to look back and ‘tell stories’ about the past. This includes our personal past as well as shared, communal recollections. Therefore, the construction of memory through media texts enables a shared recollection of a potentially prosthetic past blending with personal reminiscence – I remember that song, those clothes, that TV programme... and additionally we become knowing viewers who share in this construction. We share Sam’s return to his childhood era. We might enjoy recognising this world or becoming acquainted with it and, surreptitiously, revelling in the non-politically correct banter of Gene Hunt, Sam’s Detective chief Inspector. It is safe to admire this approach of cutting through ‘red tape’ and bureaucracy because – we know/think that it is not like that now.

This sense of knowingness signals the ‘afterwardsness’ identified by Nicola King. In this interpretation we did not understand that such behaviour was unacceptable then but we do now. Alternatively, those viewers who feel that we should be tougher on criminals will think that we were more knowing then and, conversely, less knowing now. Such afterwardsness might construct the past as nostalgia as it offers us what has been lost, whether it is a form of lost innocence or old style experience. As the character summary illustrates: ‘Gene’s an old style cop, not scared of throwing a few punches to get a result’ BBC *Life on Mars*). This form of remembering can also become an excuse for accepting potentially violent or unacceptable behaviour within the drama and allows for an indulgence with the attitudes Gene Hunt who as a bad policeman with a good heart.

The sense of afterwardsness seems to provoke a need for viewers to identify with the drama and to ‘own’ it. The validation of ownership of the drama is established by recognising it as your own world. So each generation will wish to take ownership of the drama as a text that ‘speaks’ to them and about them, as parents or children. In addition, audiences not familiar with the period evoked of the 1970s can recognise the cultural references of the time that have recirculated, such as pop songs, fashions and the musical ‘rebirths’ of the Manchester area. Such discourses of ownership and identification with this era have arisen in conference discussions, and online blogs. For example, Adrian O’Rourke documents the Manchester locations used: ‘The Wild

Card Club scenes were shot in the Press Club, off Deansgate, Manchester city centre. Very little retro-fitting would be required, as the Press Club retains a wonderful look of 1970s Mancunian kitsch.’

In terms of Sam’s emotional journey, the strongest sense of demarcation of location is between the old tenement housing and city centre buildings and the depiction of the new housing estate’s community centre and suggestion of modern council housing. The images of the community centre recur in Sam’s nightmare scenes and become the geographical border between his own childhood trauma and his adult life. So my recollection of childhood in relation to the new estate is continuously forestalled in the drama, although there is a lot of potential to enjoy references to childhood programmes, music and style. The emotional possession encountered within *Life on Mars* is doubly problematic because it also encompasses sympathy for Sam’s present day state as he lies in a coma on a hospital bed. Therefore, the act of remembering seems to be his main source of life and compounds the resonance of the events that happen in this ‘flashback’ world.

Life on Mars has created the possibility of making links to a reconstructed past for viewers who draw upon their own personal memories and intertwine these with the show. Part of such memories involves actually watching the show. My own conscious memories of watching *Life on Mars* highlight two key moments. The first is the memory of watching part of the finale during an awards ceremony, which showed Sam’s apparent suicide by jumping off a building, which received tumultuous applause from the crowd. Previously, the show had won the audience award, and the design team were one of the nominees in 2008, when the ending was shown at the awards. I remember this particularly as I had not seen this episode before so it was an edited taster for what was to come. In addition, the emotional impact of the suicide was poignant and affective, so seeing the act almost in isolation from the rest of the episode gave it a greater impact. The second memory, although I have watched the series a number of times in studying it, occurs during the episode where Sam seeks a father figure and has been let down by his own father’s disappearance. Although viewed as one of the more mawkish and sentimental episodes by some, this episode seemed to resonate with my own childhood memories, or sensations and feelings about my relationship with both my father and mother. So the drama provides a way of cultivating and reflecting upon highly personal memories as well as addressing

wider social and cultural issues. *Life on Mars* achieves what I would call an inherently textual response with a strong sense of empathy, in that it prompts the viewer to respond emotionally at the time and to use their memories to fuel the 'emotional possession' or sympathy with Sam's situation.

The use of location, the mise-en-scene and iconography are highly foregrounded within the drama. The site of Sam's distress is the place where he saw his father leave, and it develops a kind of 'mythic quality' within the series, paradigmatically fuelling Sam's fears and nightmares. Kuhn recognises the 'mythic quality' of the bombed out wasteground in the film *Mandy* where the viewer's act of emotional empathy is made possible in relation to the lonely location. (*Family Secrets*, 43) Sam's memories are confused and conflated as he is both a boy and a man within the drama, inhabiting the 1970s and the present. As well as the relevance of location, the physical objects and settings, or material culture, within the drama can also provide emotional resonance for viewers: for example one fan of *life on Mars* bought the Ford Cortina which 'starred' in the series in loving memory of his wife, who had died. He said that-'Some people might buy a bench with a memorial plaque. I have done something else in memory of her.' ('Over the Moon') He is also commemorating their shared experience of watching the series and recounting this time on a very personal level. It is the viewing of the drama that is as important as the making of it in the first place. *Life on Mars* deploys an ideological openness to the extent that viewers can identify with a range of perspectives and enjoy the drama by drawing upon diverse cultural references which makes it easier to personalise the drama and to 'make it your own'.

The sense of ownership in relation to *Life on Mars* also surfaced at a Conference I attended at which various generations claimed that the drama reflected their experiences, whether regional, through age or cultural references such as music (*Life on Mars Symposium*, University of Glamorgan, 2007). Claiming an esoteric and discerning set of choices for the soundtrack, one commentator remarked that bands such as Roxy Music and David Bowie set the audience apart as connoisseurs of such music. However, partly convinced that this was not the case, I suggested that the Sweet were also on the soundtrack, providing a much more popular sound than might be suggested. Actually, all three are on the soundtrack but this sense of delineating a particular aesthetic palate in music works to claim the programme as part of a

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particular discerning viewership alongside its status as a quality and innovative drama. The status of material culture of 1973 adds to viewers' pleasure and the reference to fashions and idiom of the past contributes to the comedic and playful tone that is used to offset the darker elements of the drama.

The Long Walk to Finchley

The second example I wish to consider is the biopic shown on BBC4 *Margaret Thatcher: The Long Walk to Finchley* which depicts the rise of Thatcher during the 1950s to become an MP in 1959. It provides an amusing and liberally constructed account of events leading up to this achievement and draws upon references to subsequent activities of Thatcher, her family and political life, in a playful way. Where *Life on Mars* seems to solicit a response in directly viewing the text, at least for me, *The Long Walk* seems to be implicated much more greatly by extra-textual elements. This is not least because it portrays a real person within a fictionalised biopic so the references outside of the text already exist. However, the drama makes a somewhat controversial figure into both something of a figure of fun and a sympathetic underdog. I think that negotiating these two readings within the film leads the viewer outside of the text to find an anchor or port from which to view it. As a single drama *The Long Walk* constructs a version of Thatcher the early years for our entertainment.

The Long Walk restructures Thatcher's early political career as a contemporary narrative, providing what Burgoyne argues occurs in relation to *Saving Private Ryan*: a clearly revisionist perspective on the past. *The Long Walk* depicts an historical construction of Thatcher's early political life. *The Long Walk* is part of a series of single television dramas designed to 'provide what the BBC see as an alternative perspective on stories and characters from our past' as often comedic or ironic biopics (BBC FOUR). The status of this drama has been evaluated— including when to broadcast it. Amidst concerns that it would be inappropriate to screen the drama, 'After a while you don't notice that she doesn't look like Margaret Thatcher because she has become Margaret Thatcher'. As Wollaston recognises, we can adopt a particular persona and place it as palimpsest over an existing notions about this public figure.

Richard Brook, in *The Sunday Times*, outlines how the drama was postponed as the BBC is worried that the 'larky' portrayal of Thatcher might upset her. Instead, BBC FOUR will wait until it can run programmes based on archive footage on either side of the drama to "put it into context". This account of Thatcher provides a more appealing view of her persona and this provides a contextualisation of Thatcher's path to success as relevant to contemporary discourses on the successful individual woman. It gains coherence in looking back. So the memorial works as a commemoration and remembering of the 1950s as a time before feminism with Thatcher trying to break the glass ceiling into politics as we are called to champion her journey.

The drama depicts the rise of Margaret Thatcher during the 1950s to become an MP in 1959. It provides an amusing and liberally constructed account of events leading up to this achievement and draws upon references to subsequent activities of Thatcher, her family and political life in a playful way. As a single drama *The Long Walk* constructs a version of Thatcher the early years for our entertainment. Sue Thornham and Tony Purvis identify the function of telling stories within television drama: Narrative is our way of making sense of our experience of the real – the way of a culture think through ideas and the ways in which the 'past is made intelligible to the present' (30).

I argue that *The Long Walk* restructures Thatcher's early political career as a contemporary narrative and revises the past. The long Walk allows for an historical rewrite with, in the case of Thatcher's early political life, room for manoeuvre with the potential aporia in accounts of her personal history. Of course we are considering the construction of a persona in relation to Margaret Thatcher. In terms of television drama I wish to highlight two issues which arise here: firstly, that it has been deemed appropriate to commission and produce a comic and ironic account of Thatcher, the early years as part of the 30 year anniversary, to provide a more appealing view of Thatcher's persona; and secondly the ways in which this provides a contextualisation of Thatcher's path to success as relevant to contemporary discourses on the successful individual. It gains coherence in looking back.

The single films made for the BB4 series are designed to 'provide what the BBC see

as an alternative perspective on stories and characters from our past' - in the form of biopics with a comedic dimension. The construction of the biopic enables an insight into the public/private persona and contributes a soap-like element to drama which often heightens the interpersonal relationships. *The Long Walk to Finchley* playfully portrays Margaret Thatcher's rise through the Conservative Party ranks to become an M.P. Although it is set in the 1950s, it is inevitably both viewed and written in relation to Thatcher's later role as Prime Minister. In fact, the drama ends in 1959, before the associative 'liberation' issues of the 1960s, establishing a pre-feminist era which is never really overcome. The generally light hearted nature of the drama is achievable due to Thatcher's position as the underdog who has to find a way into the Establishment and pursue her career through various obstacles. It sets Thatcher as an outsider who is always trying to get into the establishment – the Old School network - and to make her mark. Playing the role of the 'housewife' in her political rhetoric, as a vehicle for domestic economic policy, allows Thatcher to use an unthreatening 1950s trope in order to challenge the status quo.

An ironic and playful drama such as *The Long Walk* further enables us to engage as viewers to position ourselves in a retrospective position constructing what Jeremy Ridgman describes as a 'nostalgic irony' because of what we, as an audience already know as we, too, look back (241). Therefore, the construction of memory through media texts enables a shared recollection of a potentially prosthetic past and additionally we are positioned as knowing viewers who share in this construction. In terms of Alison Landsberg's notion of prosthetic memory, it can allow for incorporation of memories for a time through which the viewer did not live. We can incorporate these memories into our shared cultural perspective but, to paraphrase Philip K. Dick, 'Do we remember them wholesale?' Once again there needs to be some recognition that viewers own memories and other shared cultural memories intertwine with the drama. My own recollections of viewing the drama span various viewings in order to study it. However, what I remember about the experience of viewing it are the impact of the mannerisms, movements and affectations of the lead character upon first watching the programme. These mannerisms are played for the audience so we can see her manipulation of those around her. Conflation of character and public persona is common within biopics where there is only one account of the character, however ingenuitous such an account might seem. The resulting effect upon

my viewing was that it made me somewhat uncomfortable that I might be sympathetic with such a figure who is antithetical to my political and ethical interests.

The Long Walk has a clear commissioning intent: it is part of a series of dramas commissioned by BBC FOUR which are intended to 'reflect the values and intelligence of the channel (witty, discerning, authoritative), whilst at the same time uplifting audiences by being entertaining, fun and colourful' (BBC FOUR). In addition, it is recognised that viewers will realise the ironic nature of the representation and negotiate it accordingly. But, because there is no clear representation of Thatcher in the 1950s already in cultural circulation, this image becomes the *version* of Thatcher which then creates a form of prosthetic memory: this is what Margaret Thatcher was like in the 1950s. Essentially, the drama is not depicting Thatcher in the 1950s but the working through a prism of the later image of Thatcher in the 1970s and beyond: she is constructed through this later persona.

The impact of *The Long Walk* resides in its interplay between fictive identification and ironic distance in relation to the main character. As a result, the depiction of the 1950s as a time when women were not in positions of power, which is also a fallacy, garners sympathy from those who might be much more left of centre than Thatcher in her 'red menace' days. Andrea Riseborough, who plays the lead in *The Long Walk*, discusses how Thatcher's struggle against adversity will have viewers rooting for her. She tells interviewer Olly Grant that she used to hate Thatcher, but that playing her has changed her opinion:

'I very much admire her for having the integrity to do her homework, for being politically passionate, for loving what she did,' she says. 'Simultaneously, for running a home and being a wonderful mother. I don't admire her political beliefs, perhaps, but I do admire her conviction.'

So the process of identification supersedes the desire to differentiate political leanings. Riseborough references her own parents in this account, remembering that they were quite anti-Thatcherite and that such an influence stayed with her. However, Riseborough's depoliticising of this controversial political figure enables an elision of the interim period, when she was in power, to relate to her as, above all, a woman. Upon reflection, a period of deskilling and loss of traditional industries did also see a

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growth in more casual labour and short term contracts, which greatly affected the traditions of the media industry and could be seen as quite suited to acting roles. As a marker of social change, this image which the drama exploits effectively through the wiles of feminine attraction much more than any feminist politics or interests.

And this is where the drama becomes even more problematic because we are not watching Thatcher and we are not even watching a drama based specifically on recorded events. It is Tony Saint's account of 'How Margaret might have done it'. ('Last Night's TV') However, as with many biopics, it draws the viewer into identification within the narrative arc. As Robert Hanks argues in a review of the drama, Tony Saint that manages to be both pro-Thatcher and anti-Tory; a view to which I do not think that she would object. But the ever embracing revisionist myth of Thatcher is pervasive. *Thatcher: The Musical!* was part of a series of theatre pieces by Foursight Productions intended to 'share stories inspired by the lives and passions of women.' As Andrea Riseborough recognises: 'That was something we all wanted to get across: just how hard it was for Margaret Thatcher.' She laughs. 'And to think it was made by a team of artistic liberals! That's an extraordinary thing, isn't it?' (*Telegraph*) This attitude clearly indicates a shift in meaning and image construction, which is displaced onto *The Long Walk* where character identification synthesises what Thornham and Purvis recognise as a trait of costume drama: the ability to manage a potentially 'unstable equilibrium' in the articulation of hegemony (77). Any contestation of meaning is overcome by the reconstitution of an unproblematic post-Thatcherite world.

Conclusion

This consideration of *Life on Mars* and *The Long Walk to Finchley* is a culmination of a number of engagements with and viewings of both dramas. Previously I have considered the implications of the characters' reconstructions within the text and, to a degree, extra textual responses and reference. In remembering, revisiting and reworking both previous consideration of the dramas and my own responses to both of them, there emerges a different relationship to a text with which I have some personal resonance and memory and a text which sets out to contravene strongly held beliefs about politics and feminism. However, in reflecting upon both dramas, I have invoked Kuhn's account of memory work as a way of understanding the personal in *Image & Narrative*, Vol 12, No2 (2011)

relation to the social from my own perspective. Equally the role of prosthetic memory in establishing a sense of phenomenological experience is to be recognised, as well as the importance of a sense of afterwardsness which these historical and costume dramas inevitably evoke. If cultural memory is derived from multiple sources then it is the way we make sense of, or use, these memories that is important.

Television

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