Screening the commune: popular tele/visions of domestic discontent

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the phenomenon of communes being brought to life as a device and
setting in popular television narratives between the mid-2000s and the late-2010s. I ask: how is
the commune imagined on popular television of this period? Why does the commune have
imaginary vitality at this juncture? I explore the imaginary vitality of the commune in the context
of what I call a "decade of domestic discontent": a period of discontent and unease in
contemporary life regarding matters of the domestic. The "domestic discontent" to which I refer
corresponds with concerns about climate change, intergenerational inequalities, and sexual
politics.

I examine four case study television programmes that feature particularly notable
instances of the commune's animation in the mid-2000s to late-2010s. I deploy a "figurative"
analysis, in which a key focus of analytical attention is the fictional characters or factual television
participants that feature in narratives about communes. I explore how these characters are
constructed as having intertextual characteristics and qualities such that they bring to life figures
that circulate in wider culture.

The set of figures that I identify as imaginatively bound up with the commune are: "the
low impact pioneer", "the boomerang child", "the selfish feminist", "the cult leader", "the acid
casualty", and "the raving brute". This set of figures, I argue, is made up of both "discontented
figures" and "figures of discontent", that is, figures that express various kinds of discontent and
figures that are objects of discontent. I argue that the commune is a signifier of multifarious
kinds of discontent that have particular resonance in the contemporary moment. The thesis
highlights television narratives featuring communes as presenting scenarios that evoke some of
the most pressing current issues of domestic discontent.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree elsewhere. Furthermore, I declare that the word count of this thesis, 60,826 words, does not exceed the permitted maximum.

Will Lawrence

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Dr Raymond Parke (Richard Johnson) sits opposite a man who represents everything that he hates. He is in a police interrogation room with Detective Superintendent Peter Boyd (Trevor Eve). Parke is under suspicion for his role in the murder of a young psychiatrist in 1967, who was found to have been killed in the commune that Parke had started in the early part of his career as a fringe psychiatrist. The police team led by Boyd suspect that the murderer was a teenage commune dweller with paranoid schizophrenia with whom Parke had conducted a failed therapeutic role play encounter immediately prior to the murder taking place. Should Parke's role in the murder be publicised, what is left of his already diminished professional reputation is at stake. The atmosphere in the room escalates to a tipping point. Enraged at Boyd's scrutiny, Parke launches into an accusatory rant and stabs his interrogator's hand with a ballpoint pen.

This scene is from a story of the BBC forensic crime drama *Waking the Dead* (BBC, 2000-11) which was first broadcast in 2007. The story centres around the investigation of a cold case that leads the *Waking the Dead* police team to look into a psychotherapeutic commune that was active in 1967. This scene encapsulates two kinds of discontent that feature prominently in my argument in the thesis. First, the discontent of Dr Raymond Parke, radical psychiatrist and former sixties guru/cult leader. In his experimental therapeutic practice, Parke expresses a generalised anti-authoritarianism, a discontent associated with the sixties counterculture which is directed towards conventional institutions and culture. The second kind of discontent is that belonging to Parke's interrogator, DS Boyd, whose discontent is directed towards Parke as a predatory cult leader who has damaged the lives of multiple young people over whom he had an influence at his commune. The commune in this particular story functions both as a symbol of Parke's discontent and desire for a radically different form of living together outside of the bounds of social acceptability and, at the same time, stands in as a cause of discontent about predatory abusers, legitimising feelings of anger and outrage towards the commune.

Since the general timeframe in which this *Waking the Dead* story was first broadcast, the mid-2000s, there has been multiple instances of communes being used as a device and setting in popular television narratives. The commune has appeared in popular television programmes of genres encompassing, for instance: "prestige" drama (*Mad Men* [AMC, 2007-15], *The Legacy* [DR, 2014-17]), thriller (*American Horror Story* [FX, 2011-], *The Sinner* [USA Network, 2017-], *The Path* [Hulu, 2016-18]), police detective drama (*Endeavour* [ITV, 2012-], *New Tricks* [BBC, 2003-15]*, Wallander* [TV4, 2005-13]), true crime documentary (*Wild Wild Country* [Netflix, 2018], *Waco: Madman or Messiah* [A&E, 2018], *Manson: The Lost Tapes* [ITV, 2018]), teen drama (*Skins* [E4, 2007-13]), domestic sitcom (*Mixed-ish* [ABC, 2019-], *Fresh Meat* [Channel 4, 2011-16]), group challenge reality TV (*Young Mum's Mansion* [BBC, 2008-09]*, Utopia* [Fox, 2014]), and travel documentary (*Ben Fogle New Lives in the Wild* [Channel 5, 2013-]). Between the mid-2000s and the late-2010s, communes have been repeatedly reconsidered by television writers and producers.

This interest in the commune is curious because the commune is so often thought of as a living arrangement that belongs almost exclusively to the 1960s and 70s. The commune is commonly regarded as an arrangement that was practiced with some degree of prevalence at this time and is now a historical relic, or a fossil, from this period. If we look to recent academic considerations of the commune, for example, most attention is placed on the 1960s and 70s commune with a historical focus on the experiences of commune dwellers of this period and cultural artefacts that were produced at the time. This academic research has engaged with, for example, life story interviews with former commune dwellers (Davis & Warring, 2011), cookbooks created by proponents of communal living (Hartman, 2003), and vinyl records collected by archaeologists from the site of a 1960s commune (Parkman, 2014). Taken as a whole, this set of work fits with a disposition towards memorialising the 1960s that has recently

been invoked in various fiftieth anniversary commemorations and celebrations of events of the late 1960s.[1]

The commune's animation in contemporary television leads me to suggest that there is something about this living arrangement that has vitality in the present and that conceptions of the commune as historical relic are insufficient for understanding this phenomenon. In thinking of this "vitality", I borrow expressions from Jackie Stacey's (2010) writing about the cinematic life of the gene: "imaginary vitality" and "imaginative charge".[2] When I say that the commune has imaginary vitality, I mean that the commune has a particular resonance in the mid-2000s to late-2010s. The commune is charged with associations that speak to highly publicised issues in the present. For instance, the association of communes with people living in very close proximity to one another resonates with concerns about the less-than-comfortable arrangements into which some people are forced by economic circumstances during a housing crisis in Britain. I do not use "imaginary vitality" to mean that communes are ubiquitous or omnipresent in television culture or that they appear in a vast array of programmes. This thesis starts from the observation that communes have featured in multiple television programmes in the mid-2000s to late-2010s and I interrogate the imaginary vitality that communes have accrued in that period.

I argue that it is crucial in considering the commune's imaginary vitality to recognise that the recent period in which communes have been recycled as a television device is a period marked by a prevalent atmosphere of domestic discontent. By "domestic discontent", I mean discontentedness with matters of the domestic, that is matters concerning living arrangements, domiciles, and the arrangement of one's dwelling space, as well as issues related to intimacy and intimate relationships. This mood of discontent is distinctive in what I refer to as the "decade of domestic discontent" between the mid-2000s and the late-2010s, a decade that has been

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[1] See Hamblin and Adamson (2019) for discussion of this phenomenon.
[2] Stacey argues that the figure of "the gene" had imaginary vitality in the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, a phenomenon that is evident in filmmakers' repeated reflections in this period on genetic engineering and related themes of doubling, impersonation, and masquerade. For Stacey, genetic engineering had imaginary vitality at this time in part because it spoke to cultural anxieties about the loss of authenticity and the transformation of familiar kinship ties.

characterised by a proliferation of debates about domestic and intimate lives, how we should

arrange domestic spaces during a recessionary period, which populations have access to what

kinds of living arrangements, how we should navigate our intimate relationships in the light of

experience with toxic masculinities. While the precise boundaries around this decade are

debatable, there is something distinctive about the extent to which it involves very public

controversies and arguments in public life around intergenerational cohabitation, living

arrangements that are suitable as a response to climate change, and enlivened discourses around

sexual politics.[3]

The imaginative charge of the commune is so valuable to study now because it helps us

to think through this circulating discontent. I suggest thinking of the commune as an object that

might tell us something about how the atmosphere of domestic discontent is aesthetically

mediated at the present time. As I trace in the thesis, the commune is a space imagined as

belonging to those who desire a break with the status quo expressed in the practice of living

collectively: a space for discontented subjects. To study how communes are brought to life on

television, then, is in part to interrogate the shape and content of the stories that we tell

ourselves as a culture about domestic discontent.[4]

I ask in the thesis: how is the commune imagined in popular television of the most

recent decade? Why does the commune have imaginary vitality at this juncture?

I consider these questions through a series of readings of selected television programmes.

The thesis is not intended as a comprehensive or exhaustive account of all television shows that

feature communes since the mid-2000s. Further, I do not intend for the thesis to identify a

singular meaning and significance that the commune carries in all instances of its appearance in

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[3] On intergenerational cohabitation and generational conflicts see Hoolachan and McKee (2019); Pickard (2019); Davis & Cartwright (2019); on concerns about the built environment in relation to climate change see Pickerill (2016); Cattaneo (2015); on enlivened sexual politics see Kindig (2018); Orgad & Gill (2019); Wood (2019); Kay & Banet-Weiser (2019); Rodriguez (2019); Wooten (2019); Boyle (2019).

[4] Here I am thinking of domestic discontent as a "public feeling" which draws upon the notion that emotions are personal at the same time as being public and social; see Ahmed (2004), Berlant (2011), Ngai (2005).

television narratives. I do not claim to derive a single authoritative meaning from the content of the programmes that I explore. Rather my argument in the thesis aims to explore why it is that the commune is so imaginatively charged in the present moment and, in the course of doing so, to explore and unpack some of the most important connections between the imaginative life of the commune and the decade of domestic discontent.

It is worth pausing here to establish what I mean by "the commune". In a concise formulation, the commune can be described as it is in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "A group that practises communal living; a small community whose members share common interests, work, and income, and typically own property collectively" (OED, 2020). A further helpful way of thinking about the commune is as a living arrangement that establishes a commons on a domestic scale. By "commons", I mean a set of resources that is maintained by a group according to a shared set of principles.[5] One advantage of thinking of the commune in this way is that it distinguishes it from the shared apartment. The commune involves a group of co-residents who intentionally live in community with one another rather than just living in close proximity to one another.

While in the example that I have given at the outset of this introduction the commune that is featured in the *Waking the Dead* story belongs to the 1960s, in the majority of cases that I explore in the thesis the commune that features in each story is one that exists, fictionally or otherwise, in the present day. The commune has an important relationship to the sixties counterculture, but on the whole the concern of the thesis is primarily with how the commune, broadly speaking, is animated in the present moment, not necessarily the "'60s commune".

Further, another crucial distinction that informs my understanding of the commune is that I am not necessarily thinking of the commune as an arrangement requiring all its inhabitants to cohabit under the same roof. This point is worth emphasising because the commune is

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[5] On the notion of a "domestic commons" in relation to communes, see Bhatia and Steinmuller (2018).

frequently imagined as a group of people who live together in one large house, as it is for instance in two notable European films that dramatise commune life: *Together* (2001, dir. Lukas Moodysson) and *The Commune* (2016, dir. Thomas Vinterberg). Communes as I conceive of them in this thesis are arrangements in which inhabitants may live in separate buildings. This is true for two living arrangements that I characterise as types of commune. The ecovillage is by design made up of multiple houses and a shared collective space in which its residents can meet with one another (Pickerill, 2016). The New Age traveller group, meanwhile, consists of multiple mobile homes parked in proximity to one another at a given site, with each home staying for varying lengths of time (Hetherington, 2000). I bracket these arrangements together as communes since they contain the basic intention to live in a communitarian manner and to create a domestic commons.

In thinking about how the commune is imagined on television, it is important to note that the commune is in a certain respect an abstract notion: what gives a commune its distinctive character as a commune is a quality that belongs to a set of human relationships. The way in which television brings the commune to life, I suggest, is through the characters that are visible on screen and the human stories and dramas tied to the characters that are imagined as inhabiting this living arrangement. Therefore, I approach the animation of the commune by putting characters and factual television participants as a key focal point of my analysis.

The thesis deploys what I call a "figurative television criticism", meaning that in the course of my analysis of television programmes I place specific analytical attention on the way in which the characters of TV narratives are made to resemble figures that circulate in wider culture and so carry with them the affective charge and associations that are bound to these figures. By "figure" I mean a metaphorical entity or image that obtains an affective charge, and the quality of being familiar or recognisable, through its repeated articulation in various sites and locations of culture. Claudia Castañeda has written of the figure as something with the "double force" of both "constitutive effect and generative circulation" (2002: 3), that is to say a figure produces the

material effect of shifting perceptions about the world, contributing to "the making of worlds", and acquires its cultural force through circulation across multiple cultural spheres. What I track in the thesis is how the figure of the commune, which is the central figure of interest, is imagined through various other human figures that correspond with stereotypes and social types of people that are thought to inhabit communes. The set of figures I explore through the course of the thesis are: "the low impact pioneer", "the boomerang child", "the selfish feminist", "the cult leader", "the acid casualty", and "the raving brute".

This figurative approach is combined in my argument with a theoretical lens or interpretive strategy that has developed in film and television studies over the past few decades, that is to read the ways in which domestic spaces and living arrangements are brought to life in visual media as corresponding with attitudes and feelings towards domesticity that circulate at the time in which these representations are produced (Spigel, 1992; Haralovich, 1992; Hunt, 2008; Wojcik, 2010; Thompson, 2018). As I have indicated above, my argument draws connections between the atmosphere of domestic discontent in the mid-2000s to the late-2010s and televisual imaginings of the commune. By focusing on communes, I am applying this interpretive strategy to a research object that has before now remain unacknowledged in the field. The commune has been studied in fields related to contemporary history, sociology, and anthropology, but in thinking through the commune as a device and setting of popular television narratives my research object is one that has been previously unexamined in television studies.

The overall argument of the thesis is that the way in which the commune is imagined on television of this period is through the set of figures that I have identified which I argue consists of both "discontented figures", figures that express or symbolise various kinds of discontent, and "figures of discontent", figures that are objects of discontent about which people feel discontented, angry, or resentful. I argue that this element of the commune's televisual imagining means that the commune has vitality at this time since the commune narratives, bound up as

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they are with these figures, bring to life and evoke some of the most pressing issues of domestic discontent of the time.

The thesis follows a series of close readings of television programmes from the mid-2000s to late-2010s whose selection was determined by a unifying set of concerns. One of the crucial unifying qualities of the programmes that I have selected is that they all might be considered "popular" to a significant extent.[6] I think about my archive of case study programmes as "popular" in two respects. One, they are popular by television industry standards, as in they generate further series and funding, relatively large audiences, or significant attention from news media and journalistic commentary. Two, they are popular as in they demonstrate television's extensive interest in generating representations of "the people": that is, in reflecting society's aspirations, anxieties, and discontent to itself.[7] To name the case study programmes as "popular" in this second respect helps me to establish that television stories carry such imaginative charge in the recent decade because of their narrativisation of fraught public issues of the time.

This consideration leads me to explore programmes that may be thought of as ephemeral in the sense that they may not endure as especially renowned artefacts when observed in the years to come but are nevertheless popular in the ways that I have indicated. The programmes I explore are the kind of quotidian programmes that audiences find repeated in the broadcasting schedules of the major British broadcasters. *Grand Designs* (Channel 4, 1999-), for instance, has spawned multiple series, as well as spin-off programmes between 2000 and the time of writing, while *Waking the Dead* was produced across an entire decade from 2000 to 2011. *Jam and Jerusalem* (BBC, 2006-09) was deemed sufficiently popular by BBC producers so that three series of the programme were created with a large ensemble cast of well-known comedic performers. *Eden* (Channel 4, 2016-17) is different in the respect that it spawned only two distinct series and was

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[6] I follow in a cultural studies tradition that sees the study of "popular" cultural artefacts as a worthwhile and important pursuit. One of the most influential texts in this tradition that shaped my perspective here is Stuart Hall's (2002) "Notes on deconstructing 'the popular'". I was also informed by Lauren Berlant's more recent rehearsal of this debate in her defence of taking seriously what some scholars categorise as "silly objects" (1997).
[7] See Jonathan Bignell's (2010) essay on "the popular" and television for a helpful discussion of this point.

not a fixture of the broadcasting schedule in the same way that *Grand Designs* can be said to be, but nevertheless it recycled a "group survival" reality TV premise that was well-established by the late-2010s.

The case study programmes also all caught my interpretive eye for a variety of distinct reasons.[8] The *Grand Designs* episode "Low Impact House" as discussed in Chapter 2 is curious for the way in which it animates a figure that is from some perspectives unsettling and troubling in a programme that carries with it the generic expectations of being reassuring and conventional. BBC sitcom *Jam and Jerusalem* is interesting in that the commune operates as a space that is never directly visible on screen but nevertheless features in the story through one grossly ridiculous comic character. The *Waking the Dead* story titled "Double Bind" that I introduced above is curious for the extreme negativity with which the 1960s therapeutic commune is imagined, which entails a striking disposition of dismay and outrage towards the commune. The reality TV show *Eden: Paradise Lost*, meanwhile, is fascinating on account of the production controversies which surrounded its making and the ways in which this context shaped how the commune of the series is imagined.

The thread that ties these selected programmes together, I argue, is their common concern with domestic discontent. Each of the case study programmes brings to life one or more human figures that express concerns about matters of the domestic and visions for ways in which domestic lives could be arranged differently. In the four case study chapters, I explore what the stories' exploration of domestic discontent tells us about the resonance communes have in the mid-2000s to late-2010s.

The thesis is organised into five main chapters followed by a concluding chapter. My concern in Chapter 1 is with situating my work in the context of existing research in television studies and with outlining both the theoretical lens of domestic discontent and the figurative

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[8] The notion of catching one's "interpretive eye" I borrow from Lauren Berlant's (2007) essay on case studies.

television criticism approach in which I engage in the thesis. In the course of this discussion, I introduce the notions of "discontented figures" and "figures of discontent" which are of central importance to my argument, situating these notions in relation to the wider cultural context of the mid-2000s to the late-2010s. Chapter 1 also contains a discussion of my methodological approach including how I am conceiving of "figures" in relation to the study of television and some of the important ways in which this figurative approach functions in the chapters that follow.

Having established this background to my approach, in Chapter 2, I attend to the first case study programme of the four that I examine in thesis: an episode of Channel 4's lifestyle TV/home construction programme *Grand Designs* titled "Low Impact House". The episode is concerned with Lammas eco-village in West Wales, UK. The central protagonists of the episode are couple Simon and Jasmine Dale. I explore how Simon and Jasmine Dale embody the discontented figure of "the low impact pioneer", a figure that expresses concern about how our built environments should be constructed in light of climate change. I argue that *Grand Designs* presents the Dales and their two children as a reassuringly familiar and safe family unit in such a way that the communal living nature of the ecovillage is obscured. While the Dales resemble the discontented figure of the low impact pioneer it is their familial contentedness that is foregrounded in the episode.

Chapter 3 examines BBC sitcom *Jam and Jerusalem*. I show how the commune is imagined through the sitcom's emblematic commune dwelling character, Tash, who is a recurrent butt of the joke in scenes in which she appears. I argue that Tash is made to resemble two discontented figures and figures of discontent, "the boomerang child" and "the selfish feminist". My argument is particularly concerned with the generational perspective of the sitcom, through which the boomerang child is perceived as a source of irritation. I examine how Tash's "selfish feminist" construction is bound up with her imagining as childish. I argue that the narrative of intergenerational cohabitation in *Jam and Jerusalem* conveys multiple kinds of discontent bound up

with the problems for young people of achieving transitions to adulthood that are especially fraught in recent years.

Chapter 4 interrogates the story "Double Bind" of BBC crime drama *Waking the Dead*. The main storyline of "Double Bind" focuses on a psychotherapeutic commune that was active in 1967. I argue that in keeping with the generic conventions of forensic noir, the genre to which *Waking the Dead* belongs, "Double Bind" reproduces a narrative about the sixties counterculture as startlingly traumatic. The story animates the figures of "the cult leader" and "the acid casualty". These figures are brought to life in such a way that they are made to fit with familiar stories about abuse containing a perpetrator of abuse and a victim/survivor. The commune is positioned in the story through a tone of outrage and anger that corresponds with discontentedness about institutional abuse cases that occurred in the decade of domestic discontent.

Chapter 5 explores the group challenge reality TV programme originally titled *Eden* and later renamed *Eden: Paradise Lost. Eden* involved a group challenge in which a set of 23 participants were tasked with surviving for one year in a remote location on the west coast of Scotland. The chapter concentrates on the second series of *Eden* which centred around the failure of the group challenge and the difficulties faced by participants that led to the majority leaving before the year was completed. My argument explores how the programme animates a figure of feminist contempt, "the raving brute", through a set of men in the camp who are especially foregrounded in the narrative of *Eden: Paradise Lost*. I explore how the series conveys a vision of the commune as a failed attempt at non-hierarchical living which results in domineering men harming others.

The concluding chapter offers a final summative articulation of my overall argument in the thesis about the commune as revitalised in the public imagination during the decade of domestic discontent of the mid-2000s to late-2010s.

The shape the thesis takes can be characterised as taking the reader on a journey from stories about communes that are light in tone to those that mobilise feelings of shock and outrage. I chart a path from the comfortingly familiar *Grand Designs* to the chilling *Eden: Paradise Lost*, which features an alarming series of events and envisions the commune as a disastrous living arrangement. The four case study chapters might be experienced as a descent into incrementally darker and more troubling visions of the commune. Before entering that territory, I first turn to detailing the conceptual framework of the thesis. In the chapter that follows I introduce a fuller account of what I mean by "domestic discontent" and of the methodological choices that support the research.

Chapter One: Domestic discontent and figurative criticism

As established in the introduction to the thesis, my intention is to investigate how the commune is imagined in popular television of the most recent decade and what causes the commune to have such imaginative charge at this time. A crucial way in which I approach this investigation is in drawing on the observation that the way in which television renders domestic lives reflects cultural anxieties about domesticity that circulate at the time of a given programme's production. As cultural studies scholar Stéphanie Genz makes this point, domesticity and popular culture are "areas of change that inform one another" (2008: 59). There is a dynamic relationship between these two spheres.

In the opening chapter, I introduced the notion of "domestic discontent" as being a key lens I use in the course of my analysis through the subsequent chapters. I also introduced the fact that my thesis works with the notion of "the figure" and tracks a set of figures across a selection of case study television programmes. My purpose in this chapter is to set out important details as to my use of these concepts and about my methodological approach, which is informed by the notion of "the figure". Further, I situate my approach to thinking about communes on television as drawing upon scholarly work in television studies that explores domestic dwellings that are imagined on screen. Overall, the chapter navigates a series of questions. How is it possible to study a living arrangement's imaginary vitality? How should one understand contemporary "domestic discontent" given that there are so many sources and strands of discontent in the most recent decade? What are the connections between "the commune" and "domestic discontent"?

This chapter is comprised of four sections. In the first section, titled "Situating the study: domestic dwellings criticism", I introduce a set of feminist television criticism that focuses on domestic dwellings. I explore the ways in which my project responds to this set of work and identify how the notion of domestic discontent with which I work expands upon existing

debates. In the second section, titled "Domestic discontent in contemporary times", I situate my project in a period that I call a "decade of domestic discontent". Here I explore the different facets and sources of domestic discontent in the long decade under investigation that inform my analysis. In the third section, titled "Discontented figures and figures of discontent", I outline the set of figures that I trace through the various case study chapters that follow. Here I make a distinction between what I call "discontented figures" and "figures of discontent". In the final section, titled "Figurative television criticism", I sketch out the important components of my methodological approach and details of the method with which I read the selected television texts, which allows me to trace how the commune is imagined in television stories through the human figures that the stories bring to life.

Situating the study: domestic dwellings criticism

My project can be placed in a scholarly field of television criticism that closely examines the domestic dwellings of TV. This work asks how some types of dwelling come to obtain resonance at certain points in time, and what television representations of certain domestic dwellings can tell us about the cultures that produced those representations. Specifically, this section will focus on two contributions to this field. The first, Anna Hunt's (2008) exploration of unconventional or unusual domestic environments that emerged in popular factual television at the turn of the millennium: television's "domestic dystopias" as Hunt calls them. The second, Pamela Wojcik's (2010) work exploring how one type of domicile — the apartment — came to stand in for and to reflect experiences, attitudes and anxieties about the domestic in television fiction between 1945 and 1975. My project takes up some of the critical interpretive strategies that these authors — and this field of study more generally — developed and follows some of the investigative threads in which these authors were particularly interested.[1]

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[1] When I say "this field of study", I would also include, indicatively, the work of Spigel (1992), Haralovich (1992), and Thompson (2018).

My thesis examines the period of the mid-2000s to the late-2010s. Before this period, during the early-2000s to mid-2000s, as various television scholars and critics observed then and in the years following, a popular television trend developed in which domestic spaces and interiors were opened up to scrutiny and judgement.

Anna Hunt's essay on "domestic dystopias" offers a helpful analysis of this trend in popular television. Hunt identifies three programmes that are indicative of the growing concern of popular television in unease within homes and dystopic living arrangements. Those programmes are *Big Brother* (Channel 4, 2000-10; Channel 5, 2011-18), *Wife Swap* (Channel 4, 2003-09), and *How Clean Is Your House?* (Channel 4, 2003-09). In Hunt's argument these programmes offered audiences a viewing invitation to indulge in what she calls "shamelessly contentious and acrimonious" visions of domestic life (2008: 123). Through carefully selected and edited footage, such programmes foregrounded squabbles and heated disputes between domestic cohabitants and domestic disarray and untidiness. These programmes enacted an all-seeing scrutiny that exploded myths of family togetherness myths for the purposes of televisual entertainment. Hunt notes that these programmes expose an "underside of domestic discontent" (2008: 123). The discontent to which she refers corresponds with the tensions contained in postfeminist culture in which renewed attention and valorisation is directed towards women's upkeep of the home and domestic duties while similar valorisation is afforded to discourses of self-empowerment and promotion of a careerist work ethic.[2] Hunt argues that the domestic dystopic visions of popular factual television resonate with the discontent emerging from this contradiction in postfeminist culture. These visions, though, do not promote radical feminist routes forward from such a contradiction. The negative portrayals of the domestic work in

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[2] This renewed valorisation of domestic duties is sometimes called "new traditionalism" (Probyn, 1990). Gill's work on postfeminist media culture (2007) helps to further illuminate the tension to which Hunt responds.

favour of a middle-class squeaky clean "cult of domesticity" since they function as a caution against organising one's domestic life in a non-normative manner.[3]

It is of note that Hunt's "domestic dystopias" relies in its analysis very heavily on the figure of the discontented housewife. More specifically, Hunt makes repeated reference to Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play *A Doll's House* and the character of Nora who wishes to escape from a situation of confinement in a traditional marriage and the duties of the housewife. Hunt's domestic discontent is written about as reflecting the discontent of the housewife.[4] The way in which I deploy the notion of domestic discontent in the thesis is to think of it as a feeling that does not only belong to one subgroup but is more widely dispersed among a diverse set of populations in contemporary society. I think of domestic discontent as something more like a pervasive atmosphere or mood that might be expressed at different times and in different scenarios by subjects inhabiting a range of different social positions.[5] To take an example from Chapter 3, my analysis here thinks about the discontentedness of both an aspiring empty nester, someone who desires to live in a space from which their adult children are absent, and a boomerang child, an adult who lives with their parents. Characters in these potions both share a feeling of discontent. I am thinking of domestic discontent as belonging to various social groups.

Hunt's work on negative visions of the home is worth mentioning here because its object — discontented domestic arrangements — overlaps closely with my object of study, that is the commune on television. The *Big Brother* house, which is one of the settings described in Hunt's argument, is a space of communal living and so bears comparison with the communes that I

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[3] I borrow the notion of "squeaky cleanness" from Lauren Berlant who writes of this phrase as standing in for "independently wealthy conjugal hetereosexuality" (1997: 178). It is of note that Hunt's argument here intersects with other work in television scholarship published at a similar time that explores how domestic spaces are opened up to scrutiny through reality TV. Wood *et al.* (2008) argue, for instance, that reality TV programmes, like *Big Brother*, foreground different aspects of participants' conduct, for instance, how they manage their emotions, bodies, or household tasks, in a way that invites self-reflexive judgemental feelings in their audiences. Meanwhile Amy West (2011) offers a positive reading of the kinds of reality TV about which Hunt is concerned in which she positions dirt as a powerful aspect of the reality TV project which presents possibilities for cultural subversion.

[4] This analytical position is found in multiple essays in the collection to which Hunt's essay belongs, e.g. Genz (2008).

[5] Here I am drawing the notion of a mood that characterises a particular period from Ben Highmore (2017), as well as Sara Ahmed's (2014) useful discussion of this notion.

study in the chapters that follow in this thesis. Hunt calls the occupants of the *Big Brother* house a "pantomime troupe of strangers" and describes the living arrangement as involving a "restructuring of the traditional family unit beyond all recognition" (2008: 127).[6] The *Big Brother* house is a communal living environment in which the participants of the house are surveilled by closed-circuit cameras 24/7. As mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, we might think of the commune as a space in which people live together in a way that establishes a "domestic commons", meaning there are shared resources among the group that are intentionally cultivated according to a shared set of principles. In *Big Brother*, the participants must share the resources with which they are given and, while they do so on the principle that they are all competing with one another to win the popularity of the public, they must nevertheless collectively complete housework and maintain the upkeep of the house while also collectively complying with principles and rules given to them by the production team. Once the *Big Brother* house is characterised in this way, then the "domestic dystopia" of *Big Brother* can be seen as a precursor to the mid-2000s wave of interest in the commune as a space animated in popular television programmes.

Notably, neither Hunt nor other authors interested in the relationship between domesticity and popular culture took up the thread of asking whether other types of commune on television beyond *Big Brother* might be worthwhile objects of study. A key reason for this situation is that the cycle of television programmes that deploy the commune as a narrative device is one that has emerged as a phenomenon or trend of note in the 2010s, and it is only from the vantage point and distance of a researcher positioned at the end of the 2010s that this phenomenon takes shape as one that is worth remarking upon. My project might be thought of as taking this strategy of looking at domestic dwellings screened on television in relation to

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[6] Hunt's work thus belongs to considerable set of television studies work to which Jon Dovey (2008) has given the shorthand name "the *Big Brother* literature". For an indicative selection of this work see e.g. Scannell (2002); McQuire (2003); Kavka (2008).

domestic unease and applying it to an object that is before now unacknowledged in this scholarly field.

Hunt's work develops a critical strategy of making a connection between the living arrangements visible in screen media and attitudes around domesticity that circulate at a given time. This strategy is mirrored in another work published in a similar period to Hunt's essay, Pamela Wojcik's (2010) book *The Apartment Plot: Urban Living in American Film and Popular Culture, 1945 to 1975*. Wojcik examines the apartment — as in a privately rented apartment usually in a city — as a space imagined through film and television, looking at programmes that feature apartments as settings and narrative devices. Wojcik argues that the apartment, which appeared with remarkable frequency in films and television in the mid-1940s to the mid-1970s, was a crucial imaginary object for exploring alternatives to suburban domesticity and was also a key signifier of "singles discourse", that is discourse about the ethics and practical navigations of life as a single person set against a culture that valorised the nuclear family.

Wojcik's work on the apartment draws on historical television criticism — following the exemplary work of Lynn Spigel (1992) in this area — and explores a period of recent history, that is mid-twentieth century/post war America.[7] Wojcik's object of interest and focus means that the study entails looking at historical records, documents, narratives, testimonies and so on from the years that correspond with these past decades. Like in Wojcik's approach, I also assemble an archive of resources which I use to comment on sensibilities and moods about the domestic in a distinct period, only I draw on a much more recent archive, that of media artefacts that correspond with the decade of domestic discontent of the mid-2000s to the late-2010s.

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[7] Spigel had followed a meticulous historical approach to examine how television was presented as amenable to being incorporated into middle-class family life in 1940s and 50s America. As part of her argument, Spigel suggests that the content of mainstream programming in this era made interventions into the public imagination as to what "normal" middle-class living arrangements were to entail. Mary Beth Haralovich's (1992) work on the single-family home in sitcom, which follows a similar set of theoretical concerns to Spigel's, is also a scholarly work which belongs to this "domestic dwellings" criticism that explores the intersection of domesticity and popular television.

While Wojcik's work takes this historical focus, the basic premise of her argument has been taken up by Lauren Jade Thompson (2018) to explore apartments in contemporary television. Thompson explores internationally popular US sitcom *Friends* (1994-2004), and the apartments in which the main characters of the sitcom live. She argues — following Wojcik (2010) — for paying close attention to the apartment setting, including set design and mise-en-scène, in interpreting the narratives of the sitcom. More specifically, Thompson suggests that *Friends* presents narratives about gendered contestations over space, which are often told through subtle textual details of the apartments that reward close viewing. The "apartment plots" of the sitcom, Thompson shows, can be read through anxieties about domestic space in the mid-1990s to mid-2000s, those revolving around heterosexual coupling, homebuilding, and domestic labour. As such, *Friends* operates as a cultural forum through which these anxieties are worked out. Thompson's work speaks to the value of bringing the analytical perspective proposed by Wojcik to more contemporary television.

Further, one very valuable aspect of Wojcik's approach is to think about the significance of the apartment in film and television narratives in terms of what she calls the "tenants" that are imaginatively bound up with the apartment. These tenants to which she refers are in effect social types that are imagined as being people who due to the circumstances of their social position are more likely to reside in apartments. Her "tenants" under examination are the bachelor, the single girl, the married couple, and the African American tenant. As I have suggested above, I am thinking of domestic discontent in an expanded sense that captures a variety of social potions, standpoints and perspectives and does not only belong to one social type. This kind of approach is contained in Wojcik's thinking about multiple "tenants" which allows Wojcik to make the argument that the apartment is a signifier with a multifarious set of meanings and which corresponds with a range of anxieties and feelings of uneasiness about navigating domestic life. Wojcik shows how the various "apartment plots" she explores set up scenarios and scenes in which various kinds of domestic discontent play out in a dramatic form.

Crucially, this set of work offers an interpretive strategy when reading television texts that I take up in my analysis in the chapters that follow: that is to approach the commune in television stories not as something which should escape critical attention but as a signifier that corresponds with discontent about matters of the domestic. Like this set of work, I interpret the representational choices in stories featuring a certain type of living arrangement to be centrally bound up with feelings of domestic discontentedness that permeate the wider culture to which those stories belong.

Domestic discontent in contemporary times

The case study television programmes that I have selected to study belong to a particular time frame that I call a "decade of domestic discontent". This is a "long decade" in the same respect as, for instance, the "long sixties" can be considered a long decade: it is not a discrete ten year period but rather a longer set of years that share a sense of belonging to a distinctive period.[8] The years spanning the mid-2000s and the late-2010s I group together as sharing an atmosphere and mood of discontent in the UK context.

Each of the subsequent four chapters of the thesis explore a different theme or issue that relates to a distinct kind of discontent that is contemporaneous with the long decade that I examine. The first theme relates to feelings of climate anxiety and alarm that manifest in experimentation with forms of living together such as ecovillages. Another is a discontent bound up with the tensions of an intergenerational household living with one another, a situation that is related to the economic instability of young people in their 20s and 30s and the phenomenon of "suspended adulthood". A third theme is a discontent with perpetrators of institutional abuse, men who leverage their institutional power to gain influence over vulnerable people. A fourth

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[8] For explorations of this notion of the "long sixties" see for instance Marwick (2005); Hoefferle (2013).

theme is a frustration and exasperation more generally with the poor behaviour of men and the toxicity of masculine cultures.[9]

These themes and issues I consider through the notion of "domestic discontent" are "domestic" in a very specific sense. They are "domestic" in that they concern homes, houses, and households: how we arrange our living spaces, who we admit into our intimate lives, who has access to what kinds of dwellings. These issues are not domestic in the respect that they are experienced as issues unique to one's own place of residence. By "domestic", I do not mean that the issues I have mentioned concern solely family affairs or private matters. These issues are matters of public controversy and concern. They are highly publicised and worried over in public forums.

I use an expanded meaning of "domestic" when compared with the "domestic discontent" written about in the 2000s by Anna Hunt. Hunt's "domestic discontent" is a feeling embodied by the figure of the housewife, a feeling of disquiet, exasperation, and anger about the conditions of bearing an unequal burden of labour in one's household. I argue that it is necessary to think with an expanded meaning of "domestic" to make sense of events and prominent debates in the mid-2000s to late-2010s. As I explain below, this period is one in which there is widespread concern with a housing crisis and the inadequate domestic arrangements into which some people are forced by economic circumstances. There have also been major controversies in this period about sex crimes and misogynistic behaviour. I consider these controversies through the notion of "domestic" because the atmosphere of anger around them has influenced people's

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[9] Of these four themes, the third has perhaps a more tenuous relationship to the notion of "domestic" so it is worth clarifying what I mean by drawing a connection between institutional abuse and "domestic discontent". From one perspective, by calling this kind of abuse "institutional" that appears to separate it out from being considered "domestic". It might not occur in a family home for instance, and instead take place in an "institutional" space like a hospital, care home, or media organisation. But importantly considerations of such abuse are often also tied to trauma — the institutional abuse can be thought of as a traumatic incident — and the survivors of institutional abuse may have to negotiate difficulties in their intimate relationships on account of navigating a posttraumatic state. Leys (2000), Kaplan (2005), Hoffman (2010), and Luckhurst (2008) all offer accounts of trauma and posttraumatic states that inform my understanding here. In a sense institutional abuse is a "domestic" issue in the way that I have been using this term since it is bound up with questions about how intimate relationships are to be navigated through one's life.

attitudes towards intimate relationships. Even though the #metoo movement, for instance, involved a proliferation of conversations about workplace behaviour, I think of #metoo as likewise troubling people's conceptions of their sexuality, how they form relationships, and their choices about domestic arrangements. My use of "domestic discontent" is intended to acknowledge the varied ways in which issues concerning domestic arrangements have surfaced in the popular imagination as matters about which people feel discontented and angry. Using this expanded sense of "domestic discontent" helps me to reveal continuities and patterns to how communes are imagined across television genres and storylines. By applying my notion of "domestic discontent" when engaging in television analysis, I can understand storylines that at first glance seem somewhat removed from one another, but which turn out to share forms of discontent that the lens of "domestic discontent" enables me to detect.

One way in which the themes and concerns that I explore in the thesis can be thought together is that they each in a distinct way express a discontent with what Lauren Berlant (2011) has called the "fraying" of good life fantasies which has occurred throughout the course of the second half of the twentieth century, and especially from the 1990s through to the 2010s. Berlant observes that because of the shifts in economic, political and social spheres over this period, the living conditions of multiple and diverse populations has shifted in such a way that the possibility for many of building a life in a way that corresponds with traditional good life fantasies has eroded. These fantasies include what she calls "hetereofamilial upwardly mobile good life fantas[ies]" (2011: 11), that is fantasies that describe the ambition of living as part of a reciprocal, stable hetereosexual couple that might one day have children and being afforded better life opportunities and circumstances than those that one's parents experienced while knowing that one's children will experience a similar upward social mobility. Because of the conditions of the contemporary moment, this fantasy is, as Berlant articulates this point, becoming "more fantasmatic, with less and less relation to how people can live" (2011: 11). Those conditions include the retraction of the social democratic promise by successive states, meaning welfare

state retrenchment and the scaling back of public spending. Such a retraction has corresponded with decades of class bifurcation and downward mobility.[10]

Berlant poses a question about fraying good life fantasies which relates to the notion of domestic discontent with which I work in the thesis. She asks: "what happens when these fantasies start to fray — depression, dissociation, pragmatism, cynicism, optimism, activism, or an incoherent mash?" (2011: 2). Domestic discontent might be thought of as one of the components to people's response to such fraying fantasies alongside the incoherent, depressive, and pragmatic mash of responses that Berlant describes.

It is worth sketching out at this stage some of the themes that I have briefly introduced above. I now move to consider how domestic discontent manifests and is expressed by various social groups. Perceptions of climate change have led to feelings of alarm and emergency among some groups in this period and a splintering of trust in the future as climate catastrophes loom on the horizon of possibility for young people who are alive today.[11] Some environmentalist groups have in response formed communities intended to be environmentally sustainable (Pickerill, 2016; Cattaneo, 2015). This phenomenon is evident for instance in the ecovillage movement, a movement that advocates for living in villages designed specifically with an environmentalist consciousness and a desire to live in a community-minded manner (Litfin, 2009). These groups evidence an impulse to retreat from contemporary lifestyles that are based on mass production of goods and unsustainable levels of economic growth and to explore a commune-like form of domestic arrangement.

Particularly following the global financial crisis of 2008, meanwhile, concerns have grown about intergenerational injustices, especially with regard to housing (Hoolachan and Mckee, 2019; Pickard, 2019).[12] Danny Dorling (2014) has identified the phenomenon of "generation

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[10] For a more recent account of this retraction that complements Berlant's, see Jensen et al. (2020).
[11] On climate anxiety see Weintrobe (2012) see also Urry (2011) for discussion of this situation.
[12] Such concerns emerged alongside a recessionary period following 2008 which affected various sections of the UK population from, as Watt and Minton suggest, 'over-indebted mortgage slaves' to those living in temporary accommodation, to the street homeless (Watt & Minton, 2016).

rent" which describes an age cohort in which a majority are priced out of being able to afford their own home and therefore remain in rented accommodation for an indefinite period with low prospects for moving into a living space that they own. Research organisation The Young Women's Trust named this scenario "suspended adulthood" (Easton, 2016), a variation on psychologist Jeffrey Arnett's (2000) more optimistic notion of "emerging adulthood", which describes a life stage between adolescence and adulthood. In calling this phenomenon "suspended adulthood", The Young Women's Trust respond to the feeling of "stuckness" in which not only do transitions to the key milestones of adulthood seem to take longer for people of this age cohort than for previous generations but that these transitions feel as though they have been suspended altogether.[13] Discontent circulates simultaneously among older generations expressed through a public discourse that produces individualising explanations of this "suspended adulthood" phenomenon in which the personal characteristics of young people are foregrounded as the reasons for their stalled transitions rather than structural economic conditions.[14]

A series of high-profile sexual abuse scandals have also marked this decade of domestic discontent which has brought the high-profile abuser to the fore as an important lightning rod for anger of this period (Greer & McLaughlin, 2015; Boyle, 2019; Wooten, 2019; Franssen, 2020). Such scandals include revelations concerning Jimmy Saville in 2012 and Harvey Weinstein in 2017.[15] In Jessie Kindig's (2018) summary of this issue she emphasises that public expressions of shock around sexual harassment and assault circulated in feminist circles especially since the 1970s and 80s but have been brought to mainstream attention in the 2010s predominantly by white women with access to power, a class of person who were usually less publicly supportive

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[13] See also Davis and Cartwright's (2019) notion of young people living "deferred lives".

[14] This discourse belongs to a wider symbolic struggle in contemporary media culture over how each age cohort should be characterised and perceived, a "millennial" versus "boomer" symbolic struggle or contestation (Pickard, 2019; Bristow, 2020).

[15] These scandals involving celebrities have been reported alongside successive cases involving powerful institutional agents, such as those with positions in care homes, schools and hospitals, about which I say more in chapter 4.

of movements against male violence in earlier decades. Circulating as part of these abuse discourses is an enlivened anger and rage that is expressed prominently through social media. The #metoo campaign, which gained significant public attention in 2017, led to a popular phenomenon by which people with social media accounts, many of whom high-profile celebrities, would publicise personal experiences with sexual abuse and harassment, typically expressing a sentiment of solidarity with survivors of abuse (Boyle, 2019; Rodríguez, 2019). Public expressions of shock have also featured in factual investigations, reports, and documentaries that speak of the experiences of survivors, making survivorship a matter of important public concern of the period.[16]

Relatedly discontent, frustration and anger has emerged in this period around concerns about the incompetence and harmful behaviours of men in general linked to a public discourse about "toxic masculinities" (de Boise, 2019; Ging, 2019; Waling, 2019).[17] Gender studies scholar Indiana Seresin (2019) observes that bound up with these circulating discourses about the poor behaviour of men is the spread of what she calls "heteropessimism", a stance by which people performatively distance themselves from heterosexual desires and express a fatalistic attitude towards the possibility of having a flourishing and healthy reciprocal relationship with a man. Like anger at perpetrators of institutional abuse or high-profile predators, the more general concept of "toxic" men has surfaced as an object of discontentedness.[18]

These forms of discontent inform my analysis in the subsequent case study chapters of the thesis, which pay close attention to this cultural context of the decade of domestic discontent. In thinking through the commune as animated on television of this period, I think

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[16] On public imaginings of the survivor and survivorship see Orgad (2009). On the related notion of "wound culture" see Seltzer (1998); cf. Ahmed (2004).

[17] Such frustration is sometimes described as being directed towards "cis-het men", meaning men whose gender identity matches with the gender they were assigned at birth and who are heterosexual. This way of describing the phenomenon is present, for instance, in Seresin's (2019) essay on "heteropessimism".

[18] Seresin supports this point especially with an emphasis on the "men are trash" social media discourses in which users of social media platforms post information about behaviour by men that is abusive or shows male entitlement. Meanwhile, in Lauren Berlant's (2017) essay "The Predator and the Jokester", Berlant argues that these scandals amplify a public feeling of erotophobia, i.e. strong disinclination or fear towards sex.

about how the commune's use as a narrative device and setting functions in television stories as a means to explore these fraught domestic matters.

My use of "discontent" here does similar work to the notion of "anxieties" when used by some television scholars (Wheatley, 2006; Boyce Kay & Wood, 2017). When I claim that television stories about communes explore fraught domestic matters of the period, this claim bears close resemblance to Helen Wheatley's (2006) argument that the programmes she examines "worry at" cultural anxieties that circulated at the time the programmes were produced. In Wheatley's argument, programmes do not necessarily resolve prevalent cultural anxieties for their audience, the programmes are not necessarily cathartic in this sense, but the anxieties of the period are present in the programmes and taking those anxieties into account is crucial to understanding the stylistic and narrative choices in the programmes. I make a similar case in this thesis: contemporary television stories about communes navigate, explore, and, using Wheatley's terminology, "worry at" preoccupations of the period: things that cause concern and worry in a specific socio-historical moment.

While "discontent" in my analysis functions in a similar way to Wheatley's "cultural anxieties", I suggest that the notion of "discontent" does a better job of describing the atmosphere of the mid-2000s to late-2010s. In making this suggestion, I draw on Sianne Ngai's (2005) reading of anxiety as a minor affective state, one that is distinct from the classical political passions and one that is characterised by a state of obstructed agency. Anxiety, along with other "ugly feelings" like irritation, paranoia, and envy, is associated with passivity. Unlike anger, anxiety is not an affective state that is normally thought of as moving one to action or retaliation. I take discontent to be closer to anger in this respect: a feeling closer to the politically efficacious emotions, those that move people to take a stance or action.

This quality of discontent is what makes it a more relevant feeling than anxiety in relation to the phenomena in which I am interested. As I have mentioned, events in the mid-2000s to late-2010s have included highly publicised expressions of contempt circulating in various media;

for instance, contempt concerning high profile abusers or generational cohorts blamed for a housing crisis. Even more crucially, the period has seen people act on their concerns: such as environmentalists joining eco-villages or people affected by the #metoo movement making changes in their workplace or home. The resonances of anxiety with obstructed agency I think makes "anxiety" seem less appropriate than "discontent" for making sense of the atmosphere of this period. In sum, my choice to discuss "discontent" rather than "anxiety" is taken in the spirit of being as precise as possible when thinking about the public mood of the mid-2000s to late-2010s.

Discontented figures and figures of discontent

I deploy the notion of "the figure" as a key part of the conceptual toolkit of the thesis. Here I introduce this notion and the set of figures that I trace in the thesis, as well as introducing a distinction between "discontented figures" and "figures of discontent" that has a bearing over my overall argument in the thesis.

By "the figure", I refer to a metaphorical entity that, as Donna Haraway (1997) observes, is akin to a "condensed map", meaning figures draw one into, or evoke, a given territory or domain of life. Three of Haraway's examples can help illustrate this understanding of "figure": "the fetus", "the bomb", and "the gene". These figures all connote a physical object or being. Importantly, they call to mind not only the physical properties of the respective object or being but an array of practices, stories, and events that have been associated with that object or being over time. As Haraway puts it these figures are "dense nodes that explode into entire worlds of practice" (1997: 11). Each of these figures hold a range of powerful associations that move one beyond thinking in a literal-minded way about a fetus, bomb, or gene.

I work with Sara Ahmed's (2004) notion that figures leave an impression. By "impression", Ahmed means an affective mark or trace that is left by an encounter with a figure.

An important consideration in my analysis is that figures are typically deployed in texts while being already affectively charged, meaning they carry an affective "stickiness" to use another expression of Ahmed's (2004). Ahmed's notion of stickiness refers to the phenomenon by which objects or figures can collect or become saturated in emotions so that when one encounters that object or figure one already has an impression of it, an impression that reflects the ways in which others have felt towards the object or figure in the past. Ahmed gives the example of the bear. When a person encounters a bear, that person already has an impression of how the encounter will play out. The bear can be apprehended as fearsome as a result of past histories of contact between the bear and the social body to which the person belongs. In the precise moment of encounter with the bear that person might not know those histories, the histories are in a sense concealed, but nevertheless the bear makes an impression and carries with it the emotional charge of being fearsome.

Figures can refer to non-human entities, like the commune for instance. Figures can also refer to human social types, generalised categories of persons. This second understanding of figures is adopted in Imogen Tyler's figurative methodology in which she explores figures as highly condensed forms that correspond with certain classes or types of person: a conception that especially informs my approach. "The chav", for instance, is a figure that Tyler identifies as standing in for, and operating as a means to stigmatise and ridicule, the white poor. In Tyler's explanation, figures acquire "accreted form" through their repetition in different media, that is to say the distinctive set of attributes that each figure is imagined to carry develops over time after the figure has been repeated on multiple occasions (2008: 19). Further, the repetition of figures across different media is, for Tyler, propelled by emotive responses to figures. The figures that Tyler writes about in *Revolting Subjects* (2013), including "the chav", "the bogus asylum seeker", and "the traveller", are propelled into various media by disgust reactions. What people come to know of these figures is shaped by disgust reactions, which constitute a common sense mode of relating to these social types. Like Tyler in *Revolting Subjects*, I foreground the affective charge that

figures carry, the impression they leave, as a key focus of my figurative analysis: although, while Tyler builds her argument around disgust, my argument is built around the notion of discontent, and particularly the contemporary kinds of discontent introduced above.

My intention is to explore the figure of the commune — a non-human figure — by tracking the human figures that are imaginatively bound up with the commune in the case study programmes I examine. In each case study, I identify one or more human figure that is brought to life in the narrative of the programme. Brought together as a set, those figures are: "the low impact pioneer", "the boomerang child", "the selfish feminist", "the cult leader", "the acid casualty", and "the raving brute". A crucial part of my reasoning behind taking this approach is that "the commune" is an abstract notion that describes a set of relations between people. This quality of the commune means that when the commune is featured in the visual medium of television it appears through television characters: the way in which television audiences encounter the commune is through the human characters with which it is associated and their human stories. The commune is occasionally invisible in the stories, functioning as an "off-stage" presence, and therefore is evoked entirely through the characters. In examining how the commune is imagined in television, I look at the characters that are deployed in narratives about the commune and explore how they resemble the set of human figures that I have introduced.

The set of figures that I explore share a relationship to domestic discontent. Specifically, the figures are either "discontented figures", "figures of discontent", or both kinds of figures simultaneously. What I mean by a "discontented figure" is a figure that represents some social group or type of person of which one of their most prominent characteristics is that they feel discontented about something. For instance, the figure of the low impact pioneer, which in Chapter 2 is embodied by environmental activists and ecovillage residents, describes someone who is discontent about the way in which most people's lives are organised with regard to environmental sustainability and dissatisfied with the response of society at large to climate change. The low impact pioneer is in this respect symbolic of an environmentalist kind of

domestic discontent. What I mean by a "figure of discontent" is a figure that is itself an object of discontent, about which people feel discontented. For instance, the figure of the cult leader, because it is commonly imagined as describing someone who is a predatory person who may be a perpetrator of sexual abuse, is a figure of discontent in the respect that the figure mobilises a discontent, outrage or anger about abusive predatory behaviour. Most of the figures that I explore in the thesis are both "discontented figures" and "figure of discontent" simultaneously.[19] To stay with the cult leader example, the cult leader is a figure of discontent in the manner that I have described *and* the figure symbolises a discontentedness with conventional society that manifests in a desire to form one's own community in rejection of that society.

In order to name the figures in this way, I make some assumptions about discontent as an emotion that are worth commenting on here. One major assumption here is that discontent can in some varieties be object-oriented or what some scholars of emotion/affect call "intentional", meaning that discontent can in some varieties be *about* something, in which case the discontent is directed towards an object.[20] Another assumption alongside this one is that discontent can in some varieties be about something distinct, that it can have clearly defined objects, so that when one feels discontent one knows what it is with which one is discontented. This status of discontent as having clearly defined objects may not hold in all cases. It seems plausible that there can be a scenario in which one feels discontent without really knowing what one is discontented about. Further, as Annette Baier (1990) observes, discontent can be a meta-emotion, meaning that it can be an emotion about the emotions that one is feeling or has been feeling for some stretch of time. One can feel discontent about feeling miserable, dissatisfied and frustrated over a period of one's life. Nevertheless, while accepting that these kinds of discontent

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[19] Imogen Tyler's *Revolting Subjects* (2013) is a helpful comparison point here. By "revolting subjects", Tyler means figures that are both revolting as in something that elicits revulsion and revolting as in something that revolts or engages in an act of dissent. My selected figures can be thought of as similarly containing a twin set of meanings and associations, although, as mentioned above, I emphasise discontent rather than disgust.

[20] See both Ngai (2005) and Ahmed (2004) for discussion of this notion of "intentional" regarding affect and emotion.

may exist, my assumption here when thinking with "discontented figures" and "figures of discontent" is that the kind of discontent to which I primarily refer is a discontent with clearly defined objects that are not necessarily other emotions. This assumption allows me to position some of the figures that I examine as figures about which people can feel discontented.

In the case study chapters that follow, my observations about the human figures through which communes are brought to life are a crucial part of my response to the first of my research questions: "how is the commune imagined in television of the most recent decade?". The relationship between this set of human figures and the figure of the commune also helps me to respond to the second of my research questions: "why does the commune have imaginary vitality at this juncture?". A key claim I make is that the commune has imaginary vitality because the figures through which the commune is imagined all correspond with current issues of domestic discontent.

I emphasise the distinction between "discontented figures" and "figures of discontent" because this distinction allows me to explore the complicated nature of how the commune is imagined and the multifarious meanings that the commune carries in the television stories under investigation. It is not so straightforward to say that the commune has imaginary vitality simply because it symbolises various discontented subjects. Television imaginings of the commune explore scenarios involving multiple kinds of discontent and emphasise the discontent of those who choose to inhabit this arrangement. Yet they also invite their audiences to take up a position of discontent towards communes. Articulating a distinction between "discontented figures" and "figures of discontent" allows me to make sense of the fact that stories about communes typically both convey the discontent of their characters and invite us to adopt a position of discontent towards them.

Figurative television criticism

In each of the subsequent four chapters of the thesis, I take one programme in which the commune features in the narrative and explore how the commune is imagined in that case. Crucially, the focus of the analysis is on how characters of these narratives resemble and carry the associations of the figures that I have introduced above. The method that I follow in approaching these case study television programmes is one that I call "figurative television criticism". The intended effect of naming my approach in this way is to distinguish the kind of television criticism in which I engage from the type of criticism that is concerned with categorising programmes on a scale of good to bad.[21] I avoid what Karen Lury has called the "championing of good-ness as a primary ambition of television criticism" (2007: 371). Whether or not the case study programmes that I investigate are good to watch or not is not especially relevant to the kinds of arguments that I make. By placing "figurative" in front of "television criticism" what I intend to signal is — as I introduced in the previous section — the importance of "the figure" as a conceptual tool in my analysis.

I examine four case study texts in the thesis. I selected programmes that bring to life the figure of the commune, meaning that a commune is prominently visible on screen or its presence in the lives of characters affects how events unfold in the narrative. In each case, the main characters — if they are not commune dwellers themselves — at least encounter the commune in some way. The case study programmes range from those in which a commune features heavily in the programme, like *Eden* which is centred around a reality TV commune, to one example in which a commune is not directly visible on screen but nevertheless shapes the narrative: *Jam and Jerusalem*.

The way in which I selected case studies and conducted the analysis was not led by an interest in the series form. Of the four texts I selected, two are television series, one is a single

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[21] For discussions of evaluative television criticism see, for example, Geraghty (2003) and Corner (2007).

episode of a series, another is a conjoined pair of episodes from a series. I was not always concerned with selecting television series and analysing them as "series". For instance, Chapter 2 explores a single episode of the popular homebuilding programme *Grand Designs*. My analysis takes into account the *Grand Designs* format, audience expectations about the tone of the programme, the style of its presenter Kevin McCloud, but I do not read the episode I investigate in terms of its relationship with the other episodes in the series. What interests me about this episode is the way in which it tells a story about one kind of a commune: an ecovillage. No other episode in the series explores communal living arrangements, so reading other episodes alongside the case study would not add to my analysis. In selecting case studies, I looked for instances in which communes were featured in television narratives, though not necessarily narratives that stretched across multiple episodes.

I chose to select programmes that are each from distinct genres. I did so because, as I mentioned in the introduction to the thesis, the pattern of communes appearing in popular television narratives in the mid-2000s to late-2010s is a cross-genre phenomenon. The programmes that I settled on as case studies are from lifestyle/homebuilding TV, sitcom, crime drama, and group challenge reality TV.

It is of note that the case study texts all belong to British television. This choice reflects my location and immediate context as a researcher. It is the context with which I am most familiar since Britain is where I live and conduct research. My question about how the commune is imagined is one about how it is imagined in a British context, which leads me, in the course of my analysis, to make reference to peculiarly British histories, locales, public figures, production contexts, newspaper articles, among other things, when interpreting the case study programmes that I examine.

When deciding between similar programmes that both seemed strong candidates to be case study texts, I considered the extent to which the programmes afforded narrative space to storylines concerning a commune. I preferred programmes in which there was more screen time

afforded to commune-dwelling characters and therefore more material to work with in my analysis. For instance, one of the texts I decided against using as the sitcom case study was an episode of the teen drama *Skins* in which the mother of one of the teenage characters temporarily turns the family's suburban home into a commune. This *Skins* episode was similar to *Jam and Jerusalem* as they both approached the commune through a comedic lens. I chose *Jam and Jerusalem* as a case study because there were three series of the sitcom, each of which featured the aspiring commune dweller Tash, whereas the *Skins* episode only features this commune storyline in a single episode and the commune-advocating mother does not feature in the drama beyond this episode.

Once I had selected case study programmes, I engaged in a process of close reading of those selected examples. I re-watched the programmes and took note of various details about them, their narrative structures, the extent to which they adhered to genre conventions and what conventions those were, the perspectives to which the programmes are aligned. My attention was filtered through the first of my research questions: "how is the commune imagined on popular television of the recent decade?". My focus repeatedly returned to moments in which communes are discussed by characters or in which communal activities are made visible. Equally, I noted the gaps and silences of the narrative: moments in which the commune is absent and details that are downplayed or excluded. Moreover, a key consideration was the characters who are associated with the commune in the story. I looked at the role the characters played in the narrative, the disposition of the writing and editing towards the characters, their mode of speech and dress.

Importantly, I thought about how the characters in the stories resembled figures that existed elsewhere in media culture. It is worth noting that I did not begin the analysis with a predetermined set of figures that I had decided to analyse. The process of identifying and naming the figures that appeared in the stories was a multiple stage process involving noting details about the characters, reading literature about twentieth and twenty-first century communes, reading literature more generally about contemporary media culture, and going back to the

programmes to reassess whether my notions of the figures that seemed relevant to each programme withstood additional viewings of the programmes. Often, figures that I had initially thought would be productive to discuss in each chapter turned out to be inadequate for the analysis after reflecting on them and writing about them in detail. For instance, in chapter 3, I had initially thought of the comic character Tash as resembling a "hippy parent", a stock character sometimes found in film and television comedy. The more I thought about the cultural context of the time, and the predicament of the main characters of the sitcom, I realised that examining Tash as a "boomerang child" was a better summation of her role in the narrative and the resonances of her character in contemporary times. Further, as I considered Tash's characterisation as an inept parent, and read literature around representations of feminism, I found that the figure of the "selfish feminist" was also useful for critically assessing Tash's characterisation.

When naming the figures, in most instances I used names in common use in British media, like "the cult leader", "the boomerang child", and "the acid casualty". I felt less sure about an appropriate name to give the figure that I found to be animated in *Eden: Paradise Lost*. I observed that the series encouraged its audience to see some of the male participants in the show as loathsome men who might be said to embody some of the worst aspects of "toxic masculinity". I wanted to write about the contemptible male figure that these men were made to resemble but recognised that it may be known by several different names. My approach to naming the figure was to borrow an expression from Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto* (2013). Solanas writes of the "old-fashioned ranting, raving brute", which I shortened to "the raving brute". While the name "the raving brute" may not be anyway near as familiar in media culture as, for instance, "the cult leader", it nevertheless successfully serves the purpose of illustrating the figure that I describe.

A key element of my thinking with "figures" was tracking twentieth century histories of certain figures and how the figures are recontextualised so that they resonate in the present. For

instance, as I explore in Chapters 2 and 4, the figures of the low impact pioneer, the cult leader and the acid casualty are all imaginatively tied to the sixties counterculture. I consider how these figures are constructed so that they are made legible in the present moment. In other words, I explore how the way in which these figures are presented means that they can be read as encompassing familiar characteristics that fit with cultures and trends that are particularly noteworthy in the present.

It was also important for me to consider the role of genre in how the figures come to be animated in the narratives. One of the key considerations of my method is that when figures get deployed within generic television formats the characteristics and attributes of the figure that become emphasised are those that fit generic conventions and the kinds of stories told within certain genres.[22] One of the ways in which this element of my approach operates is that I look at how figures, when deployed in certain generic formats, are altered in terms of the resonances that they carry. The figures are in some cases transformed into stereotypical types that are associated with certain kinds of stories. For instance, the cult leader and the acid casually become the types of villainous perpetrator of abuse and victim/survivor in crime drama. Or, in another example, the boomerang child becomes the comic foil in a comedy pair in sitcom. I was especially attentive to the contextual assumptions relating to genres that lie outside of the "text" of the television programmes. A key part of that contextual information is what Sonia Livingstone (1994) calls an implicit "contract" between text and reader, the contents of which are shaped by generic conventions and expectations. Further, part of what I take note of is the tone associated with certain programmes and their generic formats. By "tone" I mean the programme's disposition towards its audience or in Sianne Ngai's (2005) explanation the perceived but unfelt feeling of a work. A recurring detail of my analysis is noticing how figures

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[22] In some respects my project borrows from Claudia Castañeda's thinking about figures and multiplicity. Castañeda's work on the child makes an important point that "only by addressing this multiplicity [of the figure of the child] can its cultural force be adequately addressed" (2002: 5), that is to say an important part of figurative criticism involves tracking how a figure is deployed in a variety of sites and locations.

are deployed in programmes in such a way that they maintain the usual tone of a programme, one that typically corresponds with generic conventions.

There are other factors, too, that have a bearing over the way in which figures come to be deployed in television narratives towards which I was attentive in my analysis. One is the production contexts in which the programmes are produced, particular industry constraints and logics at the time in which certain texts are created.[23] This consideration is particularly important to Chapter 5 in which I explore the way in which production company Keo Films deploy the figure of the raving brute in *Eden: Paradise Lost* in the context of escalating controversies about reality TV production. Another factor is the authorship of programmes.[24] This concern informs my analysis in Chapter 3 in which I explore how the social position and career trajectory of lead writer of *Jam and Jerusalem*, Jennifer Saunders, has a significant bearing over the way in which the figures of the boomerang child and the selfish feminist feature in the story told in the sitcom.

Much of the evidence I used in researching the figures through which the commune is imagined were from cultural spheres beyond television: like films, newspaper articles, and fan-created content. My approach necessarily involved "looking past the screen" as Lewis and Smoodin (2007) recommend in their book on film history. In some instances, "looking past the screen" involved comparisons with another screen, that of cinema, something in which I engaged in Chapter 5 in which links are drawn between the figure of "the raving brute" and horror film. On other occasions, I traced the reception of programmes or the wider public perception of its presenter and participants. This concern led me to engage with documents like journalist commentary, magazine articles, or fan-created media like an online fundraising page. Such considerations allowed me to develop an account of the attributes and characteristics of figures that does not only rely on observing their manifestation as television characters.

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[23] See John Corner's helpful discussion of bringing this kind of consideration into television criticism in chapter seven of his book *Critical Ideas in Television Studies* (1999).

[24] For a helpful discussion of authorship in popular television criticism see Faye Woods (2015), whose essay particularly foregrounds female comic authorship.

It is of note that the "figurative television criticism" I describe here combines two approaches. One is the exploration of multiple case study television programmes in depth, conducting a close reading of scenes from the programmes and reading the programmes in light of various contexts. The second is a figurative analysis whereby the contemporary significance of a figure is investigated, attending to the histories with which the figure is associated and the imaginative charge the figure carries in the present. I therefore bring together one methodological element that is very common to television studies, a case study method, with another methodological element that is not at all common to this scholarly field, a figurative analysis.

An important upshot of combining the exploration of case study programmes with a figurative analysis is that there are important limitations to my analysis of the figures that feature in the various programmes that I examine. In each case study chapter, it is necessary for me to discuss relevant details like where the programmes sits in relation to genre, television industry developments, the wider cultural context, the programme's reception in news and comment media, as well as details of the narrative, its adherence to generic conventions, its deployment of particular character types, and so on. The process of writing the narrative of each case means there is a limited amount of depth in which I can discuss each of the figures that are animated. I give a summative sketch of each human figure — some important points of consideration — rather than an extended genealogy of the figure's place in contemporary media culture or television specifically. This point bears mentioning because one of the ways in which a figurative method is often deployed involves tracking a single figure across multiple discursive locations and domains of culture.[25] The way in which my argument is shaped, meanwhile, means that while I make reference to some histories of the human figures through which the commune is imagined, the extent to which I can write about their individual genealogies and representational

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[25] This is true especially of Claudia Casteñada's (2002) work on the child and Sara Ahmed's (2000) work on the stranger, for instance.

histories is constrained by the location of these discussions in a chapter looking at a case study television programme and genre.

Finally, to close this chapter I will consider the notion of "animation" that I have been deploying through the course of my discussion so far. In exploring the claim that television characters resemble and bring to life figures I have been using the term "animation" when observing that a particular figure is "animated" in, say, a certain episode of a television programme. One of the meanings of this term that Sianne Ngai sketches is one that I follow: animation as in the "process of activating or giving life to inert matter" (2005: 92). The reason this term is appropriate in discussing the animation of figures through television characters is because of the liveliness that television characters seem to contain. As Ngai points out regarding the animation of stereotypes in television characters, television as a medium is bound up with a sensation of liveness and immediacy which translates to our experience of characters when watching television.[26] This point is helpfully articulated by novelist and pop culture scholar David Foster Wallace when he notes that television characters "are often the most colourful, attractive, animated, *alive* people in our daily experience" (1993: 155; italics Wallace's). When I use the term animated to describe figures it is intended to capture these enlivened qualities to characters that are specific to the visual arts.

At the same time, while the animation of figures is part of my object of analysis it is also something that I perform in the writing of this kind of criticism. By writing about these figures, I am in a sense reanimating them, albeit not in the same enlivened, immediate mode as television. I take the position of Ngai (2005) that reanimating stereotypical characters is a positive and worthwhile critical strategy when they are reanimated in order to be critiqued and to describe the work they are doing. This stance towards figurative criticism is expressed by Leila Dawney as containing an intention to "unravel the processes of figuration that tell particular stories and tell

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[26] Ngai draws on Jane Feuer's (1983) arguments about the immediacy of television and the simultaneity between event and transmission that is made possible by the medium.

other stories in the process" (2018: 113). This way of articulating a figurative approach is helpful for making sense of the kind of television criticism in which I engage. My intention when writing about the figure of the commune and its adjacent family of human figures is precisely to both unravel the ways in which the commune is imagined and to tell a new kind of story about the commune in the process. The story that I tell is about how the commune, when featured in contemporary television, has an important relationship to the domestic discontent that circulates in contemporary life.

Having introduced the theoretical and methodological framework that informs my research, I now turn to examine the first of the four case study programmes of the thesis. I begin my exploration of how communes are imagined in contemporary television with one of the most quotidian programmes in the British broadcasting schedule, the long-running home construction programme *Grand Designs*. I explore a *Grand Designs* episode titled "Low Impact House" which features an ecovillage in Wales called "Lammas". The fact that *Grand Designs* is such a familiar component of broadcasting schedules generates a curious question regarding the show's narration of an ecovillage: how does *Grand Designs*, a programme known for its comforting familiarity and reassuring tone, address a living arrangement that is inhabited by people who are discontented with the status quo and appalled by society's response to climate change, people whose radical vision may be perceived as discomforting? This question informs part of the enquiry that follows into *Grand Designs*' comfort-TV-friendly imagining of the commune.

Chapter Two: Familiarising the ecovillage in *Grand Designs*

Driving through the Welsh countryside in a pristine black BMW, Kevin McCloud, host of *Grand Designs*, arrives at a construction site unlike most others seen on the popular homebuilding programme. The site is a plot of land that is part of Lammas ecovillage: a project that features multiple people living as part of a collective that practices ethical food production and the construction of low impact dwellings (Pickerill, 2016). Shots of McCloud passing from motorways through to single-track country lanes mark him out as an interloper travelling into unknown territory. McCloud arrives as the expert host whose role is to interpret events for the Channel 4 audience. "You might think this is just a bunch of hippies having fun on the side of a hill," McCloud says to camera, acknowledging the anticipated position of the audience. But McCloud is convinced of the credibility of the ecovillage and sets out to persuade the viewer that what he finds at Lammas is simply a heroic, hard-working family doing what they can with little resources.

Lammas ecovillage featured on the *Grand Designs* episode "Low Impact House" which was first broadcast on Channel 4 in 2016. In thinking about how the ecovillage is imagined in this chapter, I focus on the animation of the figure of "the low impact pioneer", a figure of someone who practices a pioneering and innovative lifestyle that follows a "low impact" philosophy, meaning a philosophy that privileges the goal of minimising one's environmental impact. The couple featured in "Low Impact House", Simon and Jasmine Dale, practice the techniques of low impact development: employing reclaimed, local materials, renewable technologies and engaging in organic food production. As such, the Dales come to embody the figure of the low impact pioneer and carry with them the histories of association bound up with this figure, that is as being heirs of the sixties counterculture while also being industrious and inventive self-builders.

Lammas is a rather different case to the typical *Grand Designs* subject. The participants of the programme are normally independently wealthy middle-class couples creating a bespoke home that expresses their individuality and distinctiveness. The ecovillage, conversely, is a collective which aims towards building a community of people beyond the atomised nuclear family unit. Lammas contains nine plots of land on which plot owners can construct a dwelling and start a land-based business. There are approximately nine households who make up the permanent ecovillage residents at any given time. The project includes a strong communal living element in that the plots of land are all proximate to a communal hub, a building shared by the whole collective, while the ecovillage also welcomes a continuous influx of volunteers who live and work with the main residents of Lammas.

Having featured on Channel 4 since 1999, the typical structure and content of *Grand Designs* would be very much cemented in the minds of regular viewers by the time that "Low Impact House" was broadcast in 2016. Each episode of the show follows a client or set of clients who wish to build a bespoke home. The narrative of each episodes follows the protagonists as they navigate the pressures of the building process and shifting relationships with construction workers, architects, suppliers, and project managers. Although *Grand Designs* is in part about the challenges faced in the course of the construction process it nevertheless conveys a warm and reassuring tone, a feature of the programme that is crucial to my argument in this chapter. As is demonstrated in the fact that so many series of *Grand Designs* have been ordered by Channel 4, as well as spin-offs featuring host Kevin McCloud, and the fact that the series has successfully been exported to international audiences, the programme contains a reassuring familiarity and sense of being a comfortingly constant presence in television schedules.[1]

My argument in this chapter is that the fact that *Grand Designs* consistently pitches towards being a reassuring viewing experience has an important bearing over the way in which

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[1] *Grand Designs* has two international spin-offs: *Grand Designs Australia* (The Lifestyle Channel, 2010-) and *Grand Designs New Zealand* (TV3, 2015-).

the ecovillage come to be imagined in the episode "Low Impact House". As noted above, Simon and Jasmine Dale — the central couple of the episode — are made to resemble the figure of the low impact pioneer. This is an unsettling figure bound up with one kind of domestic discontent: a discontent with conventional living arrangements in light of an escalating sense of climate emergency (about which I say more below). The generic conventions of *Grand Designs*, though, means that a very particular kind of low impact pioneer is brought to life in the episode, one that is palatable and reassuring to an audience used to certain kinds of *Grand Designs* participants. Because of the attributes of the low impact pioneer that are emphasised in the programme, particularly the construction of the low impact pioneer as intensely family-oriented, the episode ends up obscuring the nature of the ecovillage as a commune. I argue that *Grand Designs* makes the figure of the commune out to be an *object of unconcern*, an object that we are invited to perceive as unworthy of concern since it is so comprehensively shifted into the background of the story told in "Low Impact House".

The chapter is comprised of five sections plus a concluding section. In the first section, titled "Reassuring television and the low impact pioneer", I introduce the *Grand Designs* format as reassuring and repetitive of its own conventions and tropes. I then introduce the figure of the low impact pioneer as an unsettling figure and suggest that the episode "Low Impact House" required a strategy to make Simon and Jasmine Dale familiar, and thus palatable, to the *Grand Designs* audience. In the second section, titled "Austerity chic", I argue that one of the ways the episode makes the Dales familiar is by constructing them as exemplary adherents to the trends of austerity culture. In the third section, titled "For the sake of the children", I argue that another of the ways the episode makes the Dales familiar is by positioning them as looking out for their family unit at the expense of anyone else. I suggest that such a framing means they comply with "amoral familism" (Rodger, 2003; Layton, 2010), a cultural sensibility that promotes privileging the interests of one's immediate family above consideration for any others. In the fourth section, titled "Object of unconcern", I argue that because of the intensely family-oriented vision of the

Dales presented in the episode, "Low Impact House" invites its audience to see the communal living nature of Lammas as something not worthy of concern or interest. In the fifth section, titled "Burning down the house", I discuss some paratexts to the episode that shift its meaning in the years since its broadcast: newspaper reports concerning a fire that destroyed the Dales' house at Lammas. In the concluding section, titled "Disappearing commune", I suggest that the commune in "Low Impact House" is obscured and disappeared by the *Grand Designs* format.

Reassuring television and the low impact pioneer

Grand Designs is a safe, reassuringly familiar part of the Channel 4's television output. This quality of the show has an important bearing over the way in which we are introduced to Lammas ecovillage and to Simon and Jasmine Dale, the protagonists of episode "Low Impact House". "Low Impact House" was first broadcast in 2016 as part of the seventeenth series of *Grand Designs*. As critic Hugh Graham for *The Sunday Times* summarised the appeal of *Grand Designs*, it "has almost become part of the furniture in British homes" and "feels as if it's been going for ever: it's always on in the background" (Graham, 2019: para. 1). Graham raises an important point about the show: part of its appeal is that viewers know what to expect. Each series has the same host, Kevin McCloud, and follows an extremely similar narrative arc in each episode.[2] Moreover, each episode usually focuses in on a very similar set of protagonists: usually an independently wealthy, middle-class heterosexual couple (Harle, 2018: 131). The variation comes

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[2] Part of the dramatic arc of the typical *Grand Designs* script is a recurring focus on something going wrong in the process that the clients commissioning each new home must navigate. Early sequences involving the enthusiastic clients in which they set about making wildly naive plans give a kind of schadenfreude enjoyment since we know that the *Grand Designs* formula dictates that this naive optimism will almost certainly evaporate as the patience of the clients is tested throughout the process (see Cross & Littler, 2010 for useful discuss of schadenfreude in contemporary popular culture). *Grand Designs* also promises the pleasures of voyeuristically encountering luxury domestic spaces in the "reveal" moment in the last quarter of each episode. The final segment of the programme is dedicated to long lingering shots of the exteriors and interiors of the homes, including shots that mimic a house tour, the camera moving through doorways and ascending staircases.

in the precise attributes of the bespoke home, which range considerably in the aesthetic

principles imposed by the clients or self -builders and the architects with whom they work.[3]

That audiences enjoy the conventionality and familiarity of *Grand Designs* is indicated in

the popularity of *Grand Designs* bingo cards and drinking game rules that circulate online. These

bingo cards list common narrative devices used in the programme or comments by McCloud

that have been repeated by him so often that they have become akin to catchphrases. The bingo

cards and rule lists feature events like "architect is a relative", "Kevin has a go at making

something", "Kevin says 'bespoke'".[4] McCloud admitted in 2014 to being familiar with these fan

creations and to having written a script for one programme with the intention of including as

many *Grand Designs* tropes as he could, as he says, "designed to get people as drunk as possible"

(Press Association, 2014: para. 1). These fan texts demonstrate that at least part of the pleasure

of the show's viewing experience is about spotting components of each episode that are almost

entirely predictable. The repetitiveness of the show — the feeling of its "going for ever" — is a

major part of its appeal.

This characteristic of *Grand Designs* — its reassuring familiarity and close compliance

with its own conventions — is an important context to emphasise here because the episode

"Low Impact House" animates a figure that, from some perspectives, can be unsettling. "Low

Impact House" introduces the *Grand Designs* audience to two Lammas ecovillage residents,

Simon and Jasmine Dale and their two children, Elfie and Cosmo. The way that *Grand Designs*

portrays the couple leads them to resemble the figure of the low impact pioneer: an image of a

person who takes a radical step to "drop out" of a conventional living arrangement to practice a

vernacular kind of self-building or to live in a radically self-sufficient manner.

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[3] To take some examples the designs have ranged from shipping container construction ("The Shipping Containers House" series 14, episode 4), a house hewn out of a rockface ("The Cave House", series 16, episode 4), a single storey 60 meter long property cased in glass ("The Perfectionist's Bungalow", series 16 episode 1), an off-grid home made using packed earth ("The Brittany Groundhouse", series 9, episode 5).

[4] One example can be found hosted at the following website "the poke" (see Lamb 2014); another was circulated by Twitter user "Kate Bevan" (Bevan, 2016); bingo cards were also circulated by Channel 4 on their promotional webpages, e.g. Channel 4 (2018).

The low impact pioneers are markedly discontented figures. The intention of building one's own shelter using low impact building methods expresses one kind of domestic discontent, that is a radical sense of urgency and exasperation regarding how everyday practices must be transformed in order to effectively engage with climate change (see Pickerill, 2016). Environmental historian Andrew Kirk has written of low impact pioneers as what he calls "countercultural bricoleurs" (2016), figures intimately bound up with the long sixties counterculture.[5] As Kirk writes "no other aspect of the counterculture [...] captured the spirit of the age better than the simple desire to provide one's own shelter" (2016: 323). Inspired by the aim of limiting humankind's strain on the earth's natural resources, groups of countercultural self-builders during the 1960s and 70s practiced the building of temporary dwellings using materials that could be sourced locally and that had not been industrially processed. Kirk characterizes these self-building pioneers as "jack-of-all-trades who, with cunning and resource, ransack[ed] the ready at hand to create something new" (2016: 305). Contrary to the stereotypes of hippies as laid-back, mellow, drop-out do-nothings, the low impact pioneers were immensely industrious in Kirk's account: "for people who were supposed to be indolent they sure were busy" (2016: 321).

While Kirk's account of the "bricoleurs" centres around the state of California, USA, there was a cross-Atlantic pollination of the kinds of practices that made up a "low impact" lifestyle. West Wales, UK, was known as a region in which counter-cultural self-builders and back-to-the-landers moved in significant numbers after the 1960s (Forde, 2017; Halfacree, 2006). One of the notable public figures of this migration to West Wales was John Seymour, a farmer, writer and broadcaster who popularised "self-sufficient" and small-scale farming in Britain. Seymour moved to Pembrokeshire, Wales in the mid-1960s and his book *Complete Book of Self-Sufficiency*, which was described by *The Times* as "the bible of the green sustainability movement",

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[5] Greg Castillo's (2019) name for such a figure, meanwhile, is the hippie "outlaw builder".

was published in 1973 (The Times, 2004). Seymour's daughter, Anne Sears, recalled to the BBC that, as a result of the book's publication, people would leave their jobs and turn up unannounced at Seymour's farmhouse (Bates, 2016). In the same year as the book's publication, in Ceredigion, a county bordering Pembrokeshire, the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) was founded, the aim of which was to bring together environmentalists with a range of expertise to develop renewable technologies and ways of low carbon living (Shepherd, 2015). Old Etonian and businessman Gerard Morgan Grenville was instrumental to the establishment of the Centre. In a BBC radio documentary, Morgan Grenville's daughter recalled that he took time off to go to California in 1973 and "when he got back he sat cross-legged, smoking joints, and speaking in a new kind of language" (BBC, 2013).

Simon and Jasmine Dale evoke the low impact pioneer as I have sketched the figure here on several counts in "Low Impact House". First, the couple practice a kind of subsistence architecture, a type of self-building that produces buildings that are rudimentary, typically off grid and produced at a minimal cost.[6] In McCloud's commentary in the opening segments of the episode he praises their planned use of recycled and reclaimed materials in the build. Second, as the *Grand Designs* audience is repeatedly reminded in the episode, the Dales are somewhat innovative in their designs of the house. In the opening segment of "Low Impact House" McCloud observes that Simon and Jasmine are "the latest in a long line of couples, loners, families and even organised groups who are turning their back on consumerism and trying to forge new relationships with the land". The notion that the couple are trying to forge "new" relationships with nature evokes an idea of them as being pioneering. Third, because of the location of the house build, Lammas ecovillage is in Pembrokeshire, Wales, then the Dales can be situated as part of a lineage of low impact pioneers of that region: the region is inhabited by a

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[6] See Stickells (2015) for discussion of subsistence architecture.

number of countercultural self-builders who have migrated there in the second half of the twentieth century, people who may be seen as resembling the figure of the low impact pioneer.

The low impact pioneer has resonated in certain contexts since the 1960s as suspicious and fearsome. In the context of West Wales, the low impact pioneer is both a settler in the region and an un/settler in the respect that they provoke discomfort and even anger. The Centre for Alternative Technology for instance was perceived by some residents of Ceredigion with suspicion as to the intentions of the low impact pioneers. In the BBC radio documentary "The Centre for Alternative Technology", an early resident of CAT, Liz Todd, recounted an incident in which she was questioned about the Centre by her driving instructor, a resident in a nearby town. The instructor was shocked to discover that Todd was married, assuming the centre to be in effect a front for engaging in polygamy, with the "alternative technology" label being only a cover story for, in the instructor's mind, the salacious activity of the group (BBC, 2013).

Moreover, the low impact pioneers are often taken as representative of middle-class incomes to rural Wales who contribute towards the significant inequalities in access to affordable and secure housing in the region.[7] As Pembrokeshire Council leader John Davies stated upon Lammas receiving planning permission in 2009, the approval set "a dangerous precedent": "it is very difficult to explain to local people, gainfully employed, that they are not allowed to build a single house in their native area, while in this instance a whole village is allowed to be built in the middle of a field" (BBC News, 2009). Notably, a year before Davies made this statement, the Joseph Rowntree Trust released a report detailing the alarming levels of "unmet housing need" in rural Wales (JRF commission on rural housing in Wales & Milbourne, 2008). The report centred on widespread problems of affordability, homelessness and a lack of social housing supply. The low impact pioneers represent a conspicuous middle-class presence in the region. While housing inequality has structural roots that connect to issues of intergenerational

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[7] The relationship between permanent residents of rural Wales and middle-class second home owners is summarised well in Alun Howkin's (2003) history of rural England and Wales.

transmission of wealth, discrimination, and segregation, the countercultural migrants to the area receive a share of the angry sentiment about this problem.

The eco-friendly behavioural changes that the low impact pioneers promoted could also in some perspectives be seen as significantly alarming, troublesome and upsetting. The camp for climate action in South East London in 2009, as written about by critic Owen Hatherley (2009), is a good example here of a subsistence architecture project that is rather discomforting in certain respects. In a similar vein to the Dale's project at Lammas ecovillage, the 2009 climate camp practiced an ad hoc subsistence architecture that involves straw bales, tents, and compost toilets. Hatherley notes that for all the good intentions of the camp in modelling a post carbon world, it "inadvertently becomes an aestheticisation of emergency" (2009: para. 6). The actual experience of physically residing at the camp — where power rests on the performance of pedal powered generators and there is no system of drainage — is a discomforting one. The sense of alarm about climate change that the project seemingly intends to elicit is subordinated, for Hatherley, to an alarm at the "terrifying" thought of this kind of low impact project practiced more permanently at a larger scale (2009: para. 6).

These observations provide important context to the way in which the figure of the low impact pioneer is animated in "Low Impact House". When McCloud says that the Dales are "not just hippies having fun on the side of the hill", this comment might be interpreted as a distancing manoeuvre that separates the Dales from past histories of association bound up with the unsettling visions of low impact pioneers. Because of these histories, then the need of McCloud to take particular care in reassuring the *Grand Designs* audience about the Dales becomes clear: they might alienate an audience used to the show's very familiar tropes and protagonists. In order to maintain the tone of reassurance that is important to *Grand Designs*, downplaying these unsettling resonances of the figure is a coherent strategy.

Consequently, the attributes of the low impact pioneers that are foregrounded in "Low Impact House" are those that construct Simon and Jasmine Dale as a reassuring pair. McCloud

stresses the Dales as admirable and praiseworthy and lauds their status as low impact pioneers. The more troubling resonances of the figure are counterbalanced by foregrounding attributes of the low impact pioneer that are reassuringly moderate and familiar in contemporary times: their thrift, technical know-how, perseverance, and a willingness to take individual responsibility for the wellbeing of their children. The figure of the low impact pioneer that is animated in "Low Impact House" is one that matches closely with austerity culture and a culture of "amoral familism". That is to say, the figure is *familiarised*: made familiar as in made recognisable and legible to the *Grand Designs* audience and constructed as being family-oriented.

Austerity chic

Because of the Dales' obvious commitment to environmental sustainability and eco-building, which is foregrounded in the "Low Impact House" script, and because the couple describe themselves by invoking the personal qualities of perseverance and positivity that they possess, then the Dales match with two important components of the post-2008 austerity or recessionary culture. By "post-2008 austerity culture" I mean the composite of several cultures and sensibilities that valorised the principles of thriftiness, frugality, and "making do" during a political moment in which governments were severely cutting public spending after the 2008 global financial crisis while wages stagnated (Brammall, 2013). As is captured in the ubiquitous slogan which was affixed to various merchandise in the years following 2008, "Keep calm and carry on", crucial to this recessionary culture were discourses of resilience and positive-thinking by which income-squeezed households were encouraged to be adaptable and to reframe constraints as positive opportunities.[8]

"Low Impact House" presents the Dales as exemplary models of these overlapping cultures and sensibilities. The Dales show a commitment to doing "more with less" and a

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[8] For discussion of the "keep calm and carry on" slogan's ubiquity in relation to austerity culture, see Hatherley (2016).

willingness to make decisions according to a nebulous sense of happiness and positivity it might bring them. Further, the episode sets up a narrative of the Dales working "against the odds" under tight budget restrictions, a scenario that evokes how the post-recession economic landscape in the UK was represented in political discourse at that time. The Dales' financial situation means that they must necessarily show thriftiness and a careful handling of money if the house build is to be completed. As is brought to the attention of viewers in the early sequences of the episode, Simon and Jasmine plan to complete the build with only the approximately £500 that they possess at the outset of the project.[9] "What are you going to do," McCloud asks, "earn, borrow, beg, steal, find?". In a later segment, McCloud tells us that Simon and Jasmine have earned some extra money which they have invested in the building, showing the couple to be hard-working and able to grow their savings and invest sensibly.

These are attributes of *Grand Design* participants that are traditionally valued and celebrated across the multiple series of the programme. After the 2008 financial crisis, *Grand Designs* might be thought of as an instance of "austerity pedagogy" television (Jensen, 2018): a lifestyle television programme that contains in its remit an element of instruction about how to organise some component of one's life in line with the principles of austerity, that is to reduce one's expenditure and use of resources. Eco-building is one strand of post-2008 recessionary culture, one that *Grand Designs* presenter Kevin McCloud had promoted in the show since it was first broadcast in 2000.[10] Simon and Jasmine follow in a succession of *Grand Designs* episodes in which McCloud celebrates thrifty and environmentally friendly techniques in home construction.

Grand Designs is also bound up with the positive thinking cultures of post-2008. McCloud repeatedly invokes the importance of striving towards happiness, both in the *Grand Designs* episodes themselves and his promotional work outside of the show. McCloud's housing firm that was created almost a decade after *Grand Designs* first aired is named HAB housing, standing

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[9] This amount is a comparatively small budget for typical *Grand Designs* protagonists, who normally have proposed budgets of six figures.
[10] See Lloyd and Oak (2016: 162) for discussion of this point.

for "Happiness, Architecture, Beauty" (HAB housing, 2020). The branding of an architectural firm in this mode matches closely with what Will Davies (2015) describes as the "happiness industry", an ever-expanding group of businesses, public agencies and research institutions that promote the pursuit of happiness in a way that coheres with objectives set by major corporations and governments and the logic of capitalist growth. Davies observes an increasing tendency for the language of fulfilment and flourishing to be deployed in relation to a significant range of products, lifestyle practices and brands. Notions of happiness and fulfilment are quite central in *Grand Designs* episodes since the outcome of becoming happy and fulfilled are presented as ultimately the aim of the protagonists, McCloud working to help the protagonists achieve this outcome by acquiring a bespoke home. The process of striving towards happiness is a crucial marker by which *Grand Designs* protagonists are judged and valued in McCloud's commentary.

The Dales qualify as an exemplary "austerity chic" couple foremost through their environmentalism. A recurring theme of "Low Impact House" is McCloud's commentary on the sustainability initiatives that the Dales make as part of their building project. In the first quarter of the episode, McCloud demonstrates the plans for the house. He introduces the Dales' focus on using reclaimed and recycled furnishings and natural materials like timber, straw and turf. Multiple sequences involve McCloud in an edutainment mode, introducing the viewer to eco-friendly techniques, objects and devices while praising the Dales for approaching the project in such a "green" manner. In one sequence, for instance, McCloud introduces the "humanure" system of the building, the waste disposal system that can turn human waste into compost or fluids that can be used in gardening. "You might have an aversion to handling your own composted poo," McCloud says, before telling us with a grin that the compost produced by the Dales is "sweeter smelling" than that bought in a shop.

There are moments in the episode, too, when the Dales evidently comply with McCloud's preference for positive thinking, his emphasis on happiness. One scene involves a talking-head interview with Simon in which he talks about the deeper philosophy behind his and

Jasmine's approach to navigating their lives: "we have come to this point by following our hearts, by following what is bringing joy to our lives, and that's been our navigation system to get here". In another scene, using similar positivity-speak, Simon talks approvingly about the volunteers at Lammas as "following some dreams". These scenes are curious for their focus on existential, even spiritual, matters, rather than the practical focus on building a house which is the subject matter of most of the episode. But given the "happiness industry" context, such scenes can be read as further evidence of the Dales as being contemporary and as following recognisable trends. These scenes also help to maintain the warm tone of the programme. Rather than emphasising the sense of climate emergency that drives the project, we are reminded of the happiness towards which the Dales strive.

The episode also draws focus to Simon and Jasmine performing traditional homesteading activities. A voice-over that introduces one sequence for instance features McCloud stating, "I'll never get tired of watching Simon work with his homegrown timber", with the accompanying footage showing Simon using a hand plane while preparing timber for the frame of the house. Here we are given an image of skilled hand crafting, the hard-working man providing for his family through patient and thorough craftsmanship and self-endeavour. McCloud introduces Jasmine's gardening with similar levels of admiration and praise, with footage showing Jasmine performing various gardening tasks with a steady concentration. The shots of Jasmine performing this kind of work and of the couple's vegetable patches are consistent with what Potter and Westall (2013) call a "veg patch aesthetic" which was broadly circulated in multiple forms in the post-2008 period in which austerity culture bloomed. The idea that individuals can use their initiative and capacity for hard work to sustain themselves when struggling for income by growing their own vegetables resonated with the main principles of austerity, and partially recalled wartime efforts to supplement food rationing by doing the same.

One of the important tenets to being an "austerity chic" family, meanwhile, is to have a strong resolve and resilience, a "bounce-back-ability" to borrow a phrase used in Rosalind Gill

and Shani Orgad's (2018) investigation of post-recessionary resilience discourse. The Dales are presented as possessing these qualities, too. The couple are shown to successfully move through periods of stress and feelings of being overwhelmed.[11] In one segment Jasmine describes a "mini tiredness breakdown" that she experienced where she uncharacteristically felt extremely tired each evening and which affected the rate at which the building project progressed. Jasmine also describes Simon's experience of "exhaustion showing up as illness" which paused his work on the project for an unspecified length of time. Jasmine explains that she and Simon have been in a "project building phase" for ten years working on similar construction projects ever since they were first married and had children, referring to other dwellings the couple had built together before they had begun construction on the house filmed for *Grand Designs*. The episode leads us to consider that their sustained work on the project at Lammas in these circumstances, that is the circumstances of just having finished working on a number of demanding self-build projects, is fairly convincing evidence of the Dales successfully being able to "bounce back" from their difficulties, that is their periods of ill health and exhaustion.

Adding to this image of the Dales, one of the more extended pieces of commentary by Simon that is featured in "Low Impact House" is his speech after McCloud has toured the almost-complete house on the subject of "hard work". Simon admits that the process was laborious and difficult but that "there's something nice about a hard day's graft". Expanding on his stoical approach to the project, Simon adds: "I think that's part of being human, isn't it? It's to have a little bit of challenge, and a little bit of struggle, and come through it and especially when we come through it together". Simon's enjoyment of hard work, as with the other "austerity chic" traits that are emphasised in "Low Impact House", invite us to adopt a perspective of the Dales as admirably following the core tenets of a "more with less" philosophy, one extremely familiar to the period coinciding with the episode's broadcast.

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[11] This arc fits with the conventions of *Grand Designs* episodes in which the final quarter normally shows the final house having been completed and the protagonists expressing their relief.

For the sake of the children

If the Dales are made safe and familiar on account of their compliance with austerity culture trends, then this sense of familiarity of the couple is even more pronounced in their relationship to their children. Throughout "Low Impact House", through comments made by Simon and Jasmine and through various scenes involving the children, the couple are shown to be remarkably devoted to the wellbeing of their children. In one moment, for instance, McCloud observes the ongoing construction with the family in a scene plainly choreographed to demonstrate their togetherness. McCloud stands with Jasmine and the two children in a neat row, all of them facing a digger on the site which is being operated by Simon. The accompanying voice-over has McCloud express his positive assessment of the scene: "it feels like a privilege to be with the whole family and witness this moment". The act of preparing the groundwork for the house is made out as an act shared by the family, one from which they stand to benefit given the family home that is promised.

We might think of this as reassuring because the image of the Dales as being strongly motivated to protect the wellbeing of their immediate family — and particularly their children — resonates with what Lynn Layton (2010), following the work of sociologist John Rodger (2003), has called "amoral familism": an important component of the cultures of the Global North in recent decades. This concept refers to the phenomenon by which the nuclear family unit is the most valorised form of collectivity that neoliberal subjects are invited to care for and about. Layton names "amoral familism" as "behaviour which follows the dictum that the individual should maximise the material and short run advantage of the nuclear family and assume that everyone else in the community will behave similarly" (2010: 312). Such behaviour is amoral for Layton because it denies the mutual responsibility that any given person has towards people outside of their immediate family. As Roberta Garrett et al. (2016) argue, it is precisely those tight knit family units that act in accordance with the principle of maximising the advantages of

one's own children that are most obviously held up as exemplars and given cultural credence in the present moment. Garrett et al. identify the emergence of "the hypercompetitive, neotraditionalist, mobile family seeking to capitalise on the uneven spread of resources in order to maximise the futures of its own children" (2016: *ix*). Garrett et al. and Layton argue convincingly that this amoral familism describes the prevailing way in which families are encouraged to view themselves in a political moment shaped by neoliberalism.

Throughout the episode, Simon and Jasmine are constructed as belonging to a nuclear family that is motivated to maximise advantages for their children. In the opening meeting between the couple and McCloud, Simon explains that "this will actually be the fourth home we have built for our family and this will be the first one that's of a size to last us for a lifetime". McCloud's patient listening and receptive body language at this moment signals his tacit approval of a statement which portrays the couple as putting the needs of their children at the forefront of their thoughts, their need especially for security and a settled place to call home. The house built to last a lifetime brings with it images of longevity and stability, qualities of the home that we might assume are inspired by thoughts of the children's future.

In another scene, Simon shows the children the initial results of construction at the part of the building that will eventually form their bedrooms.[12] The children are encouraged to talk about how they imagine their future bedrooms to look like and what their preferences are about the shape and layout of the rooms. Simon explains to the camera: "we're going to try and make sure that this is ready so they can get into it in the autumn". Mimicking his earlier comments on first meeting McCloud, Simon resembles the conscientious father who places a high value on the wellbeing of the children. The comment about the autumn is particularly significant because of its associations with the start of the school calendar. To have completed accommodation for the

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[12] To return to the *Grand Designs* bingo cards, another part of the reason the family-centric philosophy of the Dales might be thought of as reassuring is that the focus on family dynamics is a well-rehearsed trope of the *Grand Designs* format as evidenced in these fan paratexts. Many of the items on the fan-created lists are those that emphasise the shifting dynamics between husband, wife and children, such as "the wife gets pregnant", "the partner hates the house", "the family has to live in a caravan", "the kid is allowed to paint something".

children by this time is to presumably give them an advantage in concentrating on their education.

The "tightly knit family" construction is further emphasised in the episode through McCloud's celebration of the family resemblance between Simon and son, Cosmo. In the final segment of the episode, in which the almost completed house is unveiled, McCloud gives particular attention and praise to the children's bedrooms. In Cosmo's bedroom, McCloud draws attention to a storage unit containing dozens of plastic draws filled with Lego pieces. "This is an architect in the making isn't it?" asks McCloud. Simon responds, "yeah well he's got some good making skills". McCloud then says with a tone of beaming positivity and pride, "just like his dad!". Far from being an insignificant throwaway remark, this comment captures precisely one of the things the McCloud apparently seems to value about the family, the way in which Simon and Jasmine create an inheritance for their children, whether that be the inheritance of a secure home or of socially-productive traits and abilities. The comment also plays on an assumption that the genetic connectedness of father and son is a chief reason for Cosmo's interest in construction, ignoring the possible inspiration generated by the ecovillage residents and volunteers with whom Simon works.

These scenes, those that contain comment about the longevity of the house, the importance of the children's wellbeing, and the intergenerational transmission of skills, all show the Dales to exemplify amoral familism because they draw a connection between the house build and the intended benefits for the Dales as a family unit. Because of the widespread credence given to amoral familism at the time of the episode's broadcast, the inclusion of these scenes in "Low Impact House" seem designed to reassure the *Grand Designs* audience that the Dales are a more or less "ordinary" family for the period.

Object of unconcern

An upshot of animating the low impact pioneer as a familiar and palatable figure in the way that *Grand Designs* does in "Low Impact House" is that the episode zooms in with a laserlike focus on the household of Simon, Jasmine and their two children. This puts quite a remarkable spin on the project of the Dales. They have, after all, chosen to live as part of an ecovillage, the emphasis of which is on the work of the collective to communally support one another in their mission to conduct ecologically friendly lives. But "Low Impact House" makes little space in which the *Grand Designs* audience might encounter the affinities that Simon and Jasmine have with any ecovillage residents that aren't their children.

One way of interpreting this representative choice in "Low Impact House" is to say that the figure of the commune is presented to the *Grand Designs* audience as an object of unconcern. An "object of unconcern", following Sianne Ngai's (2005) articulation of this concept, is an object that produces a response of unconcern, that is an affective deficit or lack. Put simply, an object of unconcern is something we have "trouble caring about" (2005: 81, 83).[13]

That the commune is made into an object of unconcern in "Low Impact House" is especially evident in one brief segment which shows a gathering of ecovillage residents. Even though the camera passes over other members of the ecovillage, it is very much the Dales' immediate family that remains the object of attention. In a sequence of no more than sixty seconds in length, the ecovillage residents are shown to be celebrating their success in meeting the targets for food and energy production in line with their planning agreement with Pembrokeshire County Council. The group are gathered in a grassy field on a sunny afternoon,

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[13] Ngai develops this concept in interpreting Herman Melville's 1857 novel *The Confidence-Man*. It should be emphasised that one component of Ngai's point about objects of unconcern is not strictly relevant to the way in which I use the concept here. Specifically, Ngai suggests that when we encounter an object of unconcern, we feel unconcerned for it, but this unconcern gives rise to a secondary feeling of discomfort about the fact that one feels unconcern. The object of unconcern gives rise then to this meta-emotion, which makes unconcern what Ngai calls an "ugly feeling". This aspect of the notion of "object of concern" is not one that I deploy here. Rather, my use of the expression follows a more straightforward meaning as simply referring to something that produces a feeling of unconcern.

sharing laughter and drinks with one another. Notably, the sequence ends with an extended shot of Simon sitting on the ground with Cosmo, Simon's arm wrapped protectively around him, the pair looking off into opposite directions with a tangible contentment. This moment reinforces the message that had been constructed up to this point in the episode, that of Simon as the lovingly protective father and the importance of the children to the Dales' motivations.

Such a "zooming in" on the Dales is also evident in the way in which "Low Impact House" deals with the large numbers of volunteers at Lammas, the volunteers being observed by McCloud with a conspicuous bafflement and incomprehension. The ecovillage encourages volunteers to live and work at the site in an arrangement whereby volunteers perform labour in exchange for basic food provisions and shelter and a cultural exchange between hosts and their guests. While Lammas is in principle a collective of families and individuals who own plots at the site, it is perhaps better characterised as a much larger and more fluid ensemble of people once the volunteers, those who live and work there impermanently, are considered. McCloud appraises the presence of volunteers at Lammas in cost-benefit terms. He explains in a voice-over that Simon "has a secret weapon for building a house with just five hundred quid in the bank: volunteers". McCloud later interviews three of the volunteers on the building site. He explains with a chuckle that he couldn't imagine getting anyone to work for him for free and wonders "how Simon does it". The volunteers are given a few seconds to briefly comment — one of the volunteers says that they have good fun and food — but that is the limit to McCloud's on-screen investigation of the matter. As far as *Grand Designs* is concerned the volunteers are simply inputs into the construction process as opposed to autonomous agents with their own set of goals and reasons for being at Lammas. Here then what is from one perspective an integral part of the ecovillage — the presence of an evolving and impermanent set of volunteers — is explained away as an exercise in Simon's sound business logic, his ability to maximise outcomes for his family through a clever use of resources. The notion that Simon has

enrolled the volunteers as a free labour force works to reinforce the construction of the Dales as thrifty and in-keeping with austerity culture.

What unites these two scenes — that of the ecovillage social gathering and McCloud's explanation of the volunteers — is the figure of the commune, which for a brief moment begins to be illuminated. These two moments give a glimpse of the wider collective of the ecovillage — a glimpse of Lammas as an experiment in communal living — because it shows the group of ecovillage residents beyond the Dales. Nevertheless, in the case of both scenes, McCloud quickly moves on to other segments.

The commune is an object of unconcern in "Low Impact House" because it is shrunk to such a significant part of the story told about Simon and Jasmine that it barely features in the script and because of the extent to which it is positioned as simply a background phenomenon. The commune — that is the wider Lammas collective beyond the Dales — exists in the episode merely as a backdrop to Simon and Jasmine's experience of their building project and family life. It is not something that the episode invites us to become either excited or pleased about, or conversely worried about, but is relegated to being something not worthy of concern. While we are encouraged into a relationship with Simon and Jasmine of admiration — they are at least reassuringly familiar and at most exceptionally praiseworthy if we take up McCloud's perspective — the commune is not a figure about which we are invited to care either way. In the course of imagining the commune through the figure of the low impact pioneer, "Low Impact House" constructs only the low impact pioneer as of any real concern or interest.

Burning down the house

The coverage of Simon and Jasmine's house did not end at the broadcast of "Low Impact House". Subsequent media attention on the Dales' project does much to complicate and disrupt the story that I have presented so far, namely that the Dales are constructed as a reassuring pair. Although the close of "Low Impact House" may leave viewers imagining Simon and Jasmine

living peacefully in their new home for many years to come, this was not the case as in January 2018, two years after the episode was broadcast, the house burned down due to an electrical fire. Coverage of the house fire introduced a set of paratexts to the episode that refixes some of the meanings contained in "Low Impact House".

The story of the Dales' house fire was covered by most UK national newspapers. The story was propelled by shock. A fantasy home, which *Grand Designs* audiences were used to seeing in a spectacular finished state, was shown here to be fallible, to be just as susceptible as any ordinary building to a chance accident, to becoming an upsetting loss. "*Grand Designs* £27,000 eco-home in Wales burns to the ground," ran the *Guardian* headline (Slawson, 2018), while the *Telegraph* headline read "*Grand Designs* family 'in shock' after £27,000 eco-home left destroyed in blaze" (Marshall, 2018). A report by *The Daily Mail* (Bedford, 2018) emphasised that this was the second home of the couple that had been destroyed by fire. The report noted that one of the couple's previous hand-built homes had experienced the same fate. The *Telegraph* report (Marshall, 2018), meanwhile, pointed out that the house that had featured on *Grand Designs* was still technically under construction and so was not covered by house insurance.

The story was given a positive angle, meanwhile, in most of the newspaper reporting on the incident, which highlighted that donations were being collected for Simon and Jasmine through *JustGiving*, a web platform that facilitates fundraising, showing the generosity of supporters in helping the family rebuild their lives following the accident. The crowdfunding page, organised by supporter Jane Wells, showed that a total of over £35,000 had been raised at the time of the fund's close in May 2018 (Wells, 2018). Many supporters left messages of support on the page responding to their enjoyment of the house having watched *Grand Designs*: "watched the show and was impressed/touched by your journey" one supporter notes, while another comments "one of my favourite *Grand Designs* amazing house, location, setup and people".

While many of the articles covering the story featured quotes from those sympathetic to Simon and Jasmine, on the *Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* websites online readers contributed

comments to reports of the accident that contained rather different sentiments, conveying feelings of contempt and suspicion towards the Dales. *The Daily Mail*'s report on the house fire incident references this public reaction when it states that "many people have poked fun comparing the home to the house of straw built by the three little pigs in the children's story" (Bedford, 2018: para. 18). Many of the comments on the article on the *Daily Mail* website (Bedford, 2018), and also of the equivalent report on the *Telegraph* website (Marshall, 2018), repeat this "three little pigs" joke, insinuating that Simon and Jasmine are essentially naive and their project fundamentally ill conceived. As one user in the *Daily Mail* comment section (Bedford, 2018) wrote "three little pigs could've told you it was a bad idea". Other commenters meanwhile accuse the Dales of misleading planning officials by using the eco-friendly nature of the project to receive planning permission for a building that would otherwise be rejected by local councils. A commenter on the *Telegraph* website (Marshall, 2018) noted "I dare say they battered the local planning officials into submission with the words "eco-friendly" and "sustainable"". Meanwhile other readers directed their ire towards the fact that Lammas ecovillage had received some funds from the Welsh Assembly. One *Daily Mail* (Bedford, 2018) user commented "oh dear I seem to have burned my house down can I have a huge handout to build another bonfire…". Curiously then the negative backlash contained in these online posts when taken together make Simon and Jasmine out to be simultaneously stupid and incompetent and at the same time crafty enough to deceive planning bodies and obtain government grants.

This response evidences the affective charge that the figure of the low impact pioneer carries when outside of the bounds of the *Grand Designs* episode "Low Impact House". As I have noted above, the low impact pioneers were unsettling figures in certain respects. The acerbic comments of readers, who might in some cases better be characterised as online trolls, surface a manifestation of the low impact pioneer as an object of discontent, or more specifically an object of class *ressentiment* (Brown, 1993). The low impact pioneers are resented and reviled partly because their holdings are an object of desire for those that resent them. In these paratexts to

the episodes — the newspaper comment sections — the affective charge of the low impact pioneer as an unsettling figure has much more of a role to play in how Simon and Jasmine are imagined than in "Low Impact House". While the tone of "Low Impact House" carefully animated a reassuring and palatable form of the low impact pioneer, the house fire destabilises this construction of the Dales. From the deliberately inflammatory point of view of the online trolls, the couple appear to be underhand and unsavoury figures.

Nevertheless, it is of note that the figure of the commune in these paratexts remains an object of unconcern. In the character attacks on Simon and Jasmine, assertions about their motivations and jokes at their expense, the status of the couple as belonging, in effect, to a commune escapes the attention of the posters. The object of their concern is more obviously the status of the Dales as a middle-class couple living in a Welsh Assembly subsidised housing arrangement: it is not their status as commune dwellers.

This focus of attention away from the communal living nature of Lammas is also apparent in the *Justgiving* fundraising material that I have mentioned above (Wells, 2018). Just as in the *Grand Designs* episode, the Dales continue to be imagined as separate from the ecovillage collective. The *Justgiving* fundraising page for the Dales is curious for the way it frames the fundraising efforts as very much centred around a family in need of assistance, their status as ecovillage residents being mentioned in passing without particular emphasis. Moreover, the comments by those who donated to the page follow a pattern in which reference is frequently made to the family — and not necessarily the ecovillage — as inspiring them to make a donation, something evident for instance in the phrase "our thoughts are with the family". Some comments, further, use expressions like "this beautiful family" or "what a lovely family". Here, the work of "Low Impact House" in establishing the Dales as a reassuring and admirable family seems to be an important factor in convincing some *Grand Designs* fans of the Dales' deservingness of a sympathetic response.

Even while the event of the house fire news story shifts the meanings of "Low Impact House", making its tone of reassurance seem out of place and incoherent, at the same time these paratexts to the episode also show the remarkable influence that the episode has over the popular culture afterlife of the Dales. In these paratexts the figure of the commune remains an object of unconcern: the Dales' status as commune dwellers and the quality of Lammas ecovillage as a kind of commune remains obscured. Whether or not the couple is taken to be heroic or contemptuous — as they are in the cases of the newspaper comment sections and fundraising webpage — the family-centric *familiarised* framing of the Dales persists.

Disappearing commune

I have argued in this chapter that the commune is imagined in the *Grand Designs* episode "Low Impact House" through the figure of the low impact pioneer as embodied by Simon and Jasmine Dale in the episode. In keeping with *Grand Designs'* typical reassuring tone and quality as a "safe" part of Channel 4's slate of programmes, the version of the low impact pioneer that is animated here is one that is reassuringly familiar and drops any associations with the more unsettling histories with which the figure has been associated in recent decades. The low impact pioneer as it is animated in "Low Impact House" is a rather conservative figure, one who is resourceful, responsible and highly motivated to care for members of their immediate family. When I say "resourceful" here I mean resourceful not in the respect that they make clever use of resources in cooperation with others or in a way that could benefit those outside of their immediate family but in the respect that they maximise resources for the benefit of their nuclear family unit. The Dales are positioned as adhering to amoral familism, meaning that they comply with hegemonic common sense about how an "ordinary" family should behave. As I have suggested, because of this very particular manifestation of the low impact pioneer that is celebrated in the episode the communal living nature of the ecovillage is obscured from view — it largely disappears — and the figure of the commune is turned into an object of unconcern. This imagining of the

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commune is one that lived on following the initial broadcast of "Low Impact House" even while paratexts to the episode call into question the reassuring nature of Simon and Jasmine's project at Lammas.

For all the work of *Grand Designs* in making the commune disappear, the ecovillage documentary setting nevertheless presents a scenario involving discontented subjects acting on their feelings about a climate emergency. The figure of the low impact pioneer — the main figure through which the commune is imagined here — is symbolic of one kind of domestic discontent: a discontent directed towards conventional society and the way in which most lives are organised which is seen as generating a climate emergency. The low impact pioneer symbolises a rejection of society's privileging of consumption, wastefulness, and convenience over environmental sustainability. The commune of "Low Impact House" is imaginatively bound up with an industrious and inventive environmentalism. It is in this aspect that we can locate the commune's imaginative charge. Lammas ecovillage symbolises anxieties about climate change, which makes up an important component of the atmosphere of discontent in the mid-2000s to late-2010s.

The perspective through which Lammas is narrated in *Grand Designs*, though, steers us away from seeing the ecovillage only in terms of the environmentalist discontent of its inhabitants. Despite their discontent, in "Low Impact House" the low impact pioneers Simon and Jasmine are seen to possess a conspicuous contentedness with their family life. It is through their contentedness that the Dales are made legible to the *Grand Designs* audience. The discontentedness of Simon and Jasmine expressed in their belonging to an ecovillage is subordinated, in the episode, to their familial contentedness.

One of the observations that I have made in this chapter is that the children featured in the episode play a role in how the Dales are made legible and familiar. Because of the recurring images of the Dales' children, Elfie and Cosmo, in apparent states of happiness and health, the Dales' family home is made out to be a fine place to grow up. In the next case study programme

that I consider, the BBC sitcom *Jam and Jerusalem*, the connection between child and commune is taken in a different direction. The sitcom toys with the question: what if the commune is not a place where children might happily grow up but a place that prevents "growing up" altogether? In the chapter that follows, I explore how *Jam and Jerusalem* plays for comedic purposes with the notion of adult commune dwellers as naive overgrown children.

Chapter Three: Suspended adulthood in *Jam and Jerusalem*

Tash (Sally Phillips) closes the door of her mobile home, which has been parked next to her mother's cottage for weeks. She is leaving for an indefinite period of travel. Sal (Sue Johnstone), Tash's mother, watches on from the doorstep to her cottage. The engine starts, the mobile home moves and, to Sal's horror, reverses into the cottage. Later that day, Tash's brother James (David Mitchell), towards whom Tash feels a reciprocated loathing, nurses a cut head. He had been inside the cottage during the accident and was caught by some falling plasterboard. "My sister, the human boomerang," he explains to an assortment of visitors in Sal's living room. "Doesn't matter how hard you throw her out she keeps coming back and cracking you on the head."

These scenes are from the BBC sitcom *Jam and Jerusalem*, a rural sitcom written by Jennifer Saunders which ran for three series between 2006 and 2009. For the regular viewer of the sitcom, the crash has comic significance because it marks yet another occasion in which Tash has declared an intention of leaving her mother's home to "go travelling" while spectacularly failing to do so. James's "boomerang" comment summarises one of the recurring plots of the sitcom. Tash and her mother Sal both desire freedom from one another's company but are perpetually trapped in a living arrangement that ensures that they remain cohabiting with one another.

This chapter focuses on Tash's characterisation in *Jam and Jerusalem*, arguing that she simultaneously resembles two discontented figures/figures of discontent: "the boomerang child" and "the selfish feminist". I choose to focus closely on Tash, and the impression that the sitcom constructs of her character, because she features as an emblematic commune dweller in the show. At the start of the first series of *Jam and Jerusalem* Tash loosely belongs to a collective of New Age travellers.[1] The commune that features in *Jam and Jerusalem* is a space that Tash aspires

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[1] "New Age Traveller" describes a (sub)cultural identity in which people style themselves in response to the sixties counterculture and travel and live in vans and other vehicles, often congregating at festivals (see Kevin Hetherington, 2000 for discussion). The travellers will normally stay at sites that incorporate multiple vehicles

to join up with but is never quite successful in doing so. Despite her domestic discontent — the dissatisfactions of living with her mother and of having to navigate the responsibilities of being a single parent to her primary-school-aged son Raph (Thomas Assafuah) — Tash repeatedly fails to follow through with the intention of joining up with the New Age traveller collective and this desired lifestyle remains elusive to her through the three series of the sitcom. The commune that features in the sitcom is an off-stage presence, one that shapes the life of the main characters, but a space that is never lived in or occupied by Tash in the course of the story.

In thinking about Tash's characterisation as Sal's stay-at-home daughter, of particular importance to my argument is the notion of "suspended adulthood", a notion that describes the predicament of a "boomerang child" (Easton, 2016). Suspended adulthood refers to the status of being of an age in which you might be considered an adult, that is over 18 years of age, but not having obtained some of the traditional milestones with which adulthood is associated, such as living in a home of one's own separate from one's parents. I investigate the way that the series constructs Tash's suspended adulthood and argue that, in her characterisation, we are left with a distinctive impression of the commune as a space longed for by an overgrown infant, an eccentric scheme betraying Tash's naivete. I argued in the last chapter that a discontented figure, the low impact pioneer, became familiarised via the reassurances of the *Grand Designs* format. In this chapter, a different effect can be observed in that *Jam and Jerusalem* foregrounds the figures of the boomerang child and selfish feminist as figures about which it is legitimate to feel discontented, that is as *figures of discontent*.

My argument in this chapter has two stages. First, I introduce the sitcom and establish it as being written from a very particular generational perspective and standpoint. Second, I assess the way in which the sitcom animates "the boomerang child" and "the selfish feminist", drawing

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parked up near one another, or they may be temporary visitors at other accommodating sites that are run by like-minded groups, like Lammas ecovillage. A collective of New Age travellers can be classified as a "commune" since their lifestyle is directly oriented around living in community with one another. New Age Traveller sites are fluid and dynamic in terms of their members and involve the sharing of domestic spaces and resources among a group (Hetherington, 2000).

on storylines and scenes from the sitcom to illustrate my points. I argue that the perspective of the show, which aligns with the perspective of a socially conservative rural retiree, informs the show's negative disposition towards Tash, the sitcom's aspiring commune dweller. In Tash's character the sitcom simultaneously animates "the boomerang child" and "the selfish feminist", both of which are figures we are invited to find ridiculous and irritating. Tash is constructed as absurdly childish. Because we learn about the commune of the story through Tash's character, then the commune is positioned, like Tash, as infantile.

The chapter is comprised of four sections plus a concluding section. In the first section, titled "Boomer comedy", I comment on the authorship of the sitcom and the generational perspective to which it is aligned. In the second section, titled "Regretful entrapment", I discuss the tone of regret taken towards Tash and the sitcom's animation of the boomerang child as object of resentment. In the third section, titled "Stay-at-home New Age traveller", I discuss how the sitcom turns Tash into an object of laughter by emphasising a contradiction in her character: her desire to be a nomadic New Age traveller while also being a homebody who is hopelessly overdependent on her mother. In the fourth section, titled "Selfish feminist", I suggest that Tash's infantilisation is compounded by her resemblance of the figure of the selfish feminist, another figure of conservative Right loathing alongside the boomerang child. In the concluding section, titled "Suspended adulthood", I comment on the kind of commune we are invited to imagine in *Jam and Jerusalem*: one that represents a deferment of adulthood.

Boomer comedy

Jam and Jerusalem is told from the perspective of a middle-aged middle-class rural homeowner, Sal, a profile that also fits the lead writer of the programme Jennifer Saunders at the time of the sitcom's initial broadcast.[2] *Jam and Jerusalem* is made both by and for people belonging to a

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[2] BBC reporter Laura Joint (Joint, 2006) reported on the filming of *Jam and Jerusalem* in 2006, which took place in North Tawton, a village in Devon, England. In the report, the president of North Tawton women's institute

particular age cohort, that of the "Baby Boomer" generation, people born between 1946 and 1964, a generational cohort that might be in a position to identify with Sal's predicament of being a homeowning retiree with adult children.

Jam and Jerusalem primarily centres on the residents of a small village in Devon and the members of the local Women's Guild. The central narrative development that frames the programme's story is main character Sal's discovery that her husband, the head of the local GP practice, has died unexpectedly of a heart attack. Given the small village setting, Sal is confined to a situation in which she is unable to grieve alone thanks to the persistent contact made by her neighbours, particularly those involved in the Women's Guild who she meets through the village church. The diegetic spaces of the sitcom include the church, the churchyard, the local shop, the pub, a local farm, the GP practice, and the moor where characters frequently take walks, though the most narratively central space is Sal's home. Much of the humour in *Jam and Jerusalem* is drawn from the repeated transgressions of Sal's privacy. She is visited almost constantly by neighbours who bring with them life dilemmas, illicitly shared secrets or requests to join in with various activities and schemes, often arriving at inopportune moments that create embarrassment or friction that drives the narrative forward. *Jam and Jerusalem* is for a large part a sitcom about the absence of anonymity in village life. As Sal remarks in one episode, referring to her house, "God, I must get locks put on both those doors".

To have written a warm and affectionate sitcom about a middle-class rural retiree is a stark departure for a writer who came to prominence as part of London's alternative comedy scene of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Both Saunders and longstanding comedy partner Dawn French, who both act in *Jam and Jerusalem* as the characters Caroline and Rosie respectively, initially began their work in comedy performance with London's "Comedy Store", a performance space closely associated with a set of performers who later became known for

comments on Saunders being a resident of the region. Saunders observed in her autobiography *Bonkers* that in writing *Jam and Jerusalem* she wanted to "write about the sort of community I was living in", referring to her experience of Devon, where she had relocated having lived in London until 1999 (2013: 289).

producing "alternative comedy" (Schaffer, 2016).[3] As Littlewood and Pickering (1998) suggest in their writing on alternative comedy, the acts and performers who were grouped under this label were primarily interested in rejecting "old-fashioned stuff" that relied on reductive categories like racial stereotypes and in carving out "new comic areas into which audiences could be drawn and challenged to habitual patterns of response" (1998: 298).

One of the most notable aspects of alternative comedy was the extent to which its practitioners set out to discomfort and shock the spectator in a way that was averse to the steady cosiness of traditional sitcoms. Rather than producing scripts that would retain a comforting familiarity for audiences, works of alternative comedy were more interested in promoting in the spectator the more discomforting feelings of confusion, irritation, disgust, loathing, and uneasiness. Much of the humour in these programmes could be described as puerile and aggressive: in the words of Eckhart Voights, it was "zany, frantic or surreal humour" that celebrated "the volcanic, disruptive id" (2016: 138, 143).

Saunders's most popular television creation, *Absolutely Fabulous*, which was first broadcast in 1992, contains these concerns of alternative comedy. *Absolutely Fabulous* centres on Edina (Jennifer Saunders), PR executive and resident of an expensive suburb of London, who lives with her daughter Saffron (Julia Sawalha) and is frequently accompanied by her heavy-drinking, former-model best friend, Patsy (Joanna Lumley). Saunders' performance of Edina creates moments of grotesque physical humour with Edina falling down stairs, crashing her car or throwing tantrums in the kitchen. *Absolutely Fabulous* plays on the inconsistencies of Edina who, at one moment, claims an interest in anti-materialist spiritualities and a desire to detox, and at the next moment is engaged in extended drinking sessions, extravagant lunches and the accrual of luxury designer goods. The sitcom performs a powerful satire on the bodily techniques of

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[3] The characters played by Saunders and French, Caroline and Rosie respectively, are both residents of the fictional town of Clatterford St. Mary, like main character Sal. Caroline is a somewhat snooty and sarcastic upper-middle-class horse aficionado. Rosie is a working-class factory labourer with multiple personality disorder. These characters are part of the reasonably large ensemble of characters, and are not central characters, although Rosie is featured more prominently in the show than Caroline.

glamour, fashion and dieting, as Kiene Brillenburg Wurth (2015) argues, and gained a strong

following among queer and feminist audiences in both the UK and the US.

Following the popular success of *Absolutely Fabulous* in the 1990s, Saunders' reputation

shifted in the respect that she became recognised as part of a screen media "mainstream" as

opposed to belonging to a set of performers promoting a disruption to the status quo.[4] In 2016,

notoriously conservative publication *The Reader's Digest* dedicated a glowing and adulating profile

to Saunders declaring her a "genius" (Goodier, 2016), which is telling of the extent to which she

became insulated from associations with transgressive comedy and became something akin to a

"national treasure".

Quite unlike the initial series of *Absolutely Fabulous* broadcast in the early 1990s, *Jam and*

Jerusalem performs the function of being a *Reader's-Digest*-friendly traditional sitcom. Because of

the sitcom's blend of comedy and melodrama, there are many moments of sincere emotional

intimacy and closeness between characters, which never stray into moments of aggression or

cartoon violence as the "alternative" sitcoms often would.[5] Characters show one another genuine

affection and the programme takes the space for occasional moments of quiet reflection.

Moreover, the programme treats its characters, who are predominantly women associated with

the Women's Guild, very charitably. While the eccentricities of the women come to the fore,

these are never presented in a way that seems intent on promoting discomfort nor is the basic

moral soundness of the women called into question. Moving away from the surrealism of

alternative comedy programs, *Jam and Jerusalem* is entirely naturalistic in its production, and with

its setting, mise-en-scène, as well as its acting styles, the programme consistently conveys a

strong sense of realism. The subject matter of *Jam and Jerusalem*, too, recalls the comfortable

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[4] As a good illustration of Saunders' "mainstream" status, she was cast in a major voice acting role in the Hollywood animated film, *Shrek 2* (2004; dir. Andrew Adamson, Kelly Asbury, and Conrad Vernon) in which she played the voice of Fairy Godmother.
[5] This tone of *Jam and Jerusalem* reflects perhaps both Saunders' screenwriting maturity as well as an intent on matching the expectations of a different, and more specifically older, intended audience than she had written for previously.

middle-class sitcom. This is a programme oriented around a retired nurse who lives in a Devon village and is surrounded by women she encounters through the church and the Women's Guild, and so the ensemble of characters, Tash aside, are fairly well insulated from the bohemian types that would typically occupy alternative comedy narratives.[6] Tash remains as an echo of Saunders' earlier work, a successor to Edina of *Absolutely Fabulous*, yet is now placed in an ensemble dominated by straight-laced, kind and well-meaning characters.

One of the distinctive features of *Jam and Jerusalem* is that it places at its centre an intergenerational household that comprises one newly widowed grandmother, one thirty-something single mother, and one young grandchild of primary school age. This aspect of the sitcom distinguishes it from many British sitcoms of previous decades which, as Frances Gray (1994) has observed, tended to be oriented around a family unit of husband and wife.

Nonetheless, like in older sitcoms, *Jam and Jerusalem* recycles the pairing of one eccentric character with a sensible one. While in the sitcoms of the twentieth-century that Frances Gray writes about it was the long-suffering wife who was the consistent common sense core of the family, in *Jam and Jerusalem* it is the older woman, mother and grandmother, Sal, who takes on this role and with whom the perspective of the story is aligned. *Jam and Jerusalem* treats Sal as the common sense anchor of the programme. Tash, conversely, follows a role previously filled in sitcoms by an erratic husband: that of being a disruptive influence on the household. Tash's inability to leave her mother's home, find stable employment, and create a secure home for her son, Raph, threaten to destabilise the family. On top of that, she plans to go travelling and join in with the activities of her New Age traveller accomplices, adding further chaos to the household. Her schemes to do a circus skills course, to become a wind farm monitor or an urban forager are all laughably flawed, while, even if any of her schemes were sensible ones, she is consistently revealed to be inconsistent, flaky and lacking in self-motivation. In the meantime, Sal does her

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[6] As Schaffer (2016: 387) observes, alternative comedians in the 1970s and 80s would often write about the left wing bohemian types of characters that they observed in their social milieu.

best to care for all the members of the household, even while preferring that they would leave. She very frequently steps in to show grandmotherly support to Raph, to give counsel to Tash, and to prepare dinners for the household, a performance of "doing it very well" even as she grieves the death of her husband (Gray, 1994: 83).[7]

Such a generational perspective is important to how Tash's suspended adulthood is positioned in the show. The experience of Tash as boomerang child is looked upon from a distance. It is not treated as a familiar experience mined affectionately for comedic purposes as it might have been done by a comedy writer of a younger generation. A productive comparison can be drawn here between Saunders' work in *Jam and Jerusalem* and the work of Phoebe Waller-Bridge in *Crashing* (Channel 4, 2016) and *Fleabag* (BBC, 2016-19) and Lena Dunham in *Girls* (HBO, 2012-17). The latter two television writers are heralded as generational voices for the "millennial" age cohort.[8] They both adopt a more sympathetic stance towards young characters navigating precarious situations than Saunders does towards her thirty-something female character in *Jam and Jerusalem*. Contrary to these more recent comedies, the perspective adopted in *Jam and Jerusalem* is one that seems more exasperated by suspended adulthood and the boomerang child than sympathetic.

Regretful entrapment

By having Tash occupy the space of suspended adulthood — she is in her mid-thirties but still lives with her mother — *Jam and Jerusalem* plays with what Frances Gray (1994) has described as the "comedy of entrapment", a persistent source of humour in British sitcoms whereby characters are trapped in a situation from which they wish to escape. Whereas American sitcoms

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[7] "Doing it very well" is a phrase that Gray uses to describe the role of the submissive, dutiful wife character in British sitcom, as opposed to the "domestic dragon" type of wife character which also features in sitcoms, Sybil Fawlty being an example of this latter type (Gray, 1994: 83).

[8] Dunham's *Girls* has been interpreted through generational and precarity lenses in Rebecca Wanzo's (2016) essay "Precarious-Girl Comedy", while Waller-Bridge has received British press attention constructing her as a generational voice speaking on behalf of "millennials" (De Casparis, 2016).

often feature narratives that involve an ensemble group of characters working with one another to resolve a bad situation and to change one another's lives, in British sitcom the underlying assumption is that the lives of its characters cannot possibly be changed and the characters remain trapped. As Gray writes: "if the message of American sitcoms is "we can work it out", that of British sitcoms is "you'll never get out"" (1994: 83). With Tash being consigned to her suspended adult status, such a predicament allows the sitcom to explore the dynamics of entrapment within the family home at the centre of the sitcom. The boomerang child here is a comic foil to an aspiring "empty nester", meaning a person with one or more adult children who wants those children to leave home.

For all the cathartic pleasure in laughing at these kinds of scenarios, there is also an underside of the comedy of entrapment that contains a degree of pathos and regret.[9] As Barry Langford (2005) argues, because of the boundaries to growth that sitcom characters experience, the characters feel the world outside of the immediate environment in which they live or work as a place where they do not belong. The episodic form of the sitcom means that narratives contain a degree of circularity by which characters remain in more or less the same situation as they were at the start of the episode. Relatedly, sitcoms are produced under certain conditions whereby there is typically one set that is reused in each episode and so while characters may venture out, the main dwelling place corresponding with the primary set is where they typically spend most of the narrative space of the story. Being familiar with these generic conventions, sitcom audiences know that the character will remain trapped in their situations. This knowingness of the outcome for the characters means that the entrapment and the tension it creates is released into comedy. But for the characters the situations in which they are positioned cause them pain.

In *Jam and Jerusalem*, the pain that is made into the dominant perspective of the programme is that belonging to Sal. That is to say, it is Sal's domestic discontent that suffuses

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[9] Frances Gray tellingly names her chapter on British sitcoms "British sitcom: a rather sad story" (2004: 80), which reinforces this point.

the story: a discontent at her lack of privacy in the small village in which she lives and in the Women's Guild group to which she belongs but also the discontent of having to share her domestic space with a thirty-something daughter who seems to take for granted Sal's hospitality. Because there is a tone of regret to the situation as seen through main character Sal's perspective, the version of the "boomerang child" that is animated in the sitcom is the version of this figure that is a resented and loathsome figure, the boomerang child as a source of regret to the parents with whom they share a house. The boomerang child is animated as a *figure of discontent*.

This version of the boomerang child is one that is reproduced frequently by think pieces, newspaper advice articles, and blog posts. A genre has emerged in national British newspapers from the period preceding the 2008 financial crisis to now whereby reporters, writers and commentators reflect with alarm on the boomerang child phenomenon or aspiring empty nester parents give testimony about their boomerang child experiences. Inhabiting a similar perspective to Saunders' writing in *Jam and Jerusalem* in the mid-2000s, this discontented public discourse covers topics ranging from how to navigate intergenerational cohabitation in an agreeable manner to how to eject one's boomerang child at the earliest opportunity or how to convert their presence in the house into a source of income.[10] In 2007, *The Express* ran an article under the headline "How boomerang children sap £11bn from your savings" (O'Grady, 2007), while a headline in *The Telegraph* in 2008 declared that "Grown up children turn family homes into war zones" (Tibbetts, 2008). In more recent years, similar commentary is no less scornful of boomerang children. A headline in *The Sunday Times* in 2019 read "How to launch adult offspring out of the nest" (Molloy, 2019), while *The Telegraph* featured an article in 2018 titled "Parents' lives made more miserable by 'boomerang generation'" (Knapton, 2018).[11]

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[10] See for instance *Guardian* article "Trouble emptying the nest? Just stop doing the ironing" (Williams, 2009) and *Daily Mail* article "How much should you be charging YOUR boomerang child?" (Green, 2019).

[11] The figure is also animated in the character of Tripp (Matthew McConaughey) in Hollywood rom-com *Failure to Launch* (2006, dir. Tom Dey) which was released the same year, 2006, as the first series of *Jam and Jerusalem* was first broadcast on the BBC. Also see the popular factual TV show *Hotel of Mum and Dad* (BBC, 2013-14) in which the participants — young couples who live with their parents — are filmed trying out living in their own houses and apartments.

That the underlying sense of regret to *Jam and Jerusalem* is Sal's regret — the regret of the aspiring empty nester — is well demonstrated by the mobile library storyline in the third series of *Jam and Jerusalem*. At the end of series two, Sal had presented Tash with a converted mobile library with the expectation that Tash would live nomadically with her partner Spike, who she meets in series two, and her son, Raph. But contrary to Sal's intentions, for the duration of series three the library remains parked on Sal's driveway in uncomfortably close proximity to her house, meaning that Tash and Spike continue to be on-and-off cohabitants with Sal, using her facilities and enjoying her food and hospitality.

It is tempting to read into this converted mobile library storyline that *Jam and Jerusalem* is making a commentary about unsuitable and cramped housing available to people with low income during a period of economic crisis. The third series of *Jam and Jerusalem* was first broadcast in 2009, one year after the global financial crisis and a year into a major economic recession in the UK. The image of the mobile library parked outside the countryside cottage works as a powerful symbol of an intergenerational divide whereby the security and material advantages of the Baby Boomer generation are placed into stark contrast with the less-than-comfortable living arrangements into which younger generations are forced by economic circumstances.[12] Viewed from this position, the mobile library storyline might prompt a sympathetic engagement with Tash, one that recognises her suspended adulthood as brought about in large part by forces beyond her control and as being a predicament shared by many other young people at the time that the series was first broadcast.

But this type of reading would be going against the grain of the sitcom, which is written from a generational perspective that is aligned with the social position of the retired rural homeowner. What comes across in the mobile home story is not so much the social problem of intergenerational inequality as simply the inconvenience and personal cost to Sal. Scenes dealing

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[12] This issue of intergenerational inequalities and the issues of "cramped" housing for young age cohorts is examined by the International Foundation's 2020 report "Rabbit hutch homes: the growth of micro homes" (Wiles, 2020).

with the aftermath of the mobile home crash, for instance, are saturated with a tone of annoyance towards Tash, most obviously expressed by her brother James, who is injured in the crash. Sal avoids the acerbic and snooty commentary of James but shares his annoyance.[13] The costs of the incident that are regretted by Sal are the damage to the cottage and Tash's continued presence on the driveway rather than the interruption of Tash's plans. The regretful resonances of the storyline, in other words, have more to do with the exasperation of Sal than of Tash. The mobile library storyline emphasises the negative construction of Tash's suspended adulthood, treating her living situation in the mobile home as deeply inconvenient to Sal, an affront to Sal's aspirations for peace and quiet at home.

Stay-at-home New Age traveller

One of the distinctive features of Tash is a striking contradiction in her character: she is someone who aspires to be a New Age traveller — that is to live a life that involves being mobile and living in a kind of genteel bohemian poverty — yet in actual fact is an idle homebody. Attributes imagined as belonging to the boomerang child, their being lazy and infantile, are replayed in Tash's character, who is indisciplined and flaky, as well as being excessively attached to the comforts of her mother's home. Tash is childlike, not in a sentimental "cute" manner, but to the point of being laughably absurd. Like Edina in *Absolutely Fabulous*, Tash is imaginative about what she wants for her life, but there is a gap between intention and action. The joke at Tash's expense is that she is so ridiculously flaky that, not only does she fail to fold down a permanent job, but she can barely keep up appearances as part of the oppositional subculture that she admires: the New Age travellers.

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[13] James, played by David Mitchell, operates as a mirror to Tash. His presence in scenes with Tash emphasises her chaotic nature because of his extreme cautiousness and excessive attachment to civility and manners. James conspicuously possesses "grown up" qualities that Tash has failed to achieve: he is logical and rational, he has left home, he is hardworking, and he has an established profession in which he cares for others since he works as a GP in the local medical practice.

The characterisation of Tash as a New Age traveller is excessive and grossly exaggerated. This characterisation is established through the visual signifiers of Tash's clothing and personal style. She wears loosely fitting clothing that appears worn and used. She has blonde dreadlocks. Her characterisation as New Age traveller also emerges from her activities and interests: she enjoys juggling and other circus skills, she collects runes, she attends Glastonbury, she is a druid, she attends protests at political summits, she practices bin-raiding and foraging. Tash's character combines so many of the stereotypical elements of the New Age traveller that she seems an absurdly over the top caricature.

The excessive visual and narrative clues as to Tash's status as New Age traveller were perhaps necessary for a 2006 audience given that this subculture is more obviously one linked to the 1980s and 90s. The most concentrated news media coverage of New Age travellers — who were also known as "crusties" — was consigned to these two decades.[14] As sociologist Kevin Hetherington observes, the travellers were usually characterised among the British press and public at this time as "dirty, unkempt, strangely dressed young people who shunned the work ethic, embraced the drug culture and had taken to the road as nomads" (2000: 1). One notable instance of the subculture's coverage was the Battle of the Beanfield of 1985 in which a convoy of hundreds of New Age travellers was blocked by police. The vehicles of the travellers were subsequently attacked, and many travellers violently removed from their vehicles and arrested, with the event receiving national news coverage.[15] Another example signals the New Age travellers as a component of the nineties rave scene. Castlemorton common festival of 1992, a huge free party involving more than 20,000 participants, of which New Age travellers were a part, attracted large scale attention from the mainstream British press that Hetherington

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[14] For instance see *The Sunday Telegraph* report "coming of age on the open road" (Jaffé-Pearce 1993); *The Times* report "landowners fear next move of hippy convoys" (Seton, 1992); see Kevin Hetherington (2000) for a comprehensive summary and analysis of the ways in which the New Age travellers were imagined and perceived among the British press and public in these two decades.
[15] This event was the subject of a Channel 4 documentary titled "Operation Solstice/Orgreave" first broadcast in 1991; see Hetherington (2000: 32) for discussion.

characterises as a moral panic in which the New Age travellers operated as "folk devils" (2000: 14).[16] Since these events were over a decade old by the time *Jam and Jerusalem* was produced, the excessive caricatured stylings of Tash work to reanimate the contested figure of the New Age traveller or crusty that was perhaps not as fresh in the public imagination in 2006 as it once was.

As an emblematic New Age traveller, Tash is persistently associated with dirt and uncleanliness, reproducing a disparaging perspective of New Age travellers as "soap dodgers" (Fox, 2018). As Dan Fox notes, the travellers were frequently dismissed in the public imagination as "simply a bunch of dropouts in need of a shower" (2018: 4). In one scene, for instance, Tash's brother, James, makes a pointed suggestion about Tash's personal hygiene. Tash, in perhaps the single scene in which she shows an entrepreneurial drive, has established a handmade soap stall as part of a bring-and-buy sale at the village hall near Sal's cottage. James approaches the stall and, in reference to the soap, remarks: "good lord, perhaps you should distribute it amongst your friends." By Tash's "friends", James refers to the New Age Traveller group to which Tash loosely belongs, who we learned earlier in the episode have had the running water to their site cut off. In another scene, for example, as Tash enters the kitchen of the family home, Sal removes a small leaf from Tash's hair and asks "What's this? Dinner or camouflage?".[17]

Yet, despite her surface level attachment to becoming a New Age traveller, throughout the various series of the sitcom Tash is never able to consistently keep up appearances as a person who occupies this identity. One of the recurring jokes is that despite the association between Tash and the "crusties" she is rarely dirty and unwashed. Tash is incapable of adopting the grotesque personal style of the New Age travellers with any consistency and displays no signs of nomadic hardship. Given her repeated failure to stay with the New Age travellers for any prolonged period and her repeated returns to her mother's home, Tash takes the ample

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[16] For indicative examples of press commentary see e.g. Crampton (1992); Herbert (1992).
[17] By making a joke that calls attention to Tash's dreadlocks as being dirty, it is of note that the sitcom reproduces a long-running racist association between dreadlocks and dirt, one that the scene does not attempt to complicate or to expose in any way (see Mercer, 1987 for discussion of black hair/style politics).

opportunities presented to her to make use of Sal's facilities. She is frequently seen wearing only a towel having apparently just come out of the shower. In a further scene, Tash eats breakfast while wearing a pair of comfortable pyjamas adorned with the image of a cartoon dog, attire that her mother describes as "Disney pyjamas". Here we witness someone who is apparently part of a subculture that is based on anti-materialism and the rejection of consumer culture and mainstream brands wearing the merchandise of perhaps the entertainment industries' most famous brand of all. It is also striking that a character who one might imagine would, if following the New Age traveller lifestyle "correctly", have sparse access to a washing machine, wears clean and well-maintained clothes designed for reclining at home. Like the resented figure of the boomerang child, Tash is imagined as privileging leisure and comfort before work and hardship.

Such a construction of Tash is also found in a sequence organised around Tash's attempts to go foraging for free food. The initial shots in the sequence show Tash wandering around fields while carrying a basket, occasionally crouching and scouring the ground. These shots then cut to the back alley at the rear of the local shop where a large bin is visible next to the backdoor of the shop. Tash moves into shot, and having briskly looked around her, dives into the bin. The shop attendant then exits the back door of the shop, opens the lid of the bin and asks Tash "would you like a bag for life?". This scene then cuts to Sal's kitchen, where Tash has opened the refrigerator and is cramming as many items into her arms as she can carry. James walks in and, observing the situation, remarks, in a comment that punctuates the entire sequence, "Mother nature's source of fruitful abundance...or mum's fridge". In this sequence, Tash's inability to escape the hallmarks of consumer culture and modernity are apparent. When attempting the practice of bin raiding, which reveals an intent on living off the waste and excess of contemporary society, Tash is presented with the offer of doing so with a plastic bag, an aid to easy consumption. It seemingly does not take long for Tash to abandon her foraging scheme and resort to her habitual return to her mother's home. The prospect of crawling around muddy

fields or the bottom of bins is replaced by the reassuring clean modern kitchen with well-stocked refrigerator.

The fact that this comic motif of Tash's return to the family home is so significant to *Jam and Jerusalem*'s narrative is evident in the fact that it is chosen to close the final episode of the second series of the programme. This episode is centred on Tash's marriage to fellow New Age traveller, Spike. The penultimate scene of the episode shows Tash, Spike and Raph entering the converted mobile library which is to be their new home, to their obvious delight. The final scene, a kind of epilogue moment, meanwhile, subverts the apparent "happily ever after" closure of this moment of conjugal harmony. Sal is in the utility room of her home. She unplugs something from a plug socket only to hear a cry from Tash: "Mum, I'm drying my hair!". The camera moves from the utility room to the exterior of the house where an electrical cable is visible. The camera follows the cable and pans to reveal that the mobile library of the previous scene is parked immediately outside of the house. The final shot before the closing credits is a wide shot of Sal's home with the mobile library parked in the drive, serving as a reminder of Tash's inescapable attachment to Sal's home, her perpetual reliance on her mother and the household appliances of comfortable modern living, with the cable as umbilical cord uniting mother and daughter.[18]

This sequence is striking for the sheer variety of ways in which Tash — a character in her mid-thirties — is imaginatively bound up with an image of an infant or adolescent. The "mum I'm drying my hair" recalls a stereotypical moody adolescent responding to a straightforward

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[18] That Tash's use of contemporary electric powered devices are used to discredit her claims to being a socially conscious radical is a familiar trope to how left-wing protest subcultures are occasionally addressed on British popular television. In 2011, two years after *Jam and Jerusalem* stopped being made by the BBC, conservative politician Louise Mensch appeared on the news parody panel show *Have I Got News For You* where she mocked Occupy protesters in London because their presence had led to the "biggest ever queues at Starbucks" and for their use of iPhones. The joke surfaced a widely held opinion: that someone can't be both a truly discontent activist while using contemporary consumer products and that to claim to be the former while doing the latter is absurd (see Fisher, 2012 for discussion). The jokes about Tash and her association with refrigerators and hair dryers prefigures the Louise Mensch joke in that they are similarly anchored in a viewpoint that baits the "crusty" protest Left for not being true to some unattainable anarcho-primitivist state.

interaction with a parent with disproportionate anger.[19] The electric power cord connecting

mobile library to cottage, the umbilical-like connection between mother and daughter,

meanwhile, imaginatively cues Tash as akin to a new-born baby, the degree of her

overdependence on her mother rendered materially in the cord connecting the dwelling places of

the two women.

More broadly, across all the scenes in which Tash's characterisation is sketched out in the

sitcom, Tash's New Age traveller style is made out to be a kind of costume that Tash can take on

and off when she pleases. In the fact that she does appear to continuously remove and reapply

the costume Tash is constructed as flaky: she conspicuously fails to stick to the principles that

she often loudly declares to her mother. This comic flaw of Tash's means that her character

deploys a specific perspective about the boomerang child, that which sees boomerang children as

simultaneously lazy — with their indiscipline and indolent nature being the factor that prevents

them from finding stable work rather than wider economic conditions — and at the same time

being so overdependent on their parents that even basic household tasks are beyond them or so

immaturely self-centred that they are unwilling to share the load of domestic labour. The way in

which Tash is made to relate to the New Age traveller stereotype, then, is as an overgrown infant

who is looked upon from the perspective of *Jam and Jerusalem* with a palpable disdain.

Selfish feminist

I have argued so far that Tash is positioned in *Jam and Jerusalem* through the lens of Sal's

domestic discontent: her resentment at cohabiting with Tash. It is also true that Tash is herself a

domestically discontented character. She wishes to live the more countercultural lifestyle that she

sees in the New Age travellers, and as part of this wish Tash wants to share out caring

responsibilities for her son Raph and to rethink her role as mother to Raph. Across the multiple

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[19] Here we can perhaps see Saunders drawing inspiration from one of the most notable British sketch comedy characters of the 1990s, Kevin The Teenager, played by Harry Enfield in *Harry Enfield and Chums* (BBC, 1990-98).

series of the sitcom, we are invited to see Tash's domestic discontent as ridiculous because it is expressed consistently in the mode of tactless and self-centred complaining and a neglect to care for her family. Tash's character then is made to resemble not only boomerang child as object of resentment but also another figure of conservative Right loathing, the selfish feminist (Tyler, 2007; Ahmed, 2017).

As is revealed across various scenes involving Tash and son, Raph, Tash's desire for a kind of liberation from the role of "mother" is conflated with an almost entirely inept approach to parenting. In one scene, Tash enters Sal's home with Raph, who is dressed smartly in his school uniform, apparently ready to attend school. Sal is startled to see them and reminds Tash that it is a Saturday, adding with reference to Raph, "that poor child". In another scene, during an argument between the pair, Sal urges Tash to recognise that her life must be organised around certain schedules and that she must be attentive to Raph's needs. Tash says, "But I'm his best friend, mum", to which Sal forcefully replies, "No, you are his mother". Tash's "best friend" comment seems to engage in a kind of naive attempt to re-imagine what it means to be a mother but more obviously exposes Tash as existing in a state of denial. It is also of note that in the first scene to which we are introduced to Tash in the first episode of the sitcom, the main conflict of the scene is Tash's request of Sal that she takes care of Raph while Tash goes away to a festival, a request she makes with a distinct impatience and tactlessness.

To some degree this aspect of Tash's characterisation — her desire to move beyond her role as mother and to share out caring responsibilities — reflects some of the impetus and motivation for radical feminists of joining or forming a commune (Segal, 1983). One of the possible benefits that some feminists saw in the commune is that childcare can be collectivised, meaning that children can in theory be looked after by adults who are not their biological parents and thus allowing mothers of the commune some free time for self-directed activity. This aspect of the commune promises one kind of liberation, an opportunity for parents to set goals that are

not directly tied to their children's immediate wellbeing and needs, since they know that the children are being cared for by another member of the commune.

When this set of emancipatory desires are translated into Tash's character, though, they appear most obviously as a conspicuous self-absorption and self-centeredness whereby she barely notices what is going on in her son's life and privileges her own desires above the needs of her son. In one scene, for instance, Sal has Tash and James round for dinner, along with Spike and Raph. She has bought them all chocolate Easter eggs. When Raph is away from the dining table, Tash swaps her egg for Raph's citing her dislike of dark chocolate. Raph subsequently expresses his upset and annoyance at the unsolicited swap. This moment reveals an impulsive childlike quality to Tash. Rather than being a golden child of the counterculture who has freed herself from the repressions of adult civility — which is how one might imagine Tash to posture herself — she is positioned here simply as a selfish brat, unable to conduct herself with any degree of empathy for her child. In another episode, Tash invents a scheme to enter Glastonbury festival without a ticket in which she uses Raph as a decoy. Raph is to play the role of lost child, and Tash as a kind stranger, with the hope that on bringing Raph to the entrance Tash will be admitted into the festival. Raph expresses his unhappiness at the idea of going along with the plan and says he would prefer to stay with his grandmother, but, against his wishes, is dragged along to participate in the scheme, Tash pursuing her fantasy without care for the feelings of her son. As Sal at one point says to Tash, "you can be a selfish little cow sometimes".

The slippage that is evident here between the radical politics of childcare with which Tash is associated by virtue of being an aspiring New Age traveller and accusations of selfishness is one that is familiar when it comes to public imaginings of feminism, as Imogen Tyler (2007) has discussed in her essay "The Selfish Feminist: Public Images of Women's Liberation". Tyler argues that many prominent cultural observers and critics of feminism after the women's movement of the 1960s and 70s positioned what they saw as a crisis in the traditional family as being caused by the self-centeredness and selfishness of feminists. The intention to liberate

oneself was, through this anti-feminist perspective, made to appear as an intention to look out only for oneself at the expense of one's familial relationships. Tyler's account here can be read alongside journalist Ellen Willis's (2012) essay "The Family: Love it or leave it" first published in 1979 in which she describes the experience of being a radical feminist who supported feminist revolution and the practice of communal child-rearing during the 1970s. Willis notes that she was looked upon by those of her peers who did not share her feminism as living a kind of perpetual adolescence.

As in the case of Tash's excessive attachment to the comfort and convenience of her mother's home, the accusation she receives of selfishness is compounded by the accusation that she is not acting her age, in other words the selfish feminist stereotype that she recreates fits seamlessly with her suspended adulthood status. Part of her selfishness is narrated in the programme as a failure to take her "correct" generational position. Sal, for instance, in one of her intermittent interventions says to Tash that she is "too old" to be following the New Age traveller lifestyle and she needs to "get it together", meaning she should form a separate nuclear family unit distinct from Sal's household.

Tash's deliberation about whether to leave the village and join up with the commune to which she loosely belongs at the beginning of the first series is another striking storyline in which the sitcom positions her as "selfish feminist". The key scene of this storyline occurs in the third episode of the first series. Tash tells Sal of the "amazing, like, blow-your-mind news" that she has received which is that she has been invited to join up with the commune for six months, with the plan being to live in a yurt. The contentious condition attached to the plan is that she would have to leave her son Raph in the care of Sal. Her desire to temporarily escape the responsibility of lone parenthood is shamed by Sal who without hesitation refuses to look after Raph and is incredulous with Tash for making this request. What Tash sees as amazing news is bracketed as a selfish request and the happiness that Tash feels at the prospect of joining up with the New Age traveller group is from the perspective to which we are aligned in the sitcom

remarkably silly: a poor substitute for staying put and bearing sole responsibility for the care of her son.

A helpful way of characterising Tash's status as selfish feminist is to think of the selfish feminist figure through Sara Ahmed's (2017) notion of the "affect alien". As Ahmed characterises the selfish feminist/affect alien figure, it describes someone who is "made happy by the wrong things" (2017: 64). Ahmed makes the point that the happiness of the affect alien is discredited: "seen as selfish, silly, inauthentic, as a substitute for the real thing" (2017: 64).

Tash is constructed in the *Jam and Jerusalem* script as spending most of the story wanting the wrong things only to redeem herself and become a sympathetic character when the objects of her desire align with Sal's. The moments when this alignment occurs are those in which she abandons her instincts against family sentimentality and settles for a course of action that aims towards a heterofamilial "good life" (Berlant, 2011). In such moments, Tash is treated most charitably by the sitcom. Tash's wedding ceremony, where she marries her partner Spike, is one of those moments. The wedding, which occurs in the finale of series two, is entirely approved of and encouraged by Sal, a marker of a conventional life course and "settling down". The ceremony takes place in an area of woodland by the village and is attended by most of the ensemble of characters. This wedding sequence is played out with a consistently warm and sentimental tone, aspiring towards being an uncomplicatedly touching part of the programme. Meanwhile, in the third series, having argued with Sal about her parenting style, Tash decides to throw a van warming party for Raph in order to help him feel more at home while staying in the mobile library where he and his mother live with Spike. Expressing her satisfaction at Tash's generous plan, Sal concedes that she is a "good mum" after all.

Here *Jam and Jerusalem* resorts to the device of a harmonious family resolution to close various narrative tensions. The wedding sequence relies on the storytelling grammar of the Hollywood romance, where the narrative culminates in a wedding which is a cathartic moment that releases the preceding tension of the romantic storyline (Macdowell, 2013). Meanwhile the

van warming party sequence seems to contain the "we can work it out" spirit of the American family sitcom, as discussed by Frances Gray (1994). Such moments work to reinforce the negative portrayal of Tash as self-centred overgrown child radical. When Tash temporarily ascends the state of suspended adulthood, *Jam and Jerusalem* presents her in her most straightforwardly upbeat scenes. The scenes in which Tash is striving for something different — for resolving her parenting dilemmas in a transgressive manner — by contrast are shown to keep Tash in a state of tension, and so her radical feminist intentions come across, from the perspective that *Jam and Jerusalem* is presenting to its audience, as all the more foolish.

The figures of boomerang child and selfish feminist, as they are animated in Tash's character, are connected by the fact that they both represent a disruption and disturbance to a conventional mechanism of generational succession, meaning a process by which roles and responsibilities are passed from one generation to another. Sal wants to pass on the baton of responsibility for Raph, but Tash refuses to inhabit the role of mother in a conventional and sufficiently "adult" manner. The commune in the story represents an interruption to the workings of this generational mechanism because Tash's desire to join a commune threatens to direct her further away from a course of action in which she takes responsibility for caring for Raph. The impression we are left with of the New Age traveller commune, then, is as the domain of a selfish feminist refusing to "grow up" as her mother insists.

Suspended adulthood

The figure of the commune is imagined in *Jam and Jerusalem* through Tash as the emblematic commune dweller of the programme. I have argued for the crucial importance in considering the generational perspective from which the sitcom is written, one that adheres to a perspective of the boomerang child as an object of resentment. *Jam and Jerusalem* is compatible with a socially conservative outlook that is concerned with the inconveniences and irritations of providing a home for one's adult child. In Tash's character, *Jam and Jerusalem* combines the stereotypes of

boomerang child and selfish feminist, which are both *personas non grata* from the perspective of the socially conservative retiree. Tash is a boomerang child in that she remains living with her mother despite being in her thirties. She is a selfish feminist in that she is extremely self-absorbed and insensitive to the needs of her son while seeking to reimagine the role of "mother" and share out childcare responsibilities. Overall, the sitcom constructs Tash as being lazy, indolent, and remarkably infantile. Unlike the Dales in "Low Impact House", Tash favours inaction and is to be found most of the time languishing idly in her mother's home.

The figure of the commune is imagined as bound to Tash's status as a self-absorbed child. The desire to join up with a New Age traveller commune is just one of many unfulfilled schemes and plans of Tash's. The commune is a space whose inaccessibility to Tash reveals both her inability to commit to her schemes and her nagging sense of family obligation: it is space that according to the logic of *Jam and Jerusalem*'s narrative is better avoided should Tash move beyond a perpetual adolescence. Moreover, from what we learn of the New Age travellers in the story, the sitcom conveys an image of the commune as a pollutant: we are invited to see it as dirty, unkempt, and repellent owing to the nomadic tribe of crusties imagined as dwelling there.

Strikingly, the commune is invisible in the sitcom. We do not get to see a physical manifestation of the commune that Tash wishes to join up with. One way of making sense of its invisibility is to note that *Jam and Jerusalem* maintains a key sitcom convention: that of affording most of its narrative space to a primary dwelling that remains constant throughout all episodes. In this case, that space is the multigenerational family home of Sal's cottage. The commune represents one component of the world "out there" to which the sitcom characters, regrettably to them, do not belong. The commune's invisibility allows *Jam and Jerusalem* to concentrate on storylines that foremost emphasise Sal's situation, that of being a recently widowed retiree putting up with the nuisance of housing Tash.

The overall storyline of Sal and Tash's cohabitation symbolises a discontentedness with multigenerational living arrangements, an experimentation in living often forced by necessity

given the structural economic conditions faced by age cohorts succeeding the "baby boomer" generation. It is in this aspect of the sitcom's narrative that we can locate the commune's imaginary vitality. The absent presence of the commune in the story conveys Tash's desire to escape the confines of her suspended adulthood status and Sal's frustration at Tash's inability to "grow up". These kinds of discontent — Sal's and Tash's separate frustrations — are familiar in the mid-2000s and late-2010s. This period coincides with the remarkable spread of a discontented public discourse about boomerang children and the tensions that are generated by multigenerational living arrangements enforced by necessity. What the narrative device of the longed-for commune permits, then, is the exploration of a timely and peculiarly fraught matter that would only expand in relevance after *Jam and Jerusalem* was discontinued in 2009.

The notion that the commune is a space occupied by those experiencing a suspended adulthood is reproduced in the following case study programme that I investigate, a story of crime drama *Waking the Dead* titled "Double Bind". The experiences of the commune dwellers in the case of "Double Bind", though, are significantly darker and more troubling than those that make up the narrative of *Jam and Jerusalem*. The deferral of adulthood in this case comes at a cost for two main characters of the incursion of deep psychological wounds, the warning being that the commune is not a safe plaything as it appears to be for Tash in *Jam and Jerusalem*. If Tash's character in *Jam and Jerusalem* presents us with a person attracted to the commune as naive idealist, the story in "Double Bind" imagines what occurs in the interaction between naive idealist and manipulator by exploring the paired figures of acid casualty and cult leader.

Chapter Four: Acid casualties in *Waking the Dead*

Detective Superintendent Peter Boyd (Trevor Eve) and DC Stella Goodman (Félicité Du Jeu) briskly exit an unmarked police car. With expressions of serious intent, the pair march over to a key person of interest in their investigation, gardening business owner Chris Lennon (Greg Hicks). Their urgency is the result of Chris's brother Daniel (Miles Anderson) having escaped from a secure psychiatric unit and now being on the run from the police. Boyd and Goodman work with haste. They press Chris for information about his brother. All parties to the conversation furrow their brows when the 1960s is mentioned, the decade in which Daniel's mental health began to deteriorate. "What started with music, philosophy, politics, drugs," says Chris, "ended in...well you know what it ended in. He got ill. Very ill." The investigation of Boyd and his team had started when a body was discovered at a large house in West London that had previously hosted a therapeutic commune. As the investigation proceeds, the team uncover the extent to which the commune had left a harrowing mark on the lives of multiple people, resulting in murder, abuse, the neglect of vulnerable people, and, of pressing concern to the police unit, a psychiatric patient on the loose.

This investigation is one conducted by the police unit of BBC forensic crime drama *Waking the Dead* (BBC, 2000-11) in the story titled "Double Bind". *Waking the Dead*'s key narrative focus was on investigations into cold cases, cases that had been left dormant and unresolved or which refer to criminal acts committed some years prior to the investigation. Each story of *Waking the Dead* focuses on a unique cold case investigation and is told over the course of two episodes, originally broadcast over two consecutive nights on BBC One. "Double Bind" explores the 60s counterculture. The commune at the centre of the narrative is an experimental psychotherapeutic commune led by fringe psychiatrist Dr Raymond Parke (Richard Johnson). Residents of the commune are a mixture of vulnerable teenagers with psychiatric conditions and trainees in psychiatry who work with Parke. The commune is an experimental side project for

Parke who is also a chief consultant at a nearby hospital. It is situated in a large Victorian house, which is squatted by the commune's residents. Like the New Age traveller commune as narrated in *Jam and Jerusalem*, the sixties therapeutic commune is imagined as a space occupied by people discontent with their domestic lives. This is the case with Daniel Lennon in the story, who lives in an emotionally dysfunctional family environment before fleeing to the commune.

In this chapter, I explore the animation of the figures of "the cult leader" and "the acid casualty" in the retelling of the sixties counterculture and the therapeutic commune in "Double Bind". By "the cult leader", I mean a figure that denotes a charismatic person who has a significant group following containing people who devote themselves to, or are coerced into, acting out the cult leader's instructions. By "acid casualty", I mean a figure that denotes a person who has been irretrievably damaged by their experience of ingesting LSD. Both figures, as I explore further below, typify the "end of the sixties", a period marking an interruption to the mood of optimism in the 1960s and thought of as revealing the sixties counterculture to contain dark impulses towards violence, terror, and psychological injury (Riley, 2019).

I trace the way in which these figures are imagined such that they map onto familiar generic types in "wound culture" stories. By "wound culture", I am referring to contemporary cultures that show interest in victim/survivor narratives and the display of psychic and physical wounds that have been suffered by a wounded subject. Mark Seltzer writes of wound culture as describing "the public fascination with torn and open bodies and with torn and open persons, a collective gathering around trauma, shock and the wound" (1998: 1). I characterise *Waking the Dead* as a programme that tells wound culture stories because of its focus on traumatic criminal incidents from past years and decades. "Wound culture" is useful in thinking about forensic crime drama as a genre of police procedural and in establishing why the figures of cult leader and acid casualty have imaginary vitality during the period I examine.

My argument explores how the characters bound up with the commune — the commune's chief organiser Raymond Parke and two troubled men who spent time at the

commune, Daniel and Chris Lennon — resemble "the cult leader" and "the acid casualty", while considering how these figures take on the characteristics and attributes of the more general types of "perpetrator of abuse" and "victim/survivor". I argue that "Double Bind" animates the cult leader and makes this figure especially provocative in the contemporary climate by making Parke resemble a high profile institutional offender. The show introduces "ripped from the headlines" details to the narrative to create this impression, by which I mean it features fictional scenarios that evoke actually-existing events or controversies that had been publicised in news media in the months and years preceding the show's broadcast. "Double Bind" thus mobilises an outrage and anger with high profile offenders that circulated in the mid-2000s and after. I position the viewing address of the show as inviting its audience to inhabit a stance of anger and outrage towards the malignant cult leader. This perspective is strengthened by the show's depiction of two tragic victims/survivors of the commune, brothers Daniel and Chris, whose pain is foregrounded in the story, the cause of which is traced back primarily to their time spent at the commune. Put in terms of this thesis's main theme of domestic discontent, "Double Bind" presents a lens of discontent about high profile abusive men as the primary lens through which to read the characters of the story and the historical crime scene that is the psychotherapeutic commune. The cult leader is animated as a *figure of discontent*, and the commune as a place that generates casualties.

The overall argument in the chapter moves from introducing the generic conventions of *Waking the Dead* and the genre of "forensic noir" (Doherty, 2003; Steenberg, 2013) to examining how "the cult leader" and "the acid casualty" are animated in "Double Bind". The chapter includes four sections plus a concluding section. In the first section, titled "Forensic noir and the traumatic sixties", I comment on *Waking the Dead*'s convention of re-examining especially shocking events from recent history. This feature of the programme, I argue, is a key factor in why "Double Bind" explores two figures bound up with the end of the 1960s, a period frequently imagined as traumatic. In the second section, titled "Synopsis", I sketch out a synopsis

of the convoluted plot of "Double Bind" with the intention of introducing the key characters and events of the narrative as a context to the subsequent analysis. In the third section, titled "Cult leader", I explore the radical psychiatrist character in the story, Raymond Parke. I argue that we are invited to see Parke as a cult leader who closely resembles an institutional offender of abuse and to inhabit a position of outrage, shock, and aversion towards him. In the fourth section, titled "Acid casualty", I focus on the pair of acid casualty characters in the story, Daniel and Chris Lennon. I argue that, through an emphasis on the pain of the Lennon brothers, the narrative positions the cult leader as a figure of discontent since Parke and his experimental commune caused the brothers' pain. In the concluding section, titled "Scene of injury", I stress that *Waking the Dead* deploys a remarkably negative imagining of the commune as the site in which traumatic wounds are inflicted.

Forensic noir and the traumatic sixties

Waking the Dead was produced during a transitional moment in contemporary British crime television. The pilot episode of the programme was broadcast in 2000, and the show then ran for nine series before being discontinued by the BBC in 2011. The time scale of *Waking the Dead*'s broadcast career places it a juncture between the dominance in broadcast schedules of more traditional detective series and murder mysteries of the 1980s and 90s like *Bergerac* (BBC, 1981-91), *Inspector Morse* (ITV, 1987-2000), and *Agatha Christie's Poirot* (ITV, 1989-2013) and the popular success of "Nordic noir" inspired crime television of the 2010s, programmes like *Line of Duty* (BBC, 2012-), *Happy Valley* (BBC, 2014-), *Broadchurch* (ITV, 2013-17), *Hinterland* (S4C/BBC, 2013-16), and *Fortitude* (Sky Atlantic, 2015-18). While the earlier set of work contained troubled detectives racked by interior turmoil, which is also true of the later programmes, the more recent television crime of the "Nordic" sensibility is marked for its much more tangible unhappiness in tone, evidenced in bleak settings, the use of darkening filters and

hues, and through extended narrative space afforded to the protracted personal struggles of detectives.[1]

One of the distinguishing features of *Waking the Dead* in comparison with other crime dramas of the 2000s was the extent to which the programme consistently pursued a dark and "gritty" tone before the "Nordic noir" style of crime drama became so popular on British television in the 2010s. *Radio Times* journalist David Brown wrote of the programme as carving out "its own niche in the harrowing gloomiverse that is the two-part psychological thriller" (Brown, 2008: para. 2). The drama repeatedly returned to the dark hinterland of British social life and recent history, dealing with child abuse, heroin addiction, snuff films, stalkers, corrupt clergy, mass shootings, gang violence, among other themes.[2]

Waking the Dead represented a subgenre that was positioned at the popular cutting edge of television crime drama at the time: forensic noir. "Forensic noir" is the evocative term coined by cultural studies scholar Thomas Doherty (2003) and later taken up by Lindsay Steenberg (2013) to describe the curious generic hybrid that programmes like *Waking the Dead* adopted in the 2000s. As Steenberg has argued, forensic noir is such an appropriate term for describing programmes of *Waking the Dead*'s ilk because it evokes the combination that such programmes make between a focus on the procedures of forensic science and the overwhelming atmosphere of corruption, darkness and dread that envelops the characters. A crucial component of forensic noir is its display of the processes and spaces of forensic science. Scenes commonly feature the dissection of human bodies in the morgue or processes of scientific analysis in the laboratory. The characters meanwhile move through these spaces with a sense of unease, a grim determination, as though they are witnessing awful events unfolding without a sense of shock

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[1] See Glen Creeber (2015) for discussion.
[2] Child abuse is tackled in the stories "Breaking Glass" (series 3), "The Hardest Word" (series 4), and "Mask of Sanity" (series 6), heroin addiction in the recurring storyline in series 7 about DS Boyd's son Luke, who dies of a heroin overdose in the story "Wounds" (series 7), a snuff film features in "Missing Persons" (series 7), stalkers in "Every Breath You Take" (series 1), corrupt clergy in "Blind Beggar" (series 1), mass shootings in "Multistorey" (series 3), and gang violence in "Deathwatch" (series 2), and "Final Cut" (series 3).

and have resigned themselves to the dark sides of human nature. Steenberg, with Paolo Russo, would later call this latter aspect of forensic noir a "post-apocalyptic mode of address" (Russo & Steenberg, 2016: 300). They refer here to the pervasive tone of loss that the dramas invoke and the way in which the narratives offer audiences "the simultaneous confirmation of their belief that the world is broken and reconfirmation that flawed but moral men and women might be able to figure out the truth about what happened" (2016: 300).

Waking the Dead — and other programmes of the forensic noir subgenre — place a consistent emphasis on what Seltzer calls "the opening of private and bodily and psychic interiors" (1998: 253). Such programmes show both injured, bruised and maimed bodies and the psychic interiors of traumatised characters who undergo psychological profiling or police interviews in which they confess their fears and past involvement in criminal incidents. The narrative thrust of many *Waking the Dead* storylines typically begins with the exhumation of a body and the script will normally create opportunities for the camera to linger on dissected bodies or flashbacks to gory assaults. The presence of trauma is also crucial. *Waking the Dead* episodes frequently replay the crime drama trope of including a flashback to a traumatic event in the life of a criminal character, which is taken to motivate their past action.[3]

Because forensic noir narratives are so centrally organised around "reconstructing, excavating, exhuming, archiving", in the words of Russo and Steenberg (2016: 300), this focus allows *Waking the Dead* to return to examine specific historical events.[4] A distinctive element of *Waking the Dead* is the programme's emphasis on returning to significant milestones of the recent past, those that articulate some noteworthy element of British identity and collective memory. Examples of the kind of nationally traumatic events that *Waking the Dead* dramatises are the

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[3] See Roger Luckhurst's (2008) discussion of the flashback as a visual device in film and television in his chapter titled "Flashbacks, mosaics and loops: trauma and narrative cinema". See also Mark Seltzer's commentary on the prevalence and typically perfunctory character of crime fiction's invocation of trauma through flashbacks (1998: 255).
[4] As television studies scholar Jeremy Ridgman observes, the programme "became more and more ambitious in its penetration of events set against particular historical moments" (2012: 10).

Balkans War as dramatised in "Pieta", or the invasion of Iraq, as featured in the story "Duty and Honour". Meanwhile, the other episodes in series 6 of *Waking the Dead* alongside "Double Bind" revisited the second Sudanese civil war, the closure of a city bank during the 1990s recession, a scheme of abuse in a children's care home in the 1970s and 80s, and London during the Second World War. This element of the programme signals the BBC's public broadcasting ethos being put to work. Because recent historical or "in the headlines" events are dramatised in such a way that their contexts and details are explained through the discussions in the police team, there is an element of education at work in the narratives, in keeping with this important element of public service broadcasting, albeit combined with the satisfying catharsis of witnessing investigators lay a cold case to rest. *Waking the Dead* might be categorised in part as "historical event television", that which is a "kind of popular history lesson for the audience" in which the content of the official culture of memory is connected with experiences with which audiences may be familiar through engaging fictionalised narratives (Ebbrecht, 2007: 37).[5]

Significantly, the historical events that *Waking the Dead* returns to are all constructed as indisputably traumatic ones from the perspective of the police team, that is the perspective to which the stories are aligned. The *Waking the Dead* storylines invite its audience into a shared perspective on recent historical events that, to borrow a formulation of Seltzer's, amounts to an "identification with the world insofar as it is a hostile place" (1998: 278). The scripting of the programme ensures that it is always the most injurious, shocking experiences associated with these events that will form the basis of the story. Consequently, the historical periods that feature

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[5] Jeremy Ridgman has written of *Waking the Dead* as positioning the work of investigators as resolving "the tragedy or sickness at the heart of events", as providing a "spiritual healing" that lays to rest the trauma surrounding an incident (2012: 7). A good example of this "spiritual healing" inclination of the programme is the *Waking the Dead* story "Breaking Glass" (2003), which won an International Emmy Award. The story centres on the discovery of a regime of abuse in a children's care home. The timing of this story being dramatised on television was significant as in 2002 a major investigation into what was known as the "Manchester care homes scandal" was completed and its results released to the public (see BBC News, 2007). However complex and open-ended the real-life investigation, in "Breaking Glass" the police team shed light on the denial and deceptions of the manager of the fictional care home, identify further victims and, ultimately, track down the care home paedophile.

in the show are necessarily presented in a mode that flattens any historical nuance or obscures competing historiographical perspectives on an event or recent period.

"Double Bind" does not deviate from this pattern. In returning to the sixties counterculture, the story emphasises the period as traumatic without any indication of historiographical debates about the "good" or "bad" sixties.[6] A "good sixties" perspective sees the 1960s as positive because of the advances made at that time for oppressed social groups. A "bad sixties" perspective, on the contrary, sees the 1960s as terrible and traumatic because of the civil unrest of the time and on the grounds that it coincided with, as Richard Cockett summarises this point, the shattering of the "1950s nirvana of monogamy" (1999: 87).[7] "Double Bind" reproduces a "bad sixties" perspective without illuminating the persistent historiographical debates that call into question the construction of the 1960s as traumatic. In "Double Bind", the tried and tested generic format of forensic noir leads to a story in which the therapeutic commune is treated the same way as any major traumatic historical event.

Given this positioning of the '60s, it is unsurprising that "Double Bind" selects the cult leader and acid casualty as the sixties stereotypes of choice. As introduced above, these are both figures imaginatively bound up with the end of the 1960s, a period that has its own distinctive character compared with the rest of the decade. As cultural studies scholar James Riley (2019) observes, the end of the 1960s is commonly constructed as a juncture that featured an abundance of violence, terror, and psychological injury. Understanding the programme as "forensic noir", and as following a narrative format that is fascinated by trauma, sets an important context as to why it would be the case that such figures are reanimated.

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[6] See MJ Heale (2005) for a summary of these debates.

[7] Jon Mowitt (2000) observes that the perspective of the 1960s as a traumatic decade is typically taken up by neoconservative political agents who call for the reigning in of social transformations that intend to improve the lives of oppressed populations.

Synopsis

Before going on to examine the animation of cult leader and acid casualty in "Double Bind" it is worth pausing here to present a synopsis of the story. As is typical of much popular crime television, "Double Bind" contains an elaborate, overly congested plot. Through the course of the narrative, we are introduced to a range of characters, many of whom turn out to have an unexpected relationship to the case given the way that they initially present themselves to the police team.

The first episode of the two over which the story is told sets up a "cat and mouse" chase between the police team and a psychologically disturbed person who has the capacity for unpredictable violence. That person is Daniel Lennon, a man who was committed to a secure psychiatric hospital in his adolescence for murdering both of his parents, an act supposedly witnessed by his brother Chris Lennon. At the beginning of the episode, Daniel escapes from the psychiatric unit by taking control of a car driven by his psychiatrist Caroline Ritter (Jill Baker) as they drive back to the unit following an optometrist examination. After his escape, Daniel posts on a gardening forum from an internet cafe. His post causes a couple living in Hampstead to unearth a body, and the *Waking the Dead* police team investigate. The police discover that the house used to belong to an experimental psychotherapeutic commune led by Dr Raymond Parke, a fringe psychiatrist. The body is that of one of his assistants, a young man called Rolf Voller (Kristian Kiehling) who was murdered by a battering to the head in 1967. The police team attempt to track Daniel and find that he is making visits to London to buy LSD, causing alarm in the team that his psychological state may be deteriorating. The climax of the episode sees Daniel pay a visit to Raymond Parke about whom he has been experiencing a series of flashbacks. When Daniel visits Parke he is in an agitated state and shouts at Parke asking "what was in that room?", referring to a room that Daniel sees in his flashbacks. Daniel then desperately grabs Parke around the neck, seemingly intent on murdering him.

The second episode involves the police team gaining an understanding of the two murder cases from 1967, a process that is told in the episode through intercutting the narrative with extended flashbacks to that year. This episode begins by indicating that Daniel fled Parke's flat where he had been strangling him, and Parke survives. Parke is called in for police questioning after the team discover that he had caused a riot in one of the hospitals in which he worked after withdrawing medication from patients. We are also introduced to Heather (Jessica Turner), someone who was involved in the commune in 1967 and made a complaint against Parke for withdrawing her medication when she was a teenager. After multiple police interviews, the team piece together what happened in the room of the commune that so traumatised Daniel. Parke had been attempting to include Daniel in a role-play therapy where he would be exposed to an anger-inducing experience but would be encouraged to refrain from responding with violence. This therapy also involves Heather, who it turns out was once Daniel's girlfriend. Because Heather had experienced childhood sexual abuse, Parke arranged a scenario in which the abuse would be recreated in a role-play scenario with Rolf Voller. With the role-play of Heather's assault in progress, Daniel enters the room on the encouragement of Parke and, unable to contain his anger, Daniel then murders Voller.

Having pieced together these events, the police team then make revelations about the murder of Daniel's parents. Two sets of information lead to their new insight into the case which was previously thought to be closed. First, Daniel's nephew Mark (Hugh Mitchell) lets slip that his father, Chris, had also been a visitor to the commune in 1967. Then the police team's forensic pathologist, Eve (Tara Fitzgerald), through an examination of the police photographs taken at the scene, discovers that it is more plausible that Daniel was in fact a witness to the double murder and not the perpetrator. Putting these new insights to Chris, the team prompt Chris to confess that he had in fact been the one who murdered his parents, an act he puts down to having been troubled by an LSD trip that he had experienced while visiting the therapeutic commune. The revelation is part of a tense denouement in which Chris eventually admits his

crime to Daniel, who — in his troubled psychological state — mistakenly thought that he had been the murderer of his parents ever since 1967.

The two episodes of the story explore themes of deception, mistaken identities, and buried trauma. Raymond Parke presents himself as a trail-blazing psychiatrist who is misunderstood by his peers in the profession, only to be revealed as something more sinister: a psychiatrist whose experimental methods segue into enabling sexual violence and covering up murder. The mistaken identity of the murderer in the 1967 case regarding the death of Daniel and Chris Lennon's parents haunts both brothers for the decades following the murder. "Double Bind" shows the commune, which is a key site of interest in the police team's investigation, to be a space controlled by Parke, who resembles a manipulative cult leader, and inhabited by Daniel and Chris, two acid casualties. In the following two sections of this chapter I take these two figures, "cult leader" and "acid casualty", and examine them consecutively, exploring how they are animated in the story and how they resonate with contemporary anxieties about high profile perpetrators of abuse.

Cult leader

The characterisation of Raymond Parke strongly reflects the figure of the cult leader, a figure normally associated with the 1960s but one that takes on more contemporary resonances in "Double Bind". Parke's character seems to draw inspiration from two recent historical figures: radical psychiatrist, RD Laing, and notorious instigator of the 1969 Tate-LaBianca murders, Charles Manson. The Laing resemblance is most obvious. In writing Parke as a psychiatrist working on the fringes of the profession, one who is a proponent of LSD use in a therapeutic context, and with an affinity for working with schizophrenic patients, the story creates a striking biographical match between Parke and Laing.[8] Moreover, the commune in "Double Bind" has

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[8] See Andrews (1998) for comment on Laing's use of LSD in a clinical setting. Laing wrote about schizophrenia most notably in *The Divided Self* (Laing, 1960).

close similarities to Laing's therapeutic commune Kingsley Hall that existed in the late 1960s, a

commune that consisted of Laing and other radical psychiatrists living with a group of people

facing psychiatric conditions in what was envisioned as a non-hierarchical group.[9] The way in

which the two phases of Parke's life and career are presented also reflects how Laing's career has

been constructed in the popular imagination. As we learn through flashbacks and through the

police team's interactions with Parke in the present day, he has changed from being an

impressively charismatic man capable of holding the attention of a room full of young people to

being someone who is short tempered, cynical and bitter. This shift reflects how Laing's career is

often remembered in commentary about his life.[10] For instance, a piece about Laing in *The*

Independent observes that Laing in the 1960s could be characterised as a "a guru whose ideas were

uncannily in harmony with the spirit of the times" while then positioning the nature of Laing's

psychiatric work published at the end of the 60s and after as revealing his "decline into

dippiness" (Barker, 1996: para. 5, para. 7). Meanwhile, a retrospective on Laing in *The Guardian*

emphasises his career trajectory as a "downward spiral" (The Guardian, 2000).[11]

While the biographical details of Parke match closely with Laing, in other respects

Parke's characterisation makes him out to have chilling resemblances with Charles Manson. In

Parke's advocacy for LSD use, his encouragement of the young people of the commune to go

out of "their wretched minds", as he says in one speech, Parke seems to embody the

manipulative cult leader who uses LSD as a tool for control. This characterisation is one major

way in which Charles Manson has been imagined in the years following the Tate-LaBianca

murders and his subsequent imprisonment. Like RD Laing, Manson was known for founding a

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[9] See Francis Huxley (1989) and Adrian Chapman (2018) for helpful discussions of Laing's work at the site.
[10] For all the celebrations of Laing's career by former collaborators and admiring psychiatrists, captured for instance in the edited collection *Fifty Years Since The Divided Self* (Itten & Young, 2012), in retrospectives and commentaries by other observers Laing is often recalled for his alcoholism, belligerent personality and poor relationships with his family. As an indicative article featuring this kind of perspective see *The Sunday Times* report titled "RD Laing: the abominable family man" (The Sunday Times, 2009).
[11] It is also of note that the episode title "Double Bind" refers to a scenario often written about by psychiatrists, and one that was important to Laing's own writings. See for instance Laing's observations on the "double bind" in his book *Self and Others* (1961: 144).

countercultural commune, except in Manson's case that commune was later made infamous as a

murderous cult: the "Manson family". As *Rolling Stone* journalist David Felton writes, Manson

can be categorised as a "mindfucker", that is one of a set of men in the U.S. during the 1960s

"who made it their business to fuck men's minds and to control them" (1972: 9). In Felton's

commentary, LSD was integral to the cult leader as it can be deployed as a powerful tool in

gaining influence over and manipulating a group. Felton suggested that the so-called

"mindfuckers" have "succeeded by assuming God-like authority and using such mindfucking

techniques as physical and verbal bullying, group humiliation and … the chemical alteration of

brain cells" (1972: 10). Men like Manson used their knowledge of the drug, according to Felton,

to ultimately produce a cult of personality. In the moments in "Double Bind" in which we see

Parke rather creepily looming over Daniel and handing him a sugar cube infused with LSD, this

"mindfucker" image is brought to life.

Parke echoes Manson in another, even more disturbing way. One important aspect of

Manson's level of control of the young people that belonged to his cult of personality is his

control and influence over the sexual relationships in the group.[12] As James Riley (2019)

documents, one story goes that Manson would carefully orchestrate group sex among himself

and his followers, going so far as to dictate positions and preferred couplings. While in "Double

Bind" it is not obvious that Parke wishes to engage in sexual encounters with the young people

of the commune, nor arrange sex between others for his own satisfaction, he nevertheless uses

his authority to construct a situation, in the guise of therapeutic role-play encounter, in which

Heather is sexually assaulted by his assistant, Voller, while Parke observes.

While these elements of the story replay themes and associations imaginatively tied to the

1960s, the echoes of Manson would no doubt register as revolting at the time in which "Double

Bind" was first broadcast. Manson has been the subject of seemingly countless fictionalised

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[12] This detail resonates with notions of the sixties as a sexually traumatic decade: see Cockett (1999) for further
discussion of this perspective of the '60s.

reinterpretations of his role in the Tate-LaBianca murders of 1969 and the terrifying hold he had on the teenage girls of the "Manson family". Notably, he was re-imagined in film in the period coinciding with that in which "Double Bind" was produced. The films *The Manson Family* (2003, dir. Jim Van Bebber) and *Helter Skelter* (2004, dir. John Gray) were both released in the space of a few years prior to the broadcast of "Double Bind", while the film *The Strangers* (2008, dir. Bryan Birtino) was released one year after the story's broadcast.

Moreover, one detail about Parke means that his cult leader status has a contemporary relevance that is historically specific to the 2000s: the fact that Parke was chief consultant at a psychiatric hospital. The police team learn that Parke recruited at least two of the commune participants — Daniel and Heather — through his official role at the hospital. In effect, Parke used his privileged role within a care institution to contact vulnerable people and to enrol them in what turned out to be an abusive and exploitative scheme, taking them from the socially acceptable institutional space of the hospital to join his therapeutic experiment in what the police team describe as a "hippie squat". Remarkably then, while Parke resembles RD Laing in the respects that I have identified above, Parke fails to live up to one important element of Laing's philosophy of humanistic psychiatric practice: Laing's sensitivity and attentiveness towards the perpetuation of violence by people in authority positions and his attempts to alleviate the effects of this phenomenon.[13] "Double Bind" shows the Laingian figure of Parke to stray completely from this philosophy because he himself becomes the person in authority perpetuating violence.

This crucial detail of the story is particularly relevant in the 2000s because institutionally facilitated abuse was high on the political agenda of the time and registered as a significant public controversy (Greer and Mclaughlin, 2015). The 2000s marked a decade in which numerous highly publicised police investigations reported incidents of the historical abuse of children in

[13] As psychologist Michael Guy Thompson has written of Laing's clinical philosophy, it was organised around "one ineluctable conclusion — that psychological conflict is more often than not the consequences of uncommonly subtle forms of violence perpetrated by person in authority…[against persons] who happen to be at their mercy" (2006: 24).

institutions like care homes, religious institutions, and schools. For instance, Operation

Cleopatra, launched in 1997, was a major inquiry into historical sexual abuse in children's homes

in Greater Manchester. The operation led to numerous reports through the early- to mid-2000s

about social workers who committed sexual crimes against young people in their care, a series of

revelations that became known as the "Manchester care home scandal" (BBC News, 2007). As

Greer and McLaughlin observe, news media attention throughout the 2000s was trained onto the

silence and denials of institutions, while high profile offenders, those who manipulated positions

of power in institutions to gain access to their victims, were scrutinised and made subject to

public outrage.

Parke's character combines the shocking associations with abuse and mind control of the

sixties cult leader and of the noughties institutionally facilitated high profile offender. The public

outrage about high profile offenders of institutional abuse can be characterised as one kind of

domestic discontent. This is a domestic discontent in the respect that it is a discontent

concerning intimate relationships and more specifically a discontent partly grounded in the

knowledge that abuse by corrupted authority figures can adversely affect the abused subject's

intimate relationships for the remainder of their lives. It is a discontent that is closely related to

anger, the object of which is the institutional offender (Wooten, 2019).

With the public outrage conceived of in this way, it is possible to say that "Double Bind"

positions the cult leader figure as an object of domestic discontent. The story channels this

discontent through the character of Boyd, who inhabits the position of outraged witness to the

cult leader and is the main character with whom the perspective of *Waking the Dead* is aligned.

After Boyd has interviewed sexual assault victim, Heather, the scene cuts into a shot of Boyd

interviewing Parke where he says with palpable fury: "I know what you did to her". Meanwhile,

after a verbal and physical confrontation in the police interrogation room, Boyd punches Parke

to the ground. In many respects Boyd's anger and his violent approach to Parke could

conceivably be taken as a justifiable form of rough justice. Boyd takes on the role of the "wild

judge", one who displays rage and anger in a way that is legitimated by some injustice, making

Boyd's anger — that with which the perspective of the show is aligned — seem socially

productive.[14]

If Boyd is positioned as a legitimate discontented subject with whom viewers might

identify given the context of public outrage, the opposite is true for Parke in the respect that

Parke's discontent is heavily discredited. In the psychotherapeutic commune project, Parke

expresses his own kind of domestic discontent, that is a frustration with the status quo of

psychiatric care and with the living environment for psychiatric patients in hospitals. In his

resemblance with Laing and Manson, meanwhile, Parke as sixties cult leader also possesses a

more generalised discontent with conventional institutions and culture.[15] In "Double Bind", this

kind of anti-authoritarian discontent is translated into the bitter ramblings of Parke when under

police questioning. Towards the end of the episode, Parke engages in a rant in which he throws

bizarre and barely coherent accusations at Boyd: "You Boyd, with your two-up two-down. Your

roast beef on Sundays. Your four-wheeled drive. Your whole miserable shitty little world. You

killed them [the murder victims in the case]. You all killed them". The delivery of the rant makes

Parke out to be barely of sound mental capacity, and his catch-all anti-authoritarian comments

reveal more obviously his bitterness than a coherent social critique. Moreover, because by this

point in the narrative Parke's abuse and neglect of his patients has been exposed, the discontent

that he feels is entirely discredited on account of his obviously morally flawed character.

Through the way in which the cult leader is brought to life in "Double Bind", the figure

becomes a contemporary object of discontent since the cult leader so resembles high profile

offenders of abuse. The anti-authoritarian discontent of the cult leader is foregrounded in the

story, but the kind of discontent with which we are invited to identify is the discontent embodied

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[14] For discussion of the characteristics and attributes that are typically thought to belong to the "wild judge" see Sloterdijk (2012) and Davies (2020).

[15] Writing in the *London Review of Books* four years before Laing's death, contemporary historian Peter Barham described Laing as a "sectarian preacher inveighing against a generalised failing of modern life" (1985, para. 8).

by Boyd: outrage at a rogue consultant psychiatrist who enables sexual violence. The cult leader figure carries associations with the end of the 1960s and the dark elements of the counterculture while at the same time resonating as a figure that makes an impression in the wound culture of the 2000s.

Acid casualty

The figure of the cult leader is paired in "Double Bind" with the acid casualty. The attributes of one figure are almost entirely the inverse of those of the other figure. Where the cult leader is an arch-manipulator who benefits from controlling others' state of mind, the acid casualty is characterised as someone who has been subject to a psychological alteration, someone who has been "mindfucked" to use David Felton's vivid expression. Both figures capture a feature of the sixties counterculture that is repeatedly replayed in constructions of the dark "end of the '60s": the capacity of bohemian counterculturalists to be dupes herding after corrupt gurus (Riley, 2019).

"Double Bind" mobilises these figures together in such a way that the story matches with typical wound culture narratives which contain a perpetrator and a victim/survivor. The narrative of "Double Bind" reveals both Daniel and Chris to be casualties of Parke's LSD-distributing therapeutic venture. The cult leader, as I have suggested, is animated in a way that befits the wound culture of the mid-2000s. Because the acid casualty bears some of the hallmarks of a victim/survivor, this figure also fits with familiar expectations of wound culture stories of this period.

The figure of the acid casualty bears a resemblance with the figure of the survivor, one which Shani Orgad (2009) has argued became an extremely culturally relevant figure in the 2000s. The concept "survivor" denotes individual strength and self-sufficiency. Orgad notes that the emergence of the concept coincided with the expanding influence of neoliberal discourses that valorised "the enterprising self", with the survivor being one exemplary model of a self-

responsible agent.[16] These discourses valorised personal resilience and the striving towards a self that has the capacity to optimise one's situation and maximise value for oneself. The traction of the concept "survivor" can be partially put down to its quality as in-keeping with this cultural sensibility which resonates with wider political currents in the 2000s.

Both "acid casualty" and "survivor" refer to a person who has encountered some traumatic incident in their life and have had to subsequently navigate their life while living with the psychological after-effects of this experience. That said, the life course of the acid casualty is not normally one that is closely resembles the "heroic" version of the survivor figure. The acid casualty's story is typically not one of triumphant "bouncing back" from a troubled state but one that revolves around a person's permanent damage.[17] The case of Syd Barrett, who is sometimes positioned as one of Britain's most well-known acid casualties, is a case in point here. Barrett was the lead singer and songwriter for rock group Pink Floyd in the late 1960s. Writing in the *London Review of Books*, Jeremy Harding describes Barrett as an "acid epitome, magnificent, and before you knew it, broken" (2003: para. 4). Barrett's trajectory took him from being in a position in which LSD by most accounts contributed to his development and success as an artist, allowing fresh insights that filtered into his song writing, to one in which his LSD use had escalated to a certain point that caused him irretrievable damage.

The story of Syd Barratt as a poster boy for the doomed sixties counterculture is plausibly a source of inspiration for Daniel's character. Barratt died in 2006, one year before "Double Bind" was first broadcast. The death of Barratt was marked in British news media with obituaries, retrospectives and tributes to the former musician, and so narratives about Barratt's transition from rockstar to a hermetic life in Cambridge circulated prominently in between the broadcast of series 5 of *Waking the Dead* in 2005 and the 2007 series in which "Double Bind"

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[16] Orgad draws on Nicholas Rose's (1992) understanding of "the enterprising self".
[17] As mentioned in Chapter 2, the resilience discourse of "bouncing back" has been helpfully examined by Gill and Orgad (2018).

featured.[18] One of the often repeated facts, of the little that was known about Barratt's later reclusive years, was that he spent much of his time tending to the garden at his mother's home.[19] This small detail is carried over into Daniel's character in "Double Bind". In one scene, Daniel's psychiatrist Caroline Ritter tells Boyd of Daniel's immense talent for gardening, which he practiced in the grounds of the psychiatric unit. As Ritter shows Boyd round the garden, she tells him: "it's important that you see Daniel for what he is, and not as a lunatic and a killer. He is an artist".

A further key element of the acid casualty is their warped relationship to time as indicated in the acid casualty's experience of intrusive flashbacks to previous LSD trips. In "Double Bind" we are made aware of the extent to which Daniel is disturbed by experiences of 1967 through the way in which he experiences flashbacks of that time. Upon ingesting LSD in his woodland hideout from police, Daniel experiences intrusive flashbacks that appear to be disorienting, with his balance and perception of his immediate surroundings disturbed, Daniel seemingly all-consumed by his visions. The viewer, meanwhile, is positioned as vicariously experiencing Daniel's temporal disorientation because of the remarkably frequent use of flashbacks in "Double Bind", the sudden intercutting of scenes from the present day with those of the 1960s, occasionally accompanied by visual effects that blur and distort the images we see on screen.[20]

By characterising Daniel as someone who experiences intrusive flashbacks this device marks him out not only as acid casualty but more generically as someone experiencing a

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[18] See for instance obituaries in *The Guardian* (Clayson, 2006) and The Independent (Webb, 2006). A tribute to Barrett also featured in a five minute segment shown on the BBC's *Newsnight* on the day his death was publicly announced, 11 July 2006.

[19] As a retrospective on Barrett published in *The New York Times Magazine* states: "For more than three decades, the progenitor of a band that eventually sold more than 200 million albums lived in Cambridge, England, with his mother, content to ignore modernity and focus on gardening" (Klosterman, 2006).

[20] This feature of Daniel's characterisation — his slippery relationship with time — recalls another trope of the acid casualty that is illustrated in a story about Syd Barrett. In the BBC documentary *Syd Barrett - Crazy Diamond* (2001), Barrett's Pink Floyd bandmate Roger Waters recounts an incident in which he left Barrett smoking a cigarette in a room and returned several hours later to find Barrett in exactly the same position, his fingers covered in ash, apparently unaware that Waters had been away for a significant period of time.

posttraumatic state. As Eva Van Hoffmann writes, "it is one characteristic of trauma and posttraumatic states that time stops at the most awful moment, that the past continues to overwhelm and overshadow the present so that the mourning never leaves" (2010: 411).[21] Daniel's experience of being visited by haunting flashbacks involves his past overwhelming him, and he is driven to return to that past to gain a more lucid understanding of it.

Just as Daniel returns repeatedly in his imagination and memory to the awful moments of 1967, he also makes physical returns to various places that are significant to him throughout the story. This narrative device reinforces the image of him as in a posttraumatic state. Mark Seltzer writes of trauma as "something like a compulsive return to the scene of the crime" (1998: 260). In Daniel's storyline, this return is literalised, in the respect that he physically returns to the site of the commune — where he murdered Rolf Voller — and to his parent's home and gardening centre where they were killed.

If Daniel is presented in "Double Bind" as an immediately obvious acid casualty, one that is a kind of reimagining of Syd Barrett as tragically disturbed schizophrenic murderer, his brother Chris is a different and perhaps even more interesting case of the animation of the acid casualty precisely because his acid casualty status is hidden and his life has not played out as one would expect of a hippie sympathiser. For the majority of the story, we are led to perceive Chris as a more or less "ordinary" person without any involvement in the sixties counterculture, which then sets up the melodramatic shocking reveal that Chris was in fact a visitor to Parke's commune and partook in an LSD session. On the initial occasions in which Chris enters the narrative, he appears to live a relatively non-descript life. He is married to Gloria (Joanna Hole), and they have a son, Mark. Chris runs a small business at the gardening centre that used to belong to his parents. Like his brother Daniel, Chris is involved in gardening but claims to the police that his talents lie in the administrative and management sides of the business. Chris is

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[21] As Ruth Leys articulates this point: "the experience of trauma, fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented as past, but is perpetually reexperienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present" (2000: 3).

presented as a bourgeois countryside dweller, wearing a sensible outdoor jacket, corduroy trousers, wellington boots, the attire of a *Countryfile* (BBC, 1988-) presenter. But as we learn these outward components of Chris are a disguise of sorts. He is in a sense a "closet" acid casualty, making efforts to distance himself from the bohemian flirtations of his past. The weight of being an acid casualty, and ultimately a murderer, is only apparent through the palpable tension with which he carries himself.

Because Chris is a "closet" acid casualty, one who conceals this part of his identity and suppresses his emotions, this characterisation allows "Double Bind" to replay a pop-psychological trope about the transfer of repressed trauma to the next generation of one's family. We learn about Chris's emotionally dysfunctional family life through the character of his son, Mark, who remains in contact with Daniel after Daniel's escape from the psychiatric unit, Mark's contact with Daniel leading the police to track Daniel down at one stage in the story. Mark is presented as a troubled teenager who comes across as profoundly depressed and, as we learn towards the end of the story, experiences a pattern of disturbing violent thoughts. One scene shows the family watching television together. Chris's attention is diverted away from the television set, signalling a lack of uniformity among the three. Mark starts crying and storms out of the room. Chris's wife, Gloria, attempts to follow Mark out of the room, but Chris blocks her path and the two shout at one another. This scene is shot quite distinctly as looking through the window of the family home, the camera looking on the scene as though witnessing the family's backstage dynamics, their emotional pain normally hidden from outsiders.

This familial sub narrative, in keeping with typical *Waking the Dead* storylines, gives an impression that we are gaining some deep psychological insights into the characters and their relationships with one another. It also reproduces a starkly conservative perspective on the acid casualty, one in which the acid casualty and the lifestyles adopted by bohemian counterculturalists are imagined as having a corrosive effect on the nuclear family. In Joan Didion's essay "Slouching Toward Bethlehem" (1968), a prominent artefact of the end of the

'60s and of the darker elements of the counterculture, Didion closed with the image of a distracted and disengaged mother allowing her young daughter to take a tab of LSD, with Didion despairing at the failure of the hippies to create a safe family environment. These kinds of perspectives are animated through Mark, a troubled product of a family wounded by past engagements with '60s counterculture, his disturbed mental state a demonstration of the corrosive effects of the counterculture that conservative critics denounce.

The figures of the commune and the cult leader stand in for the "cause" of the ongoing domestic discontent in Chris's family home. Chris experienced disturbing hallucinations having taken LSD provided by Parke in the psychotherapeutic commune. He then murdered both of his parents as a result of the hallucinations. Multiple decades later, his family is fractured and ill. The story implies a line of causality between the actions of Parke in the past and the family dysfunction in the present. As discussed in Chapter 2 regarding the Dales in *Grand Designs* episode "Low Impact House", the image of a tightly knit and happy family is one that features as a conventional component of reassuring television: it operates as a comforting and familiar presence. By emphasising the opposite — a troubled and unhappy family — this familial sub-narrative is distinctly *dis*comforting and invites us to feel appalled at the past events in the commune.

If wound culture in the contemporary moment demands that the bearers of a wound display a "compulsory heroism", as Beth DeVolder (2013) argues, then the characters Daniel and Chris might seem ill-fitting for their apparent incapacity to follow such a life course. At the point in which the closing credits are shown in the second episode of "Double Bind", there is little sense of hope for Daniel and Chris. The final shot before the closing credits shows Daniel and Chris sharing a tearful embrace with Chris having just admitted to Daniel his role as murderer of both their parents. Chris is weeping uncontrollably while Daniel wears a manic grin, his eyes showing a vacant stare. There is no real resolution for the brothers at this point. The embrace between the pair expresses a mutually shared forgiveness and love, but it is left open to doubt

whether, in his manic state, Daniel has fully registered Chris's confession. Moreover, the experience of Chris — particularly his familial difficulties — shows that if either acid casualty can adapt to become a seemingly conventional member of society, that person's acid casualty status will continue to overshadow them. In a rather bleak narrative that is consistent with *Waking the Dead*'s noir-inflected tone, the awful experiences of the acid casualties do not end with the confession of murder or the successful resolution of a criminal case but inescapably live on with no end in sight.

Nevertheless, there are crucial moments that make Chris as an acid casualty appear to be a culturally salient and familiar "survivor": he confesses and tells of his experiences. It is this process of telling, of speaking out, that marks him out as a survivor. As Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray (1993) have observed in their exploration of survivor discourse, it is through testimony in a forum like a magazine, newsletter, journal, support group or demonstration that a person gains semblance as a survivor.[22] The police interrogation of Chris in "Double Bind" operates as equivalent to these confessional encounters. Moreover, Chris's comments indicate a sustained interior struggle, as showing that he has engaged with the painful work of moving on. "Everything I've ever done has been to try and recover from that time," Chris says to Boyd. There is a sense here that Chris has engaged in a process of self-empowerment in some variety, one which his brother Daniel had mirrored through his therapeutic gardening before his escape from the psychiatric institution in which he was confined. This move of the survivor towards recovery, a trajectory that Chris follows, is another crucial element of how the survivor comes to be imagined in contemporary wound culture stories. As Orgad (2009) observes, personal empowerment, the process of discerning one's personal desires and acting upon them such that one feels a strong self-esteem, is an especially celebrated component of survivorship. To be self-empowered, as proponents of positive thinking cultures might explain this state, is to have

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[22] See also Orgad's comments on the importance of telling one's story to survivorship (2009:50). Rodriguez (2019) also contributes a helpful account of testimony in relation to survivorship.

embarked on a journey of returning from difficulties and taking individual responsibility for one's own well-being. By showing Chris to follow this trajectory to recovery, albeit a recovery that is never completed, "Double Bind" makes his acid casualty status legible in the contemporary moment.

Chris's testimony tells of his pain. To return to my argument above about public outrage towards high profile offenders, the emphasis on Chris's pain is crucial to how the story positions the events of the narrative through a lens of domestic discontent. Pain, as Sara Ahmed has argued, typically produces a response that involves anger, a response that includes "an interpretation that this pain is wrong, that it is an outrage, and that something must be done about it" (2004: 174). The injury of an individual in the context of wound culture is typically taken as the grounds for compensation or redress. Once this connection between pain and anger is considered, the pain of the acid casualties can be seen as crucial to the impression that we are left with of the cult leader. The pain of the acid casualties is plausibly something about which we might feel angry, where the object of that anger is the figure of the cult leader, since the cult leader has caused the injury. Chris's testimony then can be interpreted as a sequence that strengthens the impression of the cult leader as a justifiable object of domestic discontent.

Further, this point about the pain of the acid casualties extends to the figure of the commune in the story: witnessing the testimony of Chris also gives us an impression of the commune as a place where pain is inflicted, and thus a place towards which it is legitimate to feel discontented. The commune is, as we learn in the story, the place in which Chris was given a dose of LSD that later caused his experiences of disturbing flashbacks, the same flashbacks that led him to murder his parents. Meanwhile, Daniel's flashbacks all return to the room in the commune in which he committed murder. The commune is imaginatively constructed as the site in which the critical incidents that caused the pain of both Daniel and Chris took place. Just as anger and outrage is mobilised when it comes to the figure of the cult leader, so too the

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commune can be characterised as an object of anger that results from witnessing the pain of the acid casualties.

Scene of injury

Waking the Dead's "Double Bind" retells the '60s as a time of traumatic incident, and the psychotherapeutic commune as a crime scene. In reproducing this "traumatic sixties" narrative, one well suited to the forensic noir genre, "Double Bind" turns to two cliched figures pertaining to the "end of the sixties", the cult leader and acid casualty. These figures are animated in a way that makes them pertinent and timely to when "Double Bind" was first broadcast. The cult leader here appears a familiar perpetrator of manipulation, a man who embodies alarmingly dubious sexual politics, and a corrupted authority figure who uses his institutional power to gain access to vulnerable teenagers. The acid casualty is figured in a way that uses multiple familiar devices to display victimhood/survivorship, bringing the pain caused by the cult leader to the fore in the closing stages of the story.

The commune of "Double Bind", as the domain of the cult leader and acid casualty, is imaginatively bound to trauma and the wound. Not only is it a crime scene visited by police, the location of one of *Waking the Dead*'s typical exhumations that spark a detective process into life, it is a scene of injury, one forever marked in the memory of its casualties, the scene which flickers in their mind when they experience a traumatic collapse of past and present. Because the commune is represented predominantly as a disturbing memory, it is an absent presence, like the New Age traveller commune in *Jam and Jerusalem*. The absent presence of the psychotherapeutic commune haunts the characters. It barely seems to have substance. It is not a living arrangement that was ever really "lived in" for any sustained period as far as the narrative tells us but remains significant to the acid casualties as the space where their wound was brought into being.

There are multiple kinds of domestic discontent that are present in this narration of the commune. The discontent of psychiatrist Raymond Parke with conventional society comes

through in his desperate ranting while under police questioning. The discontent in Chris Lennon's family home is evident in the distress of his son Mark and Chris's marital discord. Perhaps most crucial to "Double Bind", though, is not a discontent belonging to any of the characters of the story, but rather the domestic discontent that circulated in the 2000s — and still does a decade later — around issues of abuse perpetrated by high profile offenders. By introducing "ripped from the headlines" details that recall related controversies, "Double Bind" invites us to read the cult leader, the acid casualty, and the commune, through this fervid discontentedness with high profile abusers.

The commune here possesses imaginary vitality because it operates as a lightning rod for anger about institutional offenders of abuse. The atmosphere of domestic discontent of the mid-2000s to late-2010s is condensed and distilled in "Double Bind" into a story in which a 1960s commune operates as a space that enables sexual violence. The commune is constructed as a place in which shocked onlookers can observe a sickening murder and the infliction of psychic wounds through manipulation, deception, and misuse of authority. The imaginative charge of the commune in "Double Bind" relies on a cultural context of fascination with trauma and abuse: the wound culture that coincides with the decade of domestic discontent.

The construction of the commune as causing injury, as the site of a psychic wounding, is replayed in the following case study programme that I examine, Channel 4's reality TV series *Eden: Paradise Lost*. Like in "Double Bind", the commune dwellers in *Eden: Paradise Lost* encounter the communal living arrangement as one that has the capacity to turn violent and to damage the mental wellbeing of its inhabitants. While in "Double Bind" a discontent around institutional abuse and high profile offenders is mobilised in the narrative, in *Eden: Paradise Lost* the editors play with a more generalised discontent, that directed towards "toxic" men who behave poorly. If the therapeutic commune is a space dominated by one abusive man in "Double Bind", the reality TV commune of *Eden: Paradise Lost* is made out to be the domain of multiple "raving brutes".

Chapter Five: Communalism as barbarism in *Eden: Paradise Lost*

It was the all-meat diet that brought Rob Patterson to his breaking point and encouraged him to leave the camp. Five men known as "the valley boys" insisted on their new diet, requiring more of the community's livestock to be slaughtered. Rob was distraught. He says to camera in a retrospective talking-head interview, referring to the group of meat-eating men, they "had a state of mind that was completely mirrored by the environment in which these people lived". Shots of Rob's testimony are intercut with footage of the cabin in the woods where the valley boys dwelled. The cabin is surrounded by animal carcasses, bloody tools and innards on the forest floor covered in flies, evidence of the men's alarming inattentiveness and murderous desires. "It was just very dark and depressing," Rob recalls, "the mood very, very negative".

Rob describes his experience as a participant in *Eden* (Channel 4, 2016-17), a reality TV programme created by Keo Films for Channel 4. The programme followed a "group challenge" format in which a group of participants are placed into an unfamiliar environment, with the challenge of forming a community that enables them to survive in a challenging landscape.[1] The *Eden* community comprised a group of twenty-three participants who in their lives previous to the programme pursued a range of occupations, each bringing a different set of skills to the community.[2] The group is placed in a remote rural location on the west coast of Scotland with the challenge of staying there with no outside contact for one year. Although there is an emphasis on the survival of the group, *Eden* eschewed the exoticism and extreme survival strategies of programmes like *The Island with Bear Grylls* (Channel 4, 2014-). Instead, the show received comparisons with the BBC's *Castaway 2000* (BBC, 2000-01), in that the focus was on how the participants would go about organising the community, arranging the tasks of building

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[1] John Corner names this format an "experiment in living" format (2002: 161-2).
[2] See Channel 4's press release on show (Channel 4, 2016a).

shelters and sourcing food (Dowell, 2016). The "survival" in *Eden* was arranged to require smart group coordination and management of resources.

The *Eden* community bears the hallmarks of a commune in that it involves a large group living arrangement whose inhabitants attempt to make collective decisions about the life of the group and share makeshift domestic spaces with one another. With its tepee community centre, the group resembles a "back to the land" commune, one closer to Lammas ecovillage, discussed in Chapter 2, than the urban, psychotherapeutic commune in *Waking the Dead,* discussed in Chapter 4. Series editor Liz Foley, in a preview about the programme in *The Times*, commented that she wanted the community to come across as a group of ordinary people rather than a "bunch of hippies living in a commune" (Whitworth, 2016). Some media commentators noted the "hippie commune" resemblance nonetheless. Notorious right-wing journalist James Delingpole (2016), in a review of the initial episodes of the programme, mocked the participants as "hippies" who enjoyed a "group hug".

In this chapter, I concentrate on the second of two series of *Eden*. While the first series had the striking, single-word title *Eden*, the second series was retitled *Eden: Paradise Lost*. The new title evoked the renewed focus of the programme on the disintegration of the *Eden* community. This second, repackaged series of *Eden* took the form of a retrospective documentary which brought together footage taken from the *Eden* camp with talking head interviews with the participants that were filmed after the project had ended. *Eden: Paradise Lost* has the feel of a grim debrief, picking over the events in the camp and the various stages of the community's falling apart. The talking head interviews allow for the participants to give a first-person account of the events, offering their own analyses and in many cases shame-facedly defending their actions. Rather than being a straightforward group challenge reality TV programme, *Eden: Paradise Lost* morphed into a work of meta-television: a documentary about a reality TV experiment that had gone wrong.

As was reported by journalists during and after the course of the year in which *Eden* was filmed, many of the participants were seriously disturbed and even traumatised by the conflicts and threatening atmosphere that developed over the course of the production (Knight, 2017; Swindon, 2017; Tate, 2017). Multiple participants left during the year in which the programme was filmed. In reference to the complaints of some participants, journalist Gabriel Tate asked in *The Guardian*, regarding the choices of production company Keo Films, whether "the moral imperative to intervene [should] have taken precedence over the professional one to simply document events" (2017: para. 18). Tate gestures towards the potential culpability of Keo Films in neglecting to intervene with a suitable ethic of care towards the participants when they experienced physical and psychological harm. Because of these events, I argue it is important to situate *Eden: Paradise Lost* in the context of a social climate in which people were becoming increasingly aware of the dubious and immoral practices of companies involved in reality TV production. My reading of *Eden: Paradise Lost* involves an understanding of the representational practices that it deploys as in one respect involving a diversion away from the controversial details of the production in order to protect the reputation of Keo Films.

This diversion is created, I argue, through the show's animation of the figure of the "raving brute", that is a figure reflecting a man whose awful, inconsiderate, and uncivilised demeanour and actions are easy to loathe. I borrow the expression of "raving brute" from Valerie Solanas's famous work of 1960s radical feminism *SCUM Manifesto* in which she claims that the "old-fashioned ranting, raving brute" is "so ridiculous he can easily be despised" (2013: 32). The raving brute is animated in *Eden: Paradise Lost* through a sustained focus on the horror and destruction caused by men in the community and particularly one of the factions of the community that I have introduced above: the "valley boys", a group of men that gradually separated themselves from others in the *Eden* community. *Eden: Paradise Lost* draws attention to the conflict and confrontation in the camp and the unsavoury actions of the valley boys, with Keo Films emphasising the spectacular incivility of the all-male clique.

By focusing on the highly emotive storytelling of the programme my intention is not to construct an excuse for the actions of these men by claiming that they have been unfairly represented, but rather to explore how the representative mode of the show taps into the atmosphere of domestic discontent around sexual politics.[3] I argue that *Eden: Paradise Lost* presents a viewing invitation to read the commune of *Eden* from a position of anger with toxic masculinity and the poor behaviour of men, with the show mobilising the raving brute as a *figure of discontent*. Further, I stress that, because of the storylines in *Eden: Paradise Lost* that emphasise the valley boys' controlling behaviour, the show presents the *Eden* community as a failed attempt at non-hierarchical living. *Eden: Paradise Lost* resonates with feminist critiques of communes prominently made in the 1960s and 70s: those that saw communes as sites of oppression featuring informal hierarchies that persisted even while inhabitants denied their existence.

The argument in the chapter is divided into three sections plus a concluding section. In the first section, titled "Controversial reality TV climate", I situate *Eden: Paradise Lost* in the context of controversies and discourses around reality TV production and the problems of safeguarding that gained traction in the late-2010s. I explore the production difficulties that Keo Films faced in the course of making *Eden*, the criticism that they attracted, and I position their choice to animate the raving brute as a strategy to avoid negative scrutiny from media commentators. In the second section, titled "Raving brute", I explore the ways in which the show brings to life the raving brute. I argue that *Eden: Paradise Lost* foregrounds two versions of this figure of discontent: one that is familiar to contemporary news, social media and think piece discourse, the other that is associated with horror film. In the third section, titled "Sixties critiques of communes", I explore how the show recalls feminist critiques of the commune that were prominently made in the 1960s and 70s. I argue that the show conveys a vision of the commune as a failed non-hierarchical living arrangement, doing so through a mode of address

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[3] Some of the valley boys group, most notably Glenn Moores, gave interviews to the British press saying that they felt they had been misrepresented and treated unfairly by the editors. See for instance Oliver (2017).

that invites us to feel angry at the valley boys. In the concluding section, titled "Boys in the woods", I emphasise that *Eden: Paradise Lost* positions the community's falling apart as due to the loathsome valley boys.

Controversial reality TV climate

Eden was first broadcast in 2016 and *Eden: Paradise Lost* in the summer of 2017. The programme thus belonged to a moment in television culture in which attitudes to reality TV production were shifting and commentators and critics were catching up to the cruelty and problems of safeguarding in the industry. 2019 was the major year in which these issues came to the fore as a public controversy.[4] The suicide of a participant of *The Jeremy Kyle Show* (ITV, 2005-19), Steve Dymond, received national news coverage, becoming a significant scandal, and leading to the show being cancelled by ITV (Waterson and Weaver, 2019). The suicides of two *Love Island* (ITV, 2015-) contestants, Sophie Gradon and Mike Thalassitis, in 2018 and 2019 respectively, were reported with similar alarm, and an enquiry was launched by the Department for Culture and Media commons select committee into duty of care issues in reality TV production in May 2019 (DCMS committee, 2019).[5]

With the news of *Jeremy Kyle* participant Steve Dymond's death, the story in the public discourse became about the cruelty and failures of the production team behind *The Jeremy Kyle Show*. Just as much as coverage of the incident pointed out the toxic tone of Kyle's presenting style and the cruelty of the show's format, attention was also granted to the failure of the production team to provide sufficient aftercare to the show's participants, exposing the

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[4] See Amelia Tait's (2019) article in *The New York Times* which commented on the scandals in British television and signals the status of these problems as an international reporting phenomenon.

[5] On the reporting of the deaths of Gradon and Thalassitis see for example Newman (2018); Gore (2018); Mcshane (2019). It also of note that, throughout the mid-2000s and 2010s, news reporting circulated that highlighted the same issues. A contestant on the reality TV show *Wife Swap* (Channel 4, 2003-09), Simon Foster, was found dead in 2008 after appearing on the show, his death reported to be caused by an excess of mephedrone and alcohol (Cockroft, 2008). In 2010, meanwhile, mental health charities warned the team behind *Britain's Got Talent* (2007-) that a tragedy was "inevitable" because of the lack of care for the participants and the exploitation by the production team leading to the possibility of severe mental distress (Cadwalladr, 2010).

production team to scrutiny.[6] The same focus on the culpability of production company ITV Studios was true in the case of *Love Island*.[7] A similar shift of attention — the production company becoming the story — was experienced by Keo Films, the company that created *Eden*, in late 2016 and the early part of 2017. Although Keo Films were not responsible for any deaths, news circulated on the fate of participants who continued to live in their artificial living arrangement even while, unbeknownst to them, no episodes were being broadcast, making Keo Films out to be deceptive and exploitative.[8]

Eden was the production company's first attempt at making a group challenge reality TV programme. The company had specialised previously in a range of factual television formats including programmes about survival in extreme environments (*Everest: Man v Mountain* [Bravo, 2006]), socially conscious documentaries (*Hugh's Chicken Run* [Channel 4, 2008]), workplace observational documentaries (*The Dentists* [ITV, 2014]), travel programmes (*The Real Man's Road Trip: Sean and Jon Go West* [Channel 4, 2012]), and cooking programmes (*Ottolenghi's Mediterranean Feast* [Channel 4, 2012]). With *Eden*, Keo Films combined several of their interests. The show mixes a focus on landscape and beautiful countryside panoramas with a survival theme, accompanied by an element of social commentary in its focus on community building. Whereas the work of the company was largely concentrated on programmes that were broadcast as one-hour specials or in series containing a handful of episodes, *Eden* was to be a major long-term project broadcast over several batches of episodes during the year that the participants were to spend in the community.[9]

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[6] Various news sources commented on ITV studios as committing a "failure of corporate responsibility" after comments by chair of the Department for Media and Culture select committee Damian Collins MP in October 2019 (e.g. The Times, 2019).
[7] ITV made a statement in response to this widespread criticism about their failed duty of care following the death of Thalassitis (see ITV, 2019).
[8] See for instance Hawksley (2017); Hooton (2017); Merritt (2017).
[9] Keo Films did not make a statement detailing their precise planned broadcast timetable, but their promotional Facebook page includes a comment noting that they were planning to release the series in batches; see Channel 4, 2016b).

The site chosen for *Eden* was an area on the west coast of Scotland which the production team fenced off before installing a rig of fixed cameras around the site. The footage from these fixed cameras were to be supplemented in the show by footage collected by three camera operators who were to live with the community and participate in the group challenge with the other participants. The remaining participants were given access to small cameras that they could carry around the site and with which they could film themselves and one another, material that would also be used in the programme (Channel 4, 2016a).

The site selected was one with a striking rugged beauty containing a mix of forested areas, rocky coastal terrain and a sandy beach. The area provided a sufficiently challenging landscape to give the community a difficult time in finding food sources. Donald Houston, the owner of the estate in which the production was situated, spoke about his response after he had been approached by the *Eden* production staff. Houston told *The Scotsman* that "we laughed and thought they were completely mad at first", making the point that the land was extremely difficult to access and had not been inhabited for hundreds of years (Stewart-Robertson, 2015). In order to moderate the experience of the community so that this harsh landscape could be navigated in a way that was not too brutal, the production team granted the community access to provisions, tools and materials that would help their survival efforts. The participants were also allowed to bring with them a large rucksack of belongings, as well as their "tools of the trade", tools that would enable them to practice their various professions. The community were also given livestock with which to sustain themselves, including goats, sheep, pigs and chickens (Channel 4, 2016a)

Despite the rugged landscape, the experience was perceived by television critics and commentators as not being particularly tough when the first four episodes of *Eden* were broadcast, leading to the series receiving mixed reviews. A review in *The Telegraph* commented on several distinctive absences in *Eden* when compared with other group challenge reality TV shows, referring to the "lack of traditional challenges or eliminations" which to the reviewer "felt

disorientating" (Power, 2016). A recurring criticism of the programme was that *Eden* failed to live up to its presentation as a survival challenge because the conditions were too favourable for the participants. Reports pointed out that the participants were engaged in activities that seemed to recall the weekend activities of the comfortable middle-classes, in that the participants made their own gnocchi and grew kale in vegetable patches (e.g. Brennan, 2016).

The content of *Eden*'s initial episodes, moreover, jarred with the show's promotional material. Print and billboard adverts for *Eden* had played on the dissatisfaction and discontent of the targeted audience by evoking the promise of retreat and "starting again". The central theme of the advertising campaign was to present the programme as an attempt to "remake society altogether" (Channel 4, 2016c). One billboard advert for the show read: "No poverty. No recessions. No bankers' bonuses. What if we could start again?" (Channel 4, 2016c). Yet while this promotional material seemed to imply that the show would give voice to public unease about social and political matters, the programme did not deliver a consistent tone of discontent in the opening episodes. The participants only very rarely discuss their dissatisfaction with the outside world and are mostly seen getting on with the business of setting up the community and getting to know one another. They make no comment about any such radical intentions as "remaking society" and — like in other group challenge reality shows — are caught up in the everyday detail of their lives.

The initial four episodes set about introducing the various participants. The narrative focused on the social cohesion of the group, as well as the individual capacities of the community members to conduct various tasks. In these initial episodes, interpersonal tensions commonly centred on the daily labour of maintaining the community, tasks such as gathering and chopping wood. The necessity of building shelters also gave these initial episodes a recurring focus on construction. Like in *Grand Designs*, the participants were forced to deal with issues like the weather affecting building plans and the challenges of coordinating a construction team. The story of the community was not exclusively focused on moments of struggle, though, as

reviewers commented. Frequently, the narrative emphasises the exciting, almost beach holiday or summer camp feel of being part of the project. Combined with moments of sexual frisson and flirtation, we see moments of platonic warmth and affection in the group, and activities like swimming in the sea and taking the fishing boat out on a sunny day. There are numerous points in which participants make confessional statements to camera expressing their enjoyment of their experience. Stephen, the chef, says in the early days of the project, "it's strange how we've come so close so quickly".

While initial press commentary around *Eden* focused on its failure to excite audiences and to live up to the survival genre, the press commentary then turned to different matters. In the winter of 2016 to 2017, increasing attention was placed on the remarkable disappearance of *Eden* from Channel 4's broadcast schedule. Although the end of the fourth episode of *Eden*, first broadcast on 8th August 2016, featured a trailer for future episodes, none materialised, and the programme went off-air. On the *Eden* Facebook page, the programme's promoters responded to queries from viewers about why further episodes had not been broadcast. "We can't confirm when *Eden* will be back on TV just yet", one response read, "we are filming throughout the year and releasing programmes in batches" (Channel 4, 2016b). Multiple reports on *Eden*'s production appeared in the weeks following its initial broadcast that seemed to present contradictory reports on the fate of the programme. A story emerged that the producers were hoping to make a second series of the programme over an additional year at the site (McCann, 2017). Adding a rather different perspective, meanwhile, the *Scottish Mail on Sunday* ran a story under the headline "Paradise Cost" which detailed the financial difficulties faced by Keo North, the subsidiary of Keo Films responsible for producing *Eden* (Sutherland, 2017).

Despite the statements made by *Eden*'s promotional team via social media throughout the autumn of 2016, by the time the year-long project had concluded in March 2017 no new episodes had been broadcast. The participants of *Eden* were in a situation in which they were living while being constantly filmed in their remote community with no outside contact while

none of that footage was being broadcast as they had anticipated. This scenario in itself became an object of journalistic fascination. As Sam Knight notes in an investigative report on the production for the *New Yorker*, tellingly titled "Reality TV's Wildest Disaster", the fate of *Eden*'s participants was reported across Europe, with one Spanish newspaper coining the expression "the forgotten of *Eden*" to describe the ill-fated group (Knight, 2017).

During the year in the community, as is reported in Knight's (2017) investigative report and by journalists for British newspapers (Swindon, 2017; Tate, 2017), group cohesion suffered from the process of in-groups and cliques forming, and these in-groups steadily became more alienated from one another to the point that community members barely spoke to one another without provoking an intense argument or bitter feeling. Hunting proved to be difficult in the early months of the project meaning that the anticipated supply of venison was not available for many months, while the agricultural efforts of the community were largely a failure due to the rocky quality of the soil. Going into the autumn and winter months, the community produced increasing quantities of homebrewed alcohol which led to the participants spending a lot of their time drinking and, occasionally, getting into arguments and disputes. The "valley boys", the all-male faction, were accused by other community members of bullying, and their outspokenness about their alarmingly sexist and homophobic attitudes irritated and shocked the rest of the community, further contributing to the divides within the camp.

Most of the participants dropped out of the project with some citing their experience in the community as significantly harming their mental wellbeing and stability. One participant, Tara, an early evacuee from the community, spoke of being "disrespected" by her fellow participants, which was reported by some of the British press as a bullying scandal (e.g. Hughes, 2016). Meanwhile, even more alarmingly, Rachel, a gardener, told reporter Sam Knight that she experienced severe paranoia and delusional thoughts while in the camp, recounting her distorted belief that she was in *Eden* permanently and would be escorted back to the site by police if she left, a situation that Rachel suggests is indicative of "how ill we all got in there" (Knight, 2017).

Seen in the context of controversies around reality TV production and accusations of cruelty, Keo Films had what might be described as a potential public relations disaster on their hands given the extent to which the experiment had fallen apart. Keo Films ran the risk of generating outrage for the failures of the production, as *The Jeremy Kyle Show* production company, ITV Studios, was to experience two years later.[10] Such a PR problem did not materialise to any great extent. Sam Knight's (2017) *New Yorker* feature, characterising the programme as a "disaster", would no doubt have been unwelcome to Keo Films, but it did not lead to successive further reports or sustained calls for retribution against the production company. Nevertheless, given the way in which the project had gone wrong, Keo Films plausibly braced for negative publicity that would damage their reputation in the industry.

Given this context, the decision to narrate the *Eden* community in the mode of *Eden: Paradise Lost*, that which stresses the community's almost barbaric incivility, is a coherent — if not ethically justified — response to a PR problem that Keo Films likely anticipated. The representational strategy deployed in *Eden: Paradise Lost* directs attention away from Keo Film's duty of care failures and creates a crafty diversion in which, as I explore in the sections that follow, the loathsome figure of the raving brute plays a pivotal role.

Raving brute

As John Corner has written of popular factual entertainment, the viewing contract that popular factual programmes make with their audience is that the audience will be drawn into a "dialectic of attraction and dislike" (2002: 266), with the viewer invited to continually assess whether and to what extent the various participants on a given programme are intuitively likable. The most striking element of *Eden: Paradise Lost's* viewing contract is that it invites its audience into a sustained dislike of the all-male clique known on the programme as "the valley boys". The

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[10] As an indicative example of how the show was being reported in terms of the harms to participants see Peter Swindon's report in the *Herald* which described the *Eden* participants as "traumatised participants" (Swindon, 2017).

scripting of the programme curates a perspective of the valley boys as almost irredeemably loathsome. As various sequences show, the valley boys leave a trail of pain and resentment in their actions and behaviour to other community members. They are boisterous, talking over others and dominating community meetings, underhand in insulting other group members, prone to aggression and boasting, ignorant and unsympathetic in their treatment of others, as well as espousing sexist and homophobic attitudes in the guise of edgy humour. The valley boys, in other words, are made to resemble what I call, after Valeria Solanas, "raving brutes".

The qualities of being domineering, easily angered and cruel I take to be attributes of what Solanas named "the old-fashioned ranting raving brute", that is a figure of a man who is immediately identifiable as repulsive to most people who might encounter him (Solanas, 2013: 32).[11] The figure of the raving brute serves the useful purpose in Solanas' argument in *SCUM Manifesto* of calling to mind a strikingly contemptuous vision of what men can be like, which lends support to her perspective that men deserve contempt at the least and in most cases extermination. While this figure might reappear with different names and descriptions, I take it to have a life beyond Solanas' text. More specifically, in more recent popular culture and public discourse, this is a figure that might be thought of as emblematic of the worst results of "toxic masculinity", by which I mean a particular ideology of masculinity that underpins cultural and social norms that tacitly support and excuse men's violence, one that has become a matter of public concern in recent years (see Ging, 2019 for discussion of current debates). Psychologist Terry Kupers' frequently cited definition of toxic masculinity names the phenomenon as "the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence" (2005: 714). While deploying the notion of "traits" to explain toxic masculinity is questionable (see Connell and Messerschmidt 2005 for a more sophisticated argument that steers away from this conception), this definition nevertheless

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[11] Solanas contrasts this figure to the modern "civilised" father who she suggests is less readily hated but in fact should also be despised because of the way that modern fathers cause harm in their families and raise successive generations of "daddy's girls" who have a fearful disposition to the world (2013: 32).

succinctly covers some of the key attitudes and behaviours that are thought of as contained in toxic masculinity. [12] As gender studies scholar Andrea Waling has observed, toxic masculinity in recent years "has become a catch-all statement when horrific acts are committed" of which men are the perpetrators (Waling, 2019: 366). I suggest thinking of the raving brute as an image of a man who possesses particular "toxic" characteristics to an extreme degree, one who takes particularly repellent measures in maintaining an appearance of hardness and indicating their superiority over others.

The figure of the raving brute is one that is mobilised in different kinds of feminist arguments about men's violent conduct. For Solanas, men are inclined to behave as brutes because this kind of behaviour is their genetic destiny, a result of being born as a "biological accident" (2013: 23). Feminist arguments that are more widely accepted in the present reject this biologically essentialist argument and would be more likely to suggest that men who embody raving brutes do so as a result of social factors, such as toxic masculine cultures that promote social norms by which antifeminism and the subjugation of women is tolerated or even celebrated.[13]

The raving brute carries an affective charge as repulsive and loathsome. In Solanas' explanation of the figure, it refers to a man "so ridiculous he can be easily despised" (2013: 32). To articulate this point in terms of the theme of domestic discontent that I have been exploring in this thesis, the figure of the raving brute is an object of discontent: people feel discontented with the raving brute. The affective charge it carries is especially forceful in the mid-2000s to late-2010s. As various scholars have noted (Orgad & Gill, 2019; Wood, 2019; Kay & Banet-

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[12] While Kupers has proved a helpful reference point to debates about toxic masculinity, the work of Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) account of hegemonic masculinity more obviously informs my interpretation of "toxic masculinity". Connell and Messerschmidt argue that hegemonic masculinity may result in some men engaging in toxic practices, but hegemony can be responded to in multiple ways and, in some cases, men may engage in different kinds of practices e.g. practices that distance oneself from "toxicity". It might be more appropriate to understand the phenomenon that toxic masculinity refers to under the name hegemonic masculinity, but my discussion is coined in the popular terms of toxic masculinity, since this is the term that has left the strongest impression on the public imagination.

[13] This position broadly aligns with Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) position on hegemonic masculinity, for instance. See also Messerschmidt's (2019) more recent account of hegemonic masculinity.

Weiser, 2019), the end of the 2010s can be characterised as a juncture involving a remarkable

quantity of feminist rage and anger circulating in media culture. The raving brute might be

thought of as one of the figures that symbolise precisely the kind of behaviours and cultures

about which people are angry. The raving brute might be considered as standing in for the causes

of a multitude of harms enacted by men and is, therefore, an enticing target for anger.

In suggesting that the repellent men of *Eden* resemble the figure of the raving brute, it is

important to note that the type of raving brutes that they resemble are those that belong to two

separate domains of media culture. The first is the raving brute of contemporary comment

articles, think pieces and social media discourse. The second is the raving brute of horror film.

First, in repeatedly drawing attention to the repulsive qualities of the men in the

community, *Eden: Paradise Lost* makes a very culturally salient and contemporary commentary

that plays on cultural anxieties that were very much active in the public imagination during 2017,

when the series was first broadcast. As popular feminist website and magazine, *Gal-dem*, reported

at the time, 2017 was the year in which the phrase "men are trash" entered widespread

circulation on social media, an expression often conveyed on Twitter using the hashtag

#menaretrash (Olaoshun, 2017). "Men are trash" captured a generalised discontent with various

aspects of sexual politics. In the analysis of journalist Oluwakemi Olaoshun the expression

served the purpose of venting frustration about news events related to sexual violence but also

worked to express a more generalised feeling of frustration with ill-treatment from a male

partner or behaviour encountered in daily life that showed male entitlement.[14] Relatedly, between

the autumn of 2016 and the summer of 2017, a cycle of well-publicised books exploring

masculinity were published that received significant press attention in Britain (Grayson Perry *The*

Descent of Man [2016], Robert Webb *How Not To Be A Boy* [2017], Chris Hemmings *Be A Man*

[2017]). A common theme repeated in discussions around these books, in adjacent newspaper,

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[14] See also Indiana Seresin's (2019) helpful analysis of this social media phenomenon.

radio and TV commentary, was that of "toxic" masculinity, with discussions encompassing

issues like the damage caused to men when they try to present themselves as tough and

invulnerable in order to maintain their status in groups of male acquaintances.

The narrative that *Eden: Paradise Lost* constructs is one that resonates with these cultural

anxieties and national talking points.[15] Part of the way in which the programme emphasises these

associations is through the inclusion of critical comments and observations by the female

participants of *Eden*. In one instance, Ali, a doctor who left the *Eden* camp a few months into the

project, describes her frustration with the behaviour of the men in the community, especially

their irritating performance of toughness. Ali says: "I was hoping people who were a bit quieter

and more sensitive would have more voice as time went on but actually I don't know if we will. I

hate boys with brawn who throw their weight around with their muscles and all of this and like

now there seems to be a big fucking group of them just there". She adds that the project

descended into a "fucking penis size matching competition". Here we see Ali deploying an

aggression of her own, conveying a sense of being pushed into an extreme frustration. In

another example, Josie, a shop attendant before she entered the *Eden* community, criticises the

decision of the valley boys to slaughter an increasing proportion of the community's livestock.

When talking about the slaughter of animals, she says, in indirect reference to the valley boys, "I

think you maybe end up shutting off some side of yourself because you have to in order to be

able to deal with that, maybe it means that you're also shutting off from human connections as

well". Josie's comments resonate with common comments made in relation to the notion of

"toxic masculinity" whereby some men are said to lack emotional skills and capacity to relate to

others on account of their mode of performing their masculinity.[16]

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[15] *Eden: Paradise Lost* operates in part as what journalist Molly Fischer (2018) has called "entertainment-as-think-piece", a media entertainment product whose stance on some contemporary social debate, and the way in which this stance is conveyed, is a key part of the entertainment.

[16] For an indicative journalistic account that demonstrates the way this emotional suppression notion figures in the public imagination see *Harper's Bazaar* article "Men Have No Friends And Women Bear The Burden" (Hamlett, 2019).

Moreover, the fact that the valley boys experiment with an all-meat diet resonates with histories linking meat to male dominance. As Carol Adams (1990) argues in *The Sexual Politics of Meat*, in patriarchal cultures meat is thought to promote strength and thus eating meat is conceived as a route to obtaining the attributes of masculinity. The valley boy's diet might be thought of, in this context, as a means to inflate their sense of masculinity, a pursuit of toughness that again recalls behaviour that may be categorised as "toxic".

The programme also brings out a relationship between close male friendships and sexual violence. When the valley boys boast of their close bonds, such comments take on a concerning tone. Glenn for instance speaks of the friendship of the valley boys as "five blokes who work together and get on with each other and work closely every day — that became a bond like a little brotherhood". Glenn's phrasing seems to work towards making this group seem as banal as possible. The word "little" conveys the group as cute, as something mostly harmless. But the "little brotherhood" is positioned in the programme as more obviously something about which we should feel alarmed. This feeling is particularly cultivated in the programme when footage is shown of the men's derogatory jokes and violent sexual "banter". In one segment of footage, some of the valley boys discuss how they would prefer to divide the women of the community based on which women would make preferable sexual partners for which men.

Since the fixed cameras of the *Eden* site give "backstage" access to the private conversations of the valley boys, as is an enduring promise of reality TV formats, viewers have the opportunity to witness "banter" that would normally be conducted in private. In this way, the programme offers the chance to see the interior of the "locker room", a space of male-only access that is imagined as one where misogynistic attitudes breed, a construction made particularly relevant in 2016 after Donald Trump defended one set of his sexist remarks by passing them off as "locker room talk" (Friedman, 2016). In the *Eden* site, one of the physical manifestations of the imaginary "locker room" is — appropriately — the toolshed, a popular location for private conversations in seclusion from other community members. It becomes

apparent that the space is one in which the valley boys can vent and confirm one another's

feelings of sexist rage and resentment. One particularly striking sequence of footage in this

regard is the moment in which Titch and two of the other valley boys, while in the toolshed,

discuss the capability of men and women respectively, and the distribution of work in the

community. Titch says: "Us men need to do the manly jobs because we can get them done in the

morning without fucking pissing and moaning, the women need to fucking do the women jobs",

comments that are met with approval from the other men.

While *Eden: Paradise Lost* features a version of the raving brute from the sphere of

contemporary comment articles and social media, the programme also animates a second type of

raving brute which belongs to a rather different cultural domain: horror film. The storylines of

the programme construct a horror narrative about "the brute within" that threatens to emerge

from any man trapped in a rural location isolated from civilization. Jack, a former army officer,

one of the valley boys, says on the programme that "when men live in the woods, they go feral",

a statement that evocatively captures one of the main explanations of events that *Eden: Paradise*

Lost puts across.

Such a narrative is one that is familiar to horror film set on the outer geographical fringes

of Britain. Peter Hutchings has written of the "savage pagan and ancient landscapes" (2004: 34)

that are often the locales of rural horror films. One of the main devices that Hutchings identifies

in such films is of characters engaging with the landscape in such a way that they lose their

individual and social agency. Characters isolated in remote landscapes become subject to

compulsions beyond their control. Unlike other types of horror films in which the monsters are

external to the protagonists, these films deploy protagonists that themselves have the capacity to

regress into violent states of being. The horror emerges from the fear of what lies within

oneself.[17] Moreover, as films like *Straw Dogs* (1971, dir. Sam Peckinpah) exemplify, this fear is

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[17] See also Adam Scovell's (2017) discussion of folk horror cinema which deals with similar themes to Hutchings's
essay.

often embodied by urban interlopers who encounter strange and threatening residents in rural "backwaters". A common rural horror trope involves an interloper entering an isolated rural village in which the residents are cut-off and thus "backwards" in their morality.

Eden: Paradise Lost stylistically evokes horror films. The opening credits show various striking images that emphasise destruction and suffering, combining a shot of participant Katie screaming and crying with a dark night sky lit by a flash of lightning. The stock background music of the programme transformed from the light sparkling lifestyle TV music of the initial *Eden* episodes to a soundtrack that might befit a ghost story in its dissonance, featuring slow-moving upper strings transitioning to rumbling bass drones with irregular high-pitched frequencies. Moreover, the handheld camera footage taken while moving through darkened woods that appears on occasion in the programme recalls a point of view horror film like *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, dir. Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez).

Because of this stylistic framing device, then the unsavoury actions of the brutish men in the community take on a sinister tone. There is frequent intercutting of footage of the participants of *Eden* with close-up shots of the tools with which the participants work, including those that could be used as weapons, knives and saws. A recurring shot in the opening credits of the programme is one of a saw lying on the forest ground covered in blood. In one sequence, meanwhile, we see Titch, the plumber, stabbing a knife in repeated patterns in the spaces between his fingers. On a couple of occasions the knife nicks his skin and draws blood but he continues the game regardless. These tools we anticipate being used in a violent manner given all the fights that occur throughout the project. In a certain respect the focus on the knives operates as a "Chekhov's gun", that is a narrative device whereby a weapon is prominently placed in the mise-en-scène, the presence of which foreshadows violence that will occur later in the story. Violent assaults with the knives do not occur between the residents of the camp, but because of the tone of the programme, the prospect of violence hangs over the story.

An especially emotionally fraught moment that demonstrates the men of *Eden* as horror movie brutes is that relating to the exit of Rob Patterson from the camp. The valley boys decide to experiment with an all-meat diet which means that they begin to demand that an increasing proportion of the community's livestock is slaughtered. The all-meat diet creates a dilemma for Rob who is expected to comply with the demands of the valley boys given his role as vet in the community. The outcome of Rob's distress at the slaughtering regime is that he decides to leave the *Eden* community. He makes a dramatic exit in the middle of the night without saying goodbye to any of the community members, not even his girlfriend Katie, who upon discovering Rob's exit cries in desperation and calls his name while shaking with shock. Rob leaves without informing the production team and is later found miles away from the *Eden* site walking along one of the isolated country roads in the area. Since the valley boys have been imaginatively bound up with the monsters of horror film, then Rob comes across on a symbolic level as murder victim. This framing is most pronounced in a short clip included as part of this storyline. Some of the valley boys are chopping wood in one of the cabins. As Glenn goes to strike a log with an axe he says "this log's Rob" before swinging the axe down to an audible tittering of his accomplices in the cabin. Here we are presented with an image of the valley boys as being only a short distance removed from axe murderers. While Rob shows vulnerability and sensitivity when it comes to the animals, the valley boys show no remorse about their slaughtering regime. As chef Stephen says at one point while preparing the carcass of an animal that has recently been killed, "I don't feel like I'm really living until my hands are covered in blood and stuff". With the exit of Rob, the programme demonstrates the valley boys as having both literal and figurative "blood on their hands". Damningly for the valley boys, Rob's departure reveals that the descent into feral masculinity experienced by the clique could have been refused.

Sixties critiques of communes

In the course of mobilising the figure of the raving brute as a crucial part of the storyline of *Eden: Paradise Lost*, the programme envisions the commune as a space over which men can gain control and that allows their poor behaviour to propagate. One recurring element of the storyline in *Eden: Paradise Lost* is the narrative that the *Eden* community maintains a belief in its cohesion as a community, and in the non-hierarchical nature of the community, even while many of the group's decisions are heavily influenced by the valley boys who use various tactics to shape group decisions to their own satisfaction. Such a perspective on the commune reproduces a critical understanding of this living arrangement that was especially active in feminist arguments in the 1960s and 70s.[18] For instance, Solanas, in *SCUM Manifesto*, dismissed the commune as "an extended violation of the female's rights, privacy, and sanity" (2013: 39). Solanas' point here is that the attraction of the commune for straight male hippies was "the thought of having lots of women accessible to him" (2013: 39). For all the talk about liberation among countercultural bohemians, in Solanas' view the commune simply reproduced the patriarchal dynamics of a traditional family, only with the ostensibly more laid-back hippy male as head of the household rather than the modern father.

Perhaps the most influential version of this argument, meanwhile, was made in Jo Freeman's essay "The Tyranny of Structurelessness" (2013). Freeman makes the point that so-called "structureless" groups — which many variations of commune resemble — in fact reproduced hierarchies of power even while these hierarchies were disavowed by the group's members. For Freeman, "a laissez-faire group is about as realistic as a laissez-faire society; the idea becomes a smokescreen for the strong or the lucky to establish unquestioned hegemony over others" (2013: 232). By denying the existence of hierarchies within such groups, the

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[18] These debates are expressed in Jo Freeman's article "the tyranny of structurelessness" (2013). Such debates also informed the extensive ethnographic study of the British commune movement by Abrams and Maculloch (1976). See in particular the chapter titled "Men, women and children". This issue regarding communes reinscribing gender hierarchies also informed the creation of women's separatist communes. See Herring (2007) for discussion.

participants failed to have any formal mechanisms by which hierarchies of power could be negotiated and so groups could come to be dominated by people with particular personal qualities or resources, or, in mixed-gender communes, by male commune dwellers.

In the *Eden* community as it is narrated in *Eden: Paradise Lost* it is quite plain that the dynamics that Jo Freeman warned about in relation to non-hierarchical living and organising can be seen in action, specifically the exertion of control by a set of men in a situation in which the majority of the group maintain a fantasy that all members of the community share an equal influence over group decisions. This situation is evident in one storyline centred around discussions in the community about the way in which food is distributed. The first episode of *Eden: Paradise Lost* recaps the decision made by the community to put Jack, a former army officer, in charge of rationing the supplies in the early stage of the community, an event which was covered in the initial *Eden* series. When this event is recalled in *Eden: Paradise Lost* it is framed in terms of the valley boys engaging in a manoeuvre for power over the community. As Katie comments in a retrospective interview: "food is a way to wield power over the group". This element of the valley boys' behaviour is reemphasised in the fourth episode of the series, when the participants who are excluded from the valley boys clique discuss the men's hunting practices, by which the valley boys are effectively hoarding and annexing meat in their own cabins, with this sequence again exposing the hierarchies in the community that manifest in unequal access to food.

A further instance in which the hierarchical dynamics in the camp are foregrounded is the striking sequence showing a community meeting that is called to discuss the gender balance of daily tasks. Word had spread among the *Eden* participants that the valley boys were unhappy with the distribution of labour given their belief that women should exclusively do "women jobs". In the meeting, some of the women in the camp explain their perspective on the issue. Ali makes the point that "no one's great at washing up", while Rachel comments that "we're all equal here". This sequence contains shots of the men involved in the misogynist conversation in

the toolshed that I mentioned above appearing discomforted. Yet the sequence is punctuated by interview footage with Anton, one of the older *Eden* participants who openly scorns the valley boys, in which he explains that the community meeting involved the valley boys manipulating the discussion to their own ends. Anton claims that the men always intended to ignore dissenting opinions: "that alpha group, that separate community they could manipulate voting, they could manipulate people just by pressurising them. And there was a very clear: "I'm doing it anyway"". His comments here, in punctuating this group meeting sequence, work to render Rachel's "we're all equal here" statement as misguided, and the notion of the *Eden* community as being non-hierarchical as fantastical.

The denial and disavowal that Freeman writes about is also evident in comments made by one of the valley boys, Titch, over his influence in the *Eden* community. Ollie, a camera operator, says in a segment of footage from the camp that Titch is "the secret leader of the *Eden* mafia" and says that "if we don't watch it they could actually end up taking over because they've got control of everything". In talking head footage from his retrospective interview after the project had ended, Titch denies the fact that he had any sort of control and gestures towards the fact that *Eden* was a leaderless group without any formal hierarchical roles being agreed. "I did what I had to do to survive and to build a community," Titch says. "I had no control over anything. I can't see how anyone else did." The cutting of this footage together invites an understanding of Titch as wilfully ignorant of the power he held within the group, and which even after the project had ended he continued to deny.

The show foregrounds a vision of the commune as an arrangement that the valley boys come to dominate, which the other inhabitants of the camp only slowly realise across the course of the year. Part of the frisson of watching this storyline unfold in *Eden: Paradise Lost* is the superior knowledge about the fate of the participants that we have as viewers in comparison with the residents of *Eden* in the footage taken during the year. Because of the way that the series is presented as a retrospective of the year, we already know that the experiment in a certain respect

failed, and bad experiences are imminent for the camp's inhabitants. The various sequences in *Eden: Paradise Lost* invite us to experience the gradual realisation of the camp's residents that the valley boys are putting on a front in masking their misogynistic attitudes and want very different things out of their time at the site. This process of illumination about the valley boys mimics the same process that Freeman's essay "The Tyranny of Structureless" performs, by which I mean it sheds light on the problem of an ostensibly non-hierarchical arrangement becoming one in which certain individuals dominate.

Yet while it is true that in a certain respect *Eden: Paradise Lost* reproduces a critical narrative about communes that belongs to feminist critique, it is worth caveating this point to clarify that I would not suggest this vision of the commune is emphasised as part of an essayistic work like Freeman's "The Tyranny of Structurelessness". To read the programme in this light would be a position that confuses the goals of popular factual television. Here it is worth returning to John Corner's arguments about popular factual entertainment in the "post documentary" culture of television. As television documentaries transform in line with this culture, Corner notes "propagandist, expositional or analytical goals are exchanged with those of intensive or relaxed diversion" (2002: 260). Following Corner, perhaps a more convincing interpretation of these scenes in *Eden: Paradise Lost* in which we see the valley boys performing power manoeuvres and manipulative tactics is to see the inclusion of this footage as more obviously designed as "confrontainment", as offering the pleasures of witnessing confrontation on screen — between the brutish men and the *Eden* participants that they irritate — and of imagining the ways in which we would like to confront the unsavoury *Eden* men if we were present at the camp.[19] That is to say a key part of the show's entertainment is both in the confrontation between the participants and the attitude of confrontation that the show draws us

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[19] The notion of "confrontainment" has been written about in the context of popular factual television in Higgins et al. (2012) in which the authors use the expression in interpreting British reality TV show *Ramsey's Kitchen Nightmares* (Channel 4, 2004-14). On the point about being encouraged to feel confrontational about the *Eden* participants, see Wood et al. (2008) for a helpful discussion of the tendency of reality TV to elicit "judgemental feelings".

into as an audience. Even though *Eden: Paradise Lost* does in a certain respect reproduce a narrative about communes that circulated in feminist debates of the 60s and 70s, it is important to keep in mind that the animation of the raving brute is part of an entertaining spectacle of confrontation and deployed with a mode of address that invites us to feel angry with the raving brutes.

To return to one of the key threads of my argument in this chapter, that the programme's form works to draw us into this dialectic of dislike is remarkably diversionary in two senses: it is entertaining and pleasurable but also it shifts attention away from the production difficulties that Keo Films faced and the safeguarding issues which might have caused promotional and commercial problems for the production company if those issues had been subjected to intense public scrutiny. That the animation of the raving brute was successful in creating a diversion in this latter sense is particularly evident in the response from commentators, reviewers and recappers of the show in news media at the time of broadcast. Such media commentary, in most cases, neglected to ask whether the production team could have intervened to spare some participants from major emotional distress or whether their failure to intervene represented a dereliction of their duty of care towards the participants.[20] The kinds of questions that are instead asked are both more emotional and more finely zoomed in on the raving brutes of the programme. Those questions might be articulated as something like: how could the valley boys act with such insensitivity and malice? Or, as the headline of an article about the show in the *NME* more crudely puts it: "are the contestants from *Eden: Paradise Lost* the biggest bunch of dickwads in reality TV?" (Bassett, 2017).

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[20] Aside from the notable exceptions of Sam Knight's (2017) investigative report in *The New Yorker* titled "Reality TV's wildest disaster" and Gabriel Tate's *Guardian* article (2017).

Boys in the woods

In this chapter, I have traced the animation of the raving brute as a figure of feminist contempt in *Eden: Paradise Lost*. I have suggested that the figure is animated in order for Keo Films to tell a story about the reality TV experiment in such a way as to avoid scrutiny for the difficulties experienced in the show's production. Given the context of escalating concerns about safeguarding and reality TV production, to foreground such a despised figure is a coherent strategy of distraction and diversion. The show's mode of address draws us into a confrontational engagement with the unsavoury men of the programme, which is part of the show's entertaining qualities and a means of diverting attention away from the culpability of Keo Films in the emotional distress of the participants.

As a consequence of animating the figure of the raving brute in the way the series does, the commune is constructed as a place where raving brutes come to dominate and exploit others. The story in *Eden: Paradise Lost* is about a remote location, cut-off from the outside world. Since the remoteness of the *Eden* community was so significant to its distinctive character, this quality of the community seems to present an explanation for the domination and poor behaviour of the valley boys. As former army officer, Jack, memorably comments in *Eden: Paradise Lost*: "when boys are left in the woods, they go feral". The commune comes across as a space that, by being intentionally separate from society, and even promising to "remake" society, ends up facilitating harmful and malicious behaviour by domineering men, whose actions remain unchecked because outsiders to the community have no contact with its inhabitants.

In this way the vision of the commune that is conveyed in *Eden: Paradise Lost* bears similarity to that in *Waking the Dead*'s "Double Bind": both communes involve a rejection of conventional society and both enable men to dominate others with disastrous results. Yet there is an important difference between these two cases. "Double Bind" involves a fictional retelling of a psychotherapeutic commune from 1967, albeit a retelling that resonated with contemporary news reports about institutional abuse. *Eden: Paradise Lost*, meanwhile, belongs to the genre of

reality TV: it purports to give its audience "backstage" access to the experiences of a group of participants recruited from "ordinary" life. Because the distressed commune dwellers were not fictional characters, the horror of *Eden: Paradise Lost* is even greater than that of "Double Bind". The events of the community's disintegration had real effects on its inhabitants who then added to the story outside of the bounds of the programme by giving interviews detailing their distress.

Although *Eden*, the precursor to *Eden: Paradise Lost*, was initially promoted as offering a retreat or escape for discontent reality TV participants, and vicariously a discontent audience, over the course of the broadcast career of the programme the nature of the discontent with which it could be associated shifted. As of the broadcast of *Eden: Paradise Lost*, the most important kind of domestic discontent to the programme is anger and frustration at the toxic practices of men, a discontent directed towards the figure of the raving brute. It is the show's foregrounding of the valley boys' "toxicity" that gives the commune of *Eden* its imaginative charge during a period in which "toxic masculinity" surfaced as a matter of public concern. We might think of *Eden: Paradise Lost* as distilling various concerns that one might have with "toxic masculinity" into one narrative with clear villains and thereby giving the anger that circulates at this time a target towards which it could be cathartically channelled. *Eden: Paradise Lost*, in short, mobilises a feminist anger and discontent, which is the key lens the show offers its audience for reading the *Eden* community's disintegration.

Conclusion

This thesis poses the questions: how is the commune imagined in television of the most recent decade? Why does the commune have imaginary vitality at this juncture? I argue that the figure of the commune is brought to life in television through characters that embody "discontented figures", figures that express discontent, and "figures of discontent", figures about which people feel discontented. These figures express forms of discontent that are familiar to the mid-2000s to the late-2010s: anxiety about climate change and dissatisfaction with multigenerational living arrangements. Several of the figures also mobilise feelings of discontent that are likewise familiar to this period: discontent with predatory abusers or with those who embody toxic masculinities. The imaginary vitality of the commune can thus be explained by the fact that the human figures imagined to inhabit the commune are saturated with kinds of domestic discontent that particularly resonate in the long decade of the mid-2000s to late-2010s.

While the thesis is titled "Screening the commune", what emerges over the course of the preceding chapters is a sense of the commune as being refracted into multiple forms such that discussing "the commune" in the singular seems unsatisfactory. As the commune is deployed in the screen genres of television it becomes the backdrop to a spectacular building project, the distracting dream of a zany mother, the site of an unsolved murder, or the failed experiment of a group of reality TV participants. While I continue to use the expression "the commune", I do so while acknowledging that the commune is not a single, cohesive unit in the popular imagination. Depending on the generic format in which it is mobilised, or the character types with which it is associated, the commune can look very different in each of its multiple iterations.

Generic constraints, expectations, and conventions influence the way in which communes are deployed in television stories. The characteristics of figures that are especially emphasised in each story is informed by the conventional narrative roles that these figures occupy. In *Waking the Dead*'s "Double Bind", the commune-dwelling characters map onto

familiar types of perpetrator of abuse and victim/survivor, while in *Grand Designs'* "Low Impact House" the ecovillage residents Simon and Jasmine Dale are constructed as typically family-oriented *Grand Designs* protagonists. Moreover, the tone that audiences, critics, and commentators expect of each programme is typically the tone that is adhered to in each case, which then shapes the way in which the commune is brought to life. As I explored regarding *Eden: Paradise Lost*, one of the main criticisms that the first series of *Eden* received was that it was too light and comfortable in tone for a "survival" series. Consequently, the second series, *Eden: Paradise Lost*, was far darker in tone and thus the image it conveys of the commune is as a disastrous living arrangement. Further, there are conventional narrative patterns and shapes to which commune stories adhere in each genre. This factor is especially noticeable regarding *Jam and Jerusalem*. Tash's failure to join up with a commune conforms with the circularity of sitcom narratives, whereby the domestic arrangement on which a sitcom is based persists in each episode.

The generic logics I have described produce a diminishing of the commune in various ways. The commune is frequently shifted to the periphery of stories and is conveyed as an absent presence, a space that informs the choices of characters but is nevertheless obscured from view or relegated to the past. In *Grand Designs'* "Low Impact House", the communal living nature of Lammas ecovillage is constructed as something not worthy of the audience's concern. In *Jam and Jerusalem*, the New Age traveller commune is an off-screen presence and a living arrangement never inhabited by any of the main characters. In *Waking the Dead*'s "Double Bind", the psychotherapeutic commune is visualised entirely through flashbacks. This point highlights the crucial role that human figures, like the low-impact pioneer or the acid casualty, have in conveying the commune in television narratives. We might say that the figure of the commune is *intimated* by these human figures. The commune takes shape as something tangible through the attributes of the human figures that are visible on screen.

The television stories I have explored are mostly weighted so that communes are treated as repellent. In *Jam and Jerusalem*, the commune simultaneously expresses the discontent of the boomerang child who desires a living arrangement that would better suit their needs and the discontent of an aspiring empty nester who perceives the boomerang child as a source of frustration. Yet while both these kinds of discontent feature in the story, they are not presented neutrally nor as equally deserving of our sympathies. Rather, the mode of address of these programmes invite us to identify with those characters who distrust or who have been harmed by communes. In the case of *Jam and Jerusalem*, the character with whom we are aligned, Sal, sees the commune as an obstacle to her daughter's personal growth. In *Waking the Dead*'s "Double Bind", we witness the intense harms experienced by the acid casualties and are invited to identify with DS Boyd's outrage. The narrative of *Eden: Paradise Lost* involves the women in the Eden camp gradually realising the extent to which the valley boys have mistreated them and invites us to inhabit their position of anger. There is no moral equivalence drawn between those who advocate for communes and those who abhor them: it is the repellent qualities of the living arrangement that are most emphasised.

An overall picture that emerges in my archive of case study programmes is the commune as a place that might make one's skin crawl. For Sara Ahmed, the process of making the skin crawl occurs when "the threat posed by the bodies of others to bodily and social integrity is registered on the skin" (2004: 54). Thinking of the commune as a body that poses a threat offers a helpful characterisation of the way in which the communes of popular television are imagined. The commune disturbs because it is thought of as breaking with social and ethical conventions about how one's domestic and intimate life should be conducted. The commune is imagined as the domain of both cult leaders and raving brutes, and so is constructed as a place that fails to maintain the safety of its inhabitants. Further, because of the commune's relationship to the boomerang child and the selfish feminist, it appears to threaten a conventional mechanism of generational succession whereby an adult child "flies the nest" and starts a family of their own.

Lammas eco-village, the subject of *Grand Designs*' "Low Impact House", does not have the same skin-crawling quality when featured in the home construction programme, yet the reason it is positioned as safe and admirable is because its nature as a communal living arrangement is obscured. Instead of being a disturbing threat to the status quo, Lammas is positioned by *Grand Designs* as the background scenery to a self-contained hardworking family unit. This case confirms what the other cases show: that the commune's default imagining is as skin-crawling threat and disturbance. The fact that the *Grand Designs* production team deemed it necessary to downplay the fact that Lammas ecovillage is a kind of commune reveals the negative resonances held by communes.

The notion of the commune as making one's skin crawl, though, is insufficient for capturing all the nuances to how the commune is conveyed in my archive of programmes. It is also true to say that these stories bring to light the commune, and its inhabitants, as audacious. I use "audacious" in the more positive sense of the word, as in to breach norms with boldness while facing moral censure for one's actions.[1] The desire for communal living is conveyed as encompassing a quite brazen desire to break from the norm and a hope that one's situation can change even if that means breaking with convention and protocol. Tash in *Jam and Jerusalem* aspires towards living in a New Age traveller commune partly to help manage being a lone parent to her young son. The troubled psychiatric patient Daniel Lennon in *Waking the Dead*'s "Double Bind" is taken in by the promises of a sixties guru for liberation and personal transformation. Some of the participants of *Eden*, meanwhile, hope to build a community in which all members are treated as equals and which might entail gentle, communitarian processes of decision-making. None of these hopes and intentions come to pass, and some are subject to reversals and changes of mind, but they are present in the stories nonetheless, testifying to the characters' willingness to break away from the crowd and their daring orientation to the future.

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[1] See Jennifer Cooke (2020) for a helpful account of the various resonances of "audacity" and "audacious".

It is especially noticeable that these stories present characters who are drawn to taking brazen action having amassed *domestic discontent*. It is this aspect of the stories — their dramatising of domestic discontent — that I emphasise as being the distinctive quality that gives the commune its imaginative charge in the recent decade. As I signal in the title to the thesis, I characterise television stories about communes as being "popular tele/visions of domestic discontent". When used as a narrative device or setting, the animation of communes allows television stories to explore scenarios of discontented people struggling with issues of intimacy and domestic arrangements familiar to the period. The scenarios that the characters encounter reflect experiences and attitudes towards domesticity that exist in the period in which these stories were produced, issues of domestic discontent that were heavily publicised as fraught issues of the time. Characters and factual television participants manage thrifty responses to climate change, navigate the tensions of multigenerational living, come to terms with the knowledge that a once trusted authority figure is a perpetrator of abuse, negotiate living with men who embody toxic masculinity. One way of articulating this point is to say that television stories about communes are an important area of contemporary television in which the atmosphere of discontent at this time is transformed into narratives and presented in terms of dilemmas and scenarios facing human characters. We might think of the commune as an imaginary object into which the atmosphere of domestic discontent is condensed and distilled: a repository of the heightened unease of the period.

One of the important things we learn from the readings I propose in the thesis is that Anna Hunt's (2008) argument about the "domestic dystopias" of television, which I discussed in Chapter 1, largely holds for thinking about the televisual reanimation of the commune. Hunt argues that television of the early-2000s displayed a fascination with unconventional living arrangements. The "domestic dystopias" of this period placed a spotlight on domestic disarray and thus offered a way of looking at family life that emphasised its ugly discontents. At the same time, these programmes show nonfamilial arrangements to be something from which one should

recoil. The commune's television revival can be characterised as containing similar qualities to these "domestic dystopias" in that they allow for an exploration of characters' domestic discontent, their dissatisfaction with family life, their desires for radical transformation of self and society, while at the same time positioning the commune to be something about which one should be wary.

The thesis has contributed to the field of television studies by taking an interpretive strategy and theoretical lens belonging to feminist television criticism and applying it to the commune, which has before now been unacknowledged as an important object of critique for television scholars. As established in Chapter 1, my argument follows work at the intersection of domesticity and popular culture: studies in which the domestic spaces and living arrangements of television are examined through the lens of circulating attitudes or feelings towards domesticity that exist in a given period. Where my project makes a departure from this existing set of work is in examining a phenomenon that is uniquely discernible in recent years. The animation of communes in contemporary television is a trend that takes shape as worth remarking upon from the vantage point of a researcher positioned at the end of the 2010s. Further, my project has developed a more expansive understanding of "domestic discontent" than previous studies, one that combines seemingly distinct issues that elicit discontent, such as society's response to climate change and predatory abusers, into a single set. This strategy enabled me to show a common thread to the commune's imaginative charge across the strikingly diverse set of genres in which it is deployed.

By writing about the commune's deployment as a television device and setting, and subjecting four case study programmes to detailed scrutiny and analysis, I have provided a more complicated picture of communes than the sometimes crude and oversimplified visions of communes that these programmes construct, and created some distance from which to reflect on how we are invited to be moved by tele/visions of the commune. As Claudia Castañeda (2002) argues, figures contribute to the "making of worlds": to learn something about figures is

to learn something about the fields of perception through which we make sense of others. I have shown that tele/visions of the commune are saturated with discontent and its close relatives: feelings like anger, frustration, and resentment. This critique is valuable because it opens up a perspective that might allow for a greater appreciation of how one engages with discontented subjects who may be perceived through stereotypes about communes.

Through the course of conducting the research towards this thesis, my attention has been drawn to numerous threads and insights that were outside the scope of my key questions. This situation shows the rich possibilities for further exploration of some of the issues and themes that I have touched upon in the previous chapters. One of the observations to which I have returned on multiple occasions is the parallels between how communes are featured in film and television. The mediums and production cultures of film and television have permeable boundaries, something especially true over recent years in which media scholars have noted the rise of cinematic, big-budget television and the shared creative practices that now belong to both mediums (Nannicelli, 2019; Turner & Tay, 2009). Because of these permeable boundaries, then it seems plausible that a similar kind of animation of the commune might have occurred in popular film as in television. In the course of exploring the televisual reanimation of the commune, I came upon a cycle of films that explore the figure of the cult leader, films that were released over the same period that I have explored in the thesis. Those films are *Martha Marcy May Marlene* (dir. Sean Durkin, 2011), *Mandy* (dir. Panos Cosmatos, 2018), *Charlie Says* (dir. Mary Harron, 2018), and *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood* (dir. Quentin Tarantino, 2019). These objects present interesting candidates for further investigation, particularly given that this cycle has emerged in a period in which the #metoo movement has become prominent alongside a culture of anger and anxiety about controlling men abusing their cults of personality, an issue to which I have partially attended in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

Further, in looking into the discontented figures / figures of discontent that I have grouped together in the thesis, it became apparent to me that each of these figures have their

own peculiar imaginative charge in the decade of domestic discontent. Any one of these figures may merit a separate investigation. Some indicative questions that might be asked about a selection of these figures are: to what extent has the low impact pioneer been rehabilitated and sanitised in other television formats or areas of popular culture beyond the home construction TV of *Grand Designs*? How does the resentful image of the boomerang child compare to other cultural articulations of this figure that belong to genres beyond comedy? To what extent does the cult leader occupy our cultural horizon as a fantasy figure of identification as much as a lightning rod for anger? In other words, it may be worthwhile asking questions of these figures that do not necessarily concern communes.

This point about the vitality of the discontented figures / figures of discontent that I have examined brings me back to the central work of the thesis. While communes are very often thought of as fossils from the 1960s and 70s, a living arrangement that is occasionally dusted off for examination by researchers who are interested in sifting through a culture's relationship to the past, my thesis has highlighted the commune's striking imaginary vitality in the present as witnessed in its animation as a device and setting of popular television. Commune narratives feature scenarios in which people must navigate their domestic discontent. Television stories about communes, then, hold a crucial status as artefacts of popular culture that confront the heightened unease over matters of the domestic in contemporary life. My thesis offers an initial step in the field of television studies to understanding this phenomenon.

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