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## **The Half-Imagined Past: The Audio-Depiction of 1960s Capitalism and Freedom in the Music of *Wolfenstein: The New Order* and *Mad Men***

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### **Abstract**

In this article, we investigate how music is used in *Mad Men* (Lionsgate, 2007-2015) and *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (Bethesda Softworks, 2014) to signify a temporality in media that we call the “half-imagined past”: anterior time situated partly in mediated imagination and partly in historical reference. We thus refer to a qualitative concept of an anterior time signified by pointers to the historical period through media, objects, emotions, symbols and sensorial experiences. We further argue that the half-imagined past in screen media not only converges in imagination, memory and historical reference, but does so in a nexus of contemporary ideological and cultural politics. In that sense, pastness in popular media is not only an audiovisual representation, but also a co-construction between media and audience made up of both imagination and the ideological placing of historical references, in this case through the use of music.

**Keywords:** Half-imagined past, music, ideology, *Mad Men*, *Wolfenstein*

*Résumé en français à la fin de l'article*

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## Introduction

Frequently described as the third dimension to the two-dimensional film screen (Palmer, 1990; Rosar, 1994), music serves many purposes in screen media. One significant function is to augment emotion in cinema (Cohen, 2011), by way of generating emotional meaning (Juslin, 1997) or by establishing a general mood (Pignatiello, 1986). Music, alongside the visual, also co-creates narrative meaning, one of the earliest examples being Russian director Sergei Eisenstein's extension of visual montage to sound, suggesting an intelligibility of cinema drawn from the entirety of its audio visual presentation not only in the cuts and edits of images, but also in the accompaniment of musical tempo and orchestration. Yet another function of music is to distinguish space in cinema between the diegetic and the non-diegetic, in the process shifting meaning and affecting how the viewer understands the text. In conjunction with the spatial properties of music in cinema, it creates a sense of the temporal, placing the images, characters and actions depicted in film within a time.

With respect to these ways in which music connects to temporality, this article investigates how music is used in screen media to signify pastness. By "pastness", we do not only mean history, although the historical is certainly part of the concept. Rather, by "pastness", we refer to a more qualitative concept of an anterior time not necessarily defined by chronological events, but, more importantly, signified by pointers to the time period through media. Such media include music (of course), as well as objects and symbols, and are amplified by the solicited emotional, imaginative and sensorial experiences. The viewer's understanding and experience of pastness through screen media in this sense thus straddles historical account, viewer experience and imagination. We argue that maintaining this balance produces a temporality in media that we call the "half-imagined past": anterior time situated partly in a viewer's imagination and sensorial experience as solicited by media, and partly in historical reference. In this mediated imagination also lies the grounding of fantasy, or a general acceptance of the famous "suspension of disbelief", in the presentation of historical events or the lives of historical figures. In each case, the images and events of history are mixed with exaggerated or contradictory elements that result in a heightened or altered reference to the historical event or image. Most significantly, we argue that the convergence of imagination, memory and historical

reference in screen media is made in a nexus of contemporary ideology and cultural politics. In that sense, pastness in popular media is not only represented in terms of the audiovisual, but is also co-constructed by the audience, made up of its imagination and solicited experience, while entirely framed within a significant ideological placing of historical references.

In the first half of this article, we thus elaborate on our ideas of the half-imagined past as evoked by music, particularly by distinguishing it conceptually from nostalgia. In the second, we examine how the half-imagined past operates in two media works: the HBO TV series *Mad Men* (Lionsgate, 2007-2015) and *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (Bethesda Softworks, 2014), a first-person shooter video game developed by MachineGames (hereafter *Wolfenstein*). In particular, we analyse and compare how music in both works signifies the era in which their narratives are set – in both cases, the 1960s – and in the process critique their respective embedded ideological meanings.

### The Texts

We chose *Mad Men* and *Wolfenstein* as our case studies because they are particularly apposite for comparative analysis. On one hand, they share a number of commonalities. Both texts use music to reference the same era (the 1960s). Both were popularly and critically received. *Mad Men* has won numerous awards, including multiple awards from the American Film Institute, Directors Guild of America, the Emmys, the Golden Globe and the Writers Guild of America, with record viewing numbers in the millions (Kissell, 2015). Within a week of its release, *Wolfenstein* entered various best-selling game charts, including becoming the second-best selling game of 2014 in the UK, behind *Titanfall* (Makuch, 2014). It also won several gaming awards, such as Game of the Year from *Classic Game Room*, and nominations from the Golden Joystick Awards and the SXSW Gaming Awards (Blase, 2015).

On the other hand, both texts use music to express different conceptions of pastness in their references to the same era, allowing for intriguing contrasts to be made between them. Stretching over 7 seasons covering 92 episodes, *Mad Men* is a detailed historical drama set in the late 1950s and 1960s, following the adventures of Don Draper (played by Jon Hamm) as an advertising man beset by personal secrets, tumultuous relationships and creative genius. It has been critically lauded for its historical accuracy, such as its visual richness, with period

clothing, accessories, furniture, hairstyles, and automobiles represented in minute detail. This minutia of historical accuracy even extends to the series' creators "actually check[ing] the weather for particular days in the 1960s, so the characters can be dressed as accurately as possible". (Desta, 2015, n.p) Conversely, *Wolfenstein* is historically counter-factual: its narrative world is a Europe where Nazi Germany won the Second World War, following the dropping of an atom bomb on New York City in 1948. The game's protagonist is William "B.J." Blazkowicz, who lay in a coma following injury while fighting the Nazis in 1946. He awakens in 1960; the game then follows Blazkowicz's campaign against the Third Reich in a vast story world that is culturally, socially and politically imagined as controlled by Nazi Germany. This detailed counter-factual history of the early 1960s in the game is described as its "standout" feature: "where *The New Order* really shines [...] is in its plot, characters, and presentation. It's swimming in cool, alternate history lore that makes *Wolfenstein* feel strangely believable." (Moriarty, *IGN* 2014, np)

The two texts thus point to the same era in diametrically opposite ways: acclaimed historical accuracy against acclaimed historical counter-factual accuracy. Through a comparison of their aural strategies in presenting pastness, we will contrast the different approaches through which these works present imaginative, fantasy and sensorial experience not only to express temporality on screen media, but also to reinforce a specific ideological foundation of contemporary culture. We argue this foundation to be neoliberalism, taking David Harvey's definition: "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade." (Harvey, 2005, p. 2) In its broadest strokes, neoliberalism espouses market power and freedoms, extending as a systemic agenda beyond the spheres of associated economic doctrine such as free trade and global market capitalism. As Garry Rodan writes, "neoliberalism is principally a political project of embedding market values and structures not just within economic, but also within social and political life." (2004, p. 1) A central part of our analysis is thus to demonstrate the channeling of neoliberal values in the invocation of pastness through music in these texts, and, in its larger argument, to expose the ideological placing of the half-imagined past in contemporary culture.

## Methodology

We have chosen a method of close reading media texts which foregrounds the analysis of the aural according to a dialogic concept of representation. By dialogic we refer to how any symbolic system has the potential for “boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue’s subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context).” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 170)<sup>1</sup> We employ the renewed form in this case as the reproduction and reference to popular songs from the 1960s and how these come to represent a historically grounded image of the aspirations of the era according to contemporary discourse. Music is thus used in this analytical method as the primary signifying element of time. However, as per a dialogic understanding of the texts, the audio also relies on contexts and meaning from the visual, linguistic and spatial representations to convey narrative nuances.

To that extent, our method also questions the understanding of postmodern cultural logic as a purely visual one. Such an imagocentric approach is typified by Deborah Tudor’s analysis of *Mad Men* as “a series that uses a mid-century advertising firm as a filter for a history that is reduced to recirculated images” (Tudor, 2013, p. 1). While the economy of visual images is an important element in *Mad Men*, we believe it is necessary to extend the analysis of ideology and history in terms of textuality as expressed with multimedia. Attention to only the visual will miss key juxtapositions with other media elements such as the aural, as well as other interpretative spaces.

## Music in Mediating Pastness

Music is a common and oft-used vehicle for referring to the past, or to a different era from that of the audience’s. For example, Caitlin Shaw constructs music specifically as a trigger for nostalgia (2015, p. 45) through referencing historical elements and transmediality as a technique for introducing minute details and pointers to which the viewers can attach memories (p. 50). In a fine analysis, Berthold Hoeckner (2007), taking from Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy out of the*

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<sup>1</sup> Dialogue in this case refers to dialogism, or the quality of the symbolic to be conditioned according to how “everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole - there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. Which will affect the other, how it will do so and in what degree is what is actually settled at the moment of the utterance” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 425.) In the case of the asynchronous communication of film, TV and so on, we argue that the utterance is only completed upon the engagement of a viewer, listener, or audience.

*Spirit of Music*, distinguishes between “musical transportation” and “musical transport”. Describing how a television commercial for United Airlines is accompanied by George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue*, he notes that music “is a carrier in a double sense”: “The *Rhapsody in Blue* is a jingle, a musical reminder of a particular product. Its tune carries the commodity. That is *musical* transportation. But the music also gives a lift into a realm of heightened experience. [...] That is *musical* transport.” (p. 164; emphasis in original) In other words, musical transport is a sort of exaltation, where “powerful music can impair our perception and make us forget what we see around us. [...] Music that is not attached to a fixed association spurs our imagination. [...] Musical transport, in that sense, destroys real images by replacing them with imaginary ones.” (167-8) Music transportation, on the other hand, is a reminder: “once music is attached to the image, the image becomes attached to the music, which turns into a mnemonic device. While images wither, music remains evergreen.” (168)<sup>2</sup>

Helpfully, Hoeckner clarifies that “the relationship between musical transport and transportation is not a strict opposition. [...] Music has both elements of transport and of transportation, just as it is both expressive and illustrative, a mixture of both affect and effect.” (p. 168) To that end, our argument of music evoking a half-imagined past of imagination and historical reference certainly takes on some inflections from Hoeckner’s ideas of transport and transportation, relating particularly to the use of music as such a spatiotemporal carrier of transport *and* transportation through heightened experience, imagination and memory. Specifically, the “forever now” quality in music transportation and its evocations of memory, as with Shaw’s analyses, is central to how music creates nostalgia and, in this specific case, contributes to the half-imagined past. Moreover, we argue that this transport and transportation takes place not through, or at least not only through, an exalted aesthetic and/or the mnemonic of associated imagery, but through the positioning of music within an era that is ideologically defined by readings of popular media and other cultural narratives.

The thinking of music and associated imagery also resonates with what Anahid Kassabian (2001) proposes as the approach of “the compiled score”. Kassabian identifies “two main approaches to film music in contemporary Hollywood: the composed score, a body of musical

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<sup>2</sup> The term “evergreen” in relation to “evergreen” music, or music which seems timeless, also brings up Theodore Adorno’s arguments of how such music, in his case pop music hits, are set apart from the time in which they exist, faking “a longing for past, irrevocably lost experiences, dedicated to all those consumers who fancy that in memories of a fictional past they will gain the life denied them.” (Adorno, 1976, p. 36)

material composed specifically for the film in question; and the compiled score, a score built of songs that often (but not always) preexisted the film.” (p. 2) With respect to an audience’s connection to the former, Kassabian refers to “assimilating identifications”, where “paths are structured to draw perceivers into socially and historically unfamiliar positions”. (p. 2) Conversely, compiled scores “bring the immediate threat of history”, or what is termed (in contra) “affiliating identifications”. These are “ties” which “depend on *histories forged outside the film scene*, and they allow for a fair bit of mobility within it. If offers of assimilating identifications try to narrow the psychic field, then offers of affiliating identifications open it wide.” (p. 3; emphasis added)

Pre-existing music, or compiled scores in film and other screen media, thus occupies a privileged role in the audience’s consciousness, engendering related associations – Kassabian’s “histories forged outside the film scene” – in the audience’s minds based on this “immediate threat of history”. Other scholars also remark on this privileged position. For example, Jerrold Levinson (2004) observes not only the associations from pre-existing music, but also the stronger attention paid to their “chosenness”:

First, with appropriated scores [namely, “pre-existent music chosen by the filmmaker [...] and applied or affixed to scenes or parts thereof” (p. 144)] the issue of specific imported associations, deriving from the original context of composition or performance or distribution, rather than just general associations carried by musical style or conventions, is likely to arise. Second [...] ironically there will generally be more attention drawn to the music, both because it is often recognized as such and located by the viewer in cultural space, and because the impression it gives of chosenness, on the part of the implied filmmaker is greater. (p. 144-145)

This attention both to the choice of and the “immediate threat of history” associated with the music is particularly recognised in film and music scholarship with the use of pre-existing *popular* music. The study of popular music in cinema has received a fair amount of academic attention ranging from key works on the film musical (Altman, 1981, 1987; Feuer, 1982; and Mast, 1987) to more recent edited collections (Wojcik and Knight, 2001; Powrie and Stilwell, 2006). The latter collections are particularly significant for shifting the study of film music from the nondiegetic scores “of great composers, like Bernard Hermann, Max Steiner, and David

Raksin<sup>3</sup>” (Knight and Wojcik, 2001, p. 6) to more in-depth analyses of the use of popular music in film across different genres such as disco, jazz, rock and roll and different eras. For instance, Arthur Knight’s (2001) chapter in *Soundtrack Available* discusses how the treatment of music in *Porgy and Bess* in its various incarnations (from the 1927 DuBose and Dorothy Heyward dramatic adaptation to Gershwin’s libretto in 1935 to the Goldwyn film adaptation) and performance practices, influenced and signalled the complex sociocultural reception and circumstances of each decade in which a version of *Porgy and Bess* premiered. These readings, taken from films ranging from Hindi cinema to British documentary, demonstrate how pop music complicates our understanding of false distinctions between popular and classical music, high and low culture, and, more importantly, function by virtue of their preexisting associations as important markers of cultural, gender, geographical and economic identities in their featured work.

In this article, we thus build on such analyses and approaches, specifically relying on the heightened attentions to and pre-existing associations of the compiled score to foreground the neoliberal subject in the historical period depicted in both *Mad Men* and *Wolfenstein*, both of which heavily feature compiled scores (albeit the latter as reworkings of genres and popular songs of the era to match the counter-factual history of the narrative). To draw that into a larger conversation, we also understand music in screen media to be a general signifier of cultural, political and social meaning, a position articulated by several scholars such as Claudia Gorbman, who writes that “[m]usic signifies in films not only according to pure musical codes, but also according to cultural codes”. (Gorbman, 1987, pp. 2-3) Gorbman goes on to examine how “crossing narrational borders [such as between the diegetic and the non-diegetic] puts music in a position to free the image from strict realism” (p. 4). Similarly, Tobias Pontara analyses music as “an important message” (2014, p. 8) emanating from an entity beyond the film – akin to what Levinson calls “the implied filmmaker” (2004, p. 258-259) - “who, by using [a specific piece of music], intends to tell us that this is what the scenes are all about, indeed what the whole film is about.” (Pontara, 2014, p. 8) By offering such understandings of music, we can thus register what John Shepherd (2008) calls “the musical articulation of social-intellectual structures and frameworks in different societies” (p. 70), the result of which is to

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<sup>3</sup> Such an approach particularly brings to mind significant works on understanding music and film narrative, such as Claudia Gorbman’s *Unheard Melodies* (1987), Kathryn Kalinak’s *Settling the Score* (1992), and Royal S. Brown’s *Overtones and Undertones* (1994).



“give an idea of the culture-specific nature of such articulations” in a bid to “[elucidate] the social meaning inherent in music”. (p. 70) To that extent, we draw on insights from these scholars to inform our own understanding of music (and of the compiled score) in terms of how it signifies and its role in evoking and soliciting associations and cultural meaning.

Finally, we also note a similar position in the relatively smaller body of work on music in video games, such as Michael D’Errico’s (2016) discussion of how the contribution of music to narrative falls within procedurality via “generative aesthetics”, with “increased focus on sound as a key medium for design and creativity in interactive media”. (p. 226) Similarly, Karen Collins (2008) identifies repetitive design and intertextual references in the music as key to the considerations for driving inclusion of popular music in video games (p. 117). Nevertheless, she asserts that the use of licensed music in games is problematic “as linear music, and therefore the placement of this music in a game is generally limited (to cinematics such [as] cut-scenes, title themes, credits, and so on)” (p. 119). According to Collins’ analysis, it is the mechanics of gameplay rather than the force of narrative that is the focus of the role of music in video games. A musical piece can coordinate a character’s movement through a space, signifying the passing of time, or reinforce interaction through narrative by referencing a key historical element. A compiled score may thus also operate in a similar way in video games, whereby the player is directed to key codes in narrative through the use of recognized music. (Cheng, 2014, p. 77) In that sense, music can be understood in such media as creating a sonic space for all interaction (Barrett, 2015, p. 75), including video game play and screen viewing.

### **Pastness and Nostalgia**

Springboarding from the above approaches to understanding music, the critical stance in our argument here for the half-imagined past rests on how culture, including music, is remembered, imagined, communicated and mobilised in ways which point to pastness as referencing both emotions and political frameworks.

To that extent, such an appeal to the half-imagined past collides with another concept which has been extensively discussed, namely, nostalgia. As a very broad outline, we can highlight a few salient characteristics of nostalgia. Originally a spatial condition—nostalgia being initially defined as a medical condition of “extreme homesickness”, or being “away from home” (Davis,

1977, p. 414) – it is now conventionally understood as a spatiotemporal displacement, or “a melancholic longing for a space in time.” (Sloan, 2014, p. 530) As such, nostalgia evokes both space and time: “The nostalgic desires to... *revisit time like space*, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues the human condition.” (Svetlana Boym, 2002, quoted in Kangas, 2011, p. 222; emphasis added) It is also characterised as a personal experience of the past, based on individual experiences and memories. As Hutcheon and Váldez write: “[Nostalgia] is ‘memorialized’ as past, crystallized into precious moments selected by memory, but also by forgetting.” (Hutcheon and Váldez, 1998-2000, p. 20) Finally, nostalgia emphasises loss and longing, with associated states of emotion and selectiveness as a deliberate way of connecting to the past as a “better” time. As Heineman states: “To think nostalgically is to recognize the past as intrinsically better (e.g. simpler, healthier) than the present, but it is also to feel fear and sadness that what was lost cannot be regained.” (2014, n.p.) Nostalgia can thus be identified as a personal and emotional relationship to the past, usually accompanied by longing for it, and often negotiated through the image of a place, an event, a person or with objects.

Unsurprisingly, music, with its ability to elicit emotion (*qua* transportation, as discussed above via Hoeckner), as well as memorative sounds and images (Kangas, 2011), is often used to evoke nostalgia. As Faye Woods notes: “Music’s place in the evocation of nostalgia, due to its emotional and timespecific connotations, is well documented”. (2008, p. 27) The examination of nostalgia in relation to music on screen media in particular also includes Sarah Pozderac-Chenevey’s (2014) article on how music is used in video games, such as *Fallout 3* and *Bastion*, to prompt nostalgic responses in the player in longing for a past time and place as aligned with the game characters. Strategies include, as with *Wolfenstein*, the use of popular music in *Fallout 3* from different eras “to evoke a world in which the Cold War heated up and mutual destruction did occur, a world in which the US was mangled by Chinese nuclear weapons” (n.p.), and instrumental sounds and lyrics in *Bastion*. Similarly, Ryan Lizardi (2014) bases the nostalgic evocation of the past in screen and popular media through the reader’s or viewer’s personal experience. Lizardi argues that music, among other elements, mediates pastness according to its ability to bridge the personal with the temporal, or in his words, where the focus is on “contemporary viewers’ nostalgia for the very postmodern referential characteristic that was

developed in their childhood media texts”. (p. 18) The viewer is thus shown to be a transfixed media consumer, uncritically nostalgic for a past presented as a version developed on personal terms. Taking a more extreme position, David R. Shumway describes music as creating a sort of fictional memory, whereby

songs need not literally bring the past to life for the viewer but give the impression of such an experience, creating a fictional set of memories that, especially when taken together with other such representations, may actually come to replace the audience’s ‘original’ sense of the past. (quoted in Woods, 2008, p. 30)

In other words, nostalgia could itself be based not only on personalised memories, but also on constructed fictions,<sup>4</sup> created by the regressive circulation and recycling of images, sounds and other media representations, itself an image of nostalgia as critiqued by Fredric Jameson and other theorists of postmodernity. (Woods, 2008, p. 29)

To some extent, the half-imagined past shades into nostalgia in the sense of evoking spatiotemporalities of a past time, particularly through elements such as music or objects and through imagination or fictionalised constructs. The half-imagined past is a qualitative sense of imagined pastness in space and time solicited by the strategic placing of similar elements, such as the use of music or symbols, and is in this broad respect similar to nostalgia. However, in our ideas of the half-imagined past, we are not entirely, or not only, concerned with the personal and individual experience of the past, or the primacy of interiority in nostalgia. The half-imagined past is a balance between historical account, viewer experience and viewer imagination, and certainly the latter two shade into the personalisation of nostalgic experience—the “crystallisation” from remembering and forgetting as highlighted by Hutcheon and Váldez. In similar fashion, the imaginative components of the half-imagined past take in, among others,

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<sup>4</sup> In a sense, “fictional memory” may also be a form of forgetting, particularly in terms of what Andreas Huyssen (2000) identifies as a “contemporary memory culture of amnesia — anesthesia or numbing” (p. 27). In particular, Huyssen explores remembering and forgetting in the age of digital reproduction, and argues for “the boom of memory”, thanks to media technologies, to be accompanied by “a boom of forgetting”. As he asks, in a series of rhetorical questions: “But what if . . . the boom of memory were inevitably accompanied by a boom in forgetting? What if the relationship between memory and forgetting were actually being transformed under cultural pressures in which new information technologies, media politics, and fast-paced consumption are beginning to take their toll?” (p. 27) Historical memory can now be augmented with media re-creating more than just events or even the mimesis of characters from the period. Historical environments can now be immersive, interactive and (re)producing their own artifacts. The augmented abilities of memory in the wake of these technologies can thus be illusory.

sensorial experience and personal memory, even nostalgia itself (“memory with the pain removed” [Lowenthal, 1985, p. 8]), thus bestowing on the past a quality of the interpretative not unlike the personalisation of nostalgia.

Nevertheless, there are two important differences. The first is that imagination is only one of two key components of the half-imagined past; the other is historical referencing. The historical anchors the half-imagined past in an empirical record, and as such it problematises the uncritical, ahistorical dimensions of nostalgia, which once “confined in time and space, [...] now engulfs the whole past” (Lowenthal, 1985, p.6). As such, we query this ahistoricity, and in the half-imagined past instead use the historical as the key for decoding media representation. This, too, is Woods’s insightful approach in re-considering nostalgia in her article, “Nostalgia, Music, and the Television Past” (2008). Woods analyses the television show, *American Dreams*, a “1960s-set family drama” (p. 27) which, significantly for her argument, features

not just the American past but its musical television as well. [...] The show’s central pivot was its use of *American Bandstand* (ABC 1952–89), the popular music show broadcast daily live from Philadelphia, on which protagonist 15-year-old Meg Pryor is living her dream as a dancer, along with best friend Roxanne. The programme recreated performances from the original show as well as integrating original footage into newly created dramatic situations and placing characters within the diegesis of the original broadcasts, without the aid of Forrest Gump-style computer manipulation (p. 28).

Woods’s central argument lies in how the use of fictional drama and factual footage (from *American Bandstand*) allows *American Dreams* to blend its fictionalised stories with historical account and personal memories from selected audience members. Through this “web of reference, reproduction and commentary” (p. 27), nostalgia thus takes on not only “connotations of authenticity and cultural validity” (p. 30) through the *American Bandstand* performances, but also political and social engagement to vitalise these reproductions and circulations of previous texts. This approach resonates with our ideas of the half-imagined past, where we envision the evocation of pastness, such as that of nostalgia, as an engagement not only with subjective memory and emotion relating to a prior time, but also with its historical record and documentation, so that the past is not only about its anteriority, but also an engagement with the political in order to comment on the present.

The second difference leads from the first: out of such decoding, the half-imagined past reveals its political frame, where the ideological underpinnings of its present form and representation are as much a part of its account of pastness (as an adaptive mirror of the present) as the viewer's imagination *and* the historical account in which it is rooted. The half-imagined past is a construct from many angles: defined by contemporary ideologies, cast as historical representation, personalised as individual imagination. In the examples we will examine in the second half of this article, we demonstrate how music evokes these constructs, whereby songs function as historical artefacts to bridge the gap between historical record and individual imagination, and as a result reveal the ideologies in which such pastness is situated. In the half-imagined past, music is both memory and artefact, where each song has a singer, musician/s, a recording history and a composer, while at the same time also an artistic work open to being remembered, as well as being interpreted and recontextualised. In this nexus, we argue that the use of music points to a certain temporality of pastness forged between historical resonances and personalised memory, while constructing ideological frameworks for additional meaning. We now turn to examples from *Wolfenstein* and *Mad Men* to demonstrate how.

### **Music and the Half-Imagined Past: *Wolfenstein***

We turn first to *Wolfenstein* in examining the use of music to establish the half-imagined past. As mentioned above, the game uses the music of the post-World War II era to build an “inverse” ideology to fit its counter-factual history of a Nazi victory. The music of the game is accessed primarily via the release of a limited edition vinyl LP (Fig. 1), titled *Neumond Classics: Die Einzigartige Sammlung Mit Den Grössten Gassenhauern der 1960er!* (*New Moon Classics: The unique collection of the greatest popular songs of the 1960s!* [author's own translation]). This LP can be purchased independently of the game, and its music supports the narrative world of *Wolfenstein* as one centred on repression expressed via the culture of a victorious Nazi Germany. The LP consists of eleven songs, eight of which are original musical creations, such as *Mein Kleiner VW* by Hans; *Berlin Boys and Stuttgart Girls* by Viktor & Die Vokalisten; *Toe the Line* by The Bunkers; *Ich bin überall* by Schwarz-Rote Welle; *Weltraumsurfen* by The Comet Trails; *Zug nach Hamburg* by Die Schäferhunde; and *Tapferer Kleiner Liebling* by Karl & Karla. The remaining three are re-worked songs from the 1960s as recorded in German, namely, John Lee Hooker's *Boom! Boom!* in 1962 as re-sung by the imagined Nazi pop star Ralph Becker; the Martha and the Vandellas' song from 1965, *Nowhere*

to Run, by the *Wolfenstein* group Die Partei Damen (“The Party Ladies”); and *The House of the Rising Sun* by The Animals from 1964, reworked as *Haus Abendrot* by Wílbert Eckart und seine Volksmusik Stars.



Fig. 1. The vinyl release of *Wolfenstein* (*Neumond Classics*, 2014) that features the hits of an imagined Nazi 1960s.

The salient feature of the music in *Wolfenstein* is that it parodies genres of actual pop music from the 1960s and, as such, references and subverts popular historic images of youth rebellion, individualism and culture of the era. This occurs both in relation to the music itself as well as the promotional material which surrounds it. An example of the latter is an image, taken from *Wolfenstein*'s official video trailer, of four Nazi soldiers crossing the street in a clear parody of the cover of The Beatles' last album, *Abbey Road* (1969) (Fig 2). This Beatles cover has become so iconic that *Wolfenstein*'s image of the soldiers replacing the “Fab Four” on that pedestrian crossing (complete with the white 1968 VW Beetle in the background) needs no further description for the connection to be made. Further, the image as used in relation to *Wolfenstein* refers to the fictional band Die Käfer, whose song *Mond Mond, Ja, Ja* (*Moon Moon, Yes Yes*) appears on the *Neumond Classics* vinyl release. The song is a Beatlesque tune with lyrics in German that celebrate the greatness of the Third Reich and its intention to conquer the moon, “Vereint wir sind unter dem großen Forscher” (“United we're under the great

researchers”). Die Käfer is the literal German translation of The Beatles, which, of course, lacks the wordplay in the name of the original British group with its invocations of 1950s and 60s youth rebellion (arising from “Beat” out of Beatnik, the Beat generation and so on). Such parodies in *Wolfenstein*’s promotional material are thus also part of its strategies for representing pastness, the core of which is a direct tapping into history musically (and visually), as an important contribution to its textual structure.



Figure 2: *The Wolfenstein trailer image (Bethesda Softworks, 2013) ironically referencing the music of the 1960s; here, The Beatles’ Abbey Road (1969).*

In terms of parody in the game’s music itself, we argue that the eight reworked songs draw explicitly on several popular music genres of the early 1960s (e.g. Surf, British Invasion, Garage), with performances based on the marketed images of The Beach Boys, The Monkees, The Beatles, Sonny and Cher and Eddie Cochran. They also use aesthetic strategies to exaggeratedly conjure up an image of the era, such as the deliberate deployment of distortion as a reference to sounds associated with analogue audio technology. The musical parodies become more obvious and significant in the re-worked songs. For example, John Lee Hooker’s original performance of *Boom! Boom!* (1962) has guitar as the lead instrument, with a fast tempo blues progression where he scrapes the frets and moans. However, the fictional Ralph Becker version leads with a melodious piano, with a resulting rendition that plainly lacks the harshness, rhythm and energy of the original. Similarly, as compared to the Die Partei Damen version in

*Wolfenstein*, the Vandellas sang *Nowhere to Run* (1965) with a driving rhythm section, fewer background harmonies and a more prominent lead vocal. The insistent rhythms of the tamborine are omitted in the Die Partei Damen version, and the song is less rough with a stronger reliance on orchestration.

The music in *Wolfenstein* can thus be seen as a series of parodies forming a relatively bland collection of songs where heightened emotion and feeling are replaced by a cheesy somnolence. As such, they also parody an image of a historical period as defined in its pop culture by youth rebellion and associated freedom, in which *Wolfenstein*'s songs and pop stars of the fictitious 1960s become stilted caricatures with an exaggerated schlager sound: three-minute easy listening with emphases on melody, vocal harmonies and romantic themes, lacking percussion and strong rhythms. To that extent, schlager as used here is "radically undecidable" in that it escapes "clear-cut destinations between music as either resistance or domination" (Birdsall, 2012, p. 187). Or, as Currid puts it, schlager is "an organ of experience grounded in a total refusal to participate in the political" (2000, p. 175).

Yet, we argue that the role of the schlager sound is ideologically significant in *Wolfenstein* in that it creates a parallel sonic history where the radio-friendly music in the game's fictional 1960s replaces the presumably "decadent" forms of the actual historical period. By removing elements from the music of the 1960s and repackaging the resulting parodies as schlager, *Wolfenstein* implicitly references the "degenerate music" referenced in Nazi philosophy. While the concept of "degenerate music" was never clearly defined under the Nazis, it has been variously described as music that was produced by Jewish composers or musicians; Jazz; "un-German" or "anti-German"; or "a confusing mixture of all music that was construed as alienating, overly intellectual, sarcastic, erotic, socialistic, capitalistic or American" (Potter, n.p.). In conversely referencing this "degenerate" music through schlager, *Wolfenstein* musically structures a pastness that includes a contemporary commentary on the entire concept of "degenerate" music according to parody, and the assertions of power and control over culture that come with it. Its music thus underscores the *real* battle in the game, namely, for the energy, celebration, autonomy, freedom and youth rebellion which are pointed to through its appeal in historical 1960s music, values which are thereby now placed musically at stake in *Wolfenstein*'s counter-factual history. In studying the parodying use of its music, we can also frame



*Wolfenstein* as an ideological lauding of the freedom and individualism of the 1960s as represented in the songs from which the parodies are sourced. Hence, beyond referencing the ideology of Nazi culture as satire, these songs also represent a deeper contemporary ideology in the context of post-WWII history, in which the half-imagined pastness of *Wolfenstein* is pit against the historical decade of individual freedom as led by the United States. In its musical references, *Wolfenstein* thus not only points to the historicity of an era, but also critically reveals a political stance with which to colour the presentation of its counter-factual history.

In *Wolfenstein*, the specific references to key historical milestones of the era – the apogee of rock and roll and the stepping on the moon by Neil Armstrong – ironically contrast the unhistorical conquering of the world by the Germans as presented in the story world of the game. In these ways, the selling and promotional strategies in relation to the music in the game, as much as the music itself, point to its pastness, pitting past against present, fact against fiction. Besides these strategies, ideology is present in *Wolfenstein*'s music itself. As described above, its music invokes the pastness of the 1960s. Yet at the end of the game, as B. J. Blazkowitz, the lead character, defeats his key enemy, General Wilhelm “Deathshead” Strasse, he struggles with his injuries to call in the final nuclear strike against the Nazis, and recites aloud from the poem, *The New Colossus*, by Emma Lazarus: “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.” These lines are also famous for being engraved on the side of the Statue of Liberty in the United States. In this final scene, then, it is clear that the promised freedom in *Wolfenstein*'s unhistorical world is premised on the values of an American future. In the wake of the recited poem, the credits roll, and the song, *I Believe*, plays. Originally performed as an American country western song by Chris Isaak in 1995, *I Believe* is reproduced here as a piano ballad recorded in 2014 by Melissa Hollick. The song thus delivers the final punch of the game: revolving as it does around an unhistorical narrative of a Nazi victory musically imbued in the parodied freedom of the 1960s, what the game finally conveys is the neoliberal subject synthesised in the song *I Believe* and the individual's undimmed hope for the future as shown in its lyrics: “I believe / I believe / I believe / I believe.... / I still believe in a beautiful day”. As we are told repeatedly throughout the game, freedom is what the hero of *Wolfenstein* is supposedly fighting for against the merciless Nazi regime. With Blazkowitz's victory comes a chance for everyone to attain that freedom. Yet, expressed aurally in the Lazarus poem, *I Believe* and the songs of the LP, this is a musically stated *ideological* freedom,

namely, an American-led, neoliberal ideal that comes through the popular images of youth rebellion, individualism, pleasure-seeking and autonomy from 1960s music, first modulated through the sounds of schlager, and finally triumphed over with the indomitable belief of freedom and of tomorrow.

### **Music and the Half-Imagined Past: *Mad Men***

It is also possible to detect this stance of neoliberal individualism and individual in the music of *Mad Men*. Specifically, we argue that *Wolfenstein*'s particular vision of a "free" America is the same as that represented in *Mad Men*, with music used, again, as a central strategy to convey it. If we view both texts as products of the same global media culture, their shared vision represents an example of ideological convergence along the lines of "cooperation between multiple media industries" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2). The 1960s of *Mad Men* indicate a similar brand of freedom as desired by the 1960s of *Wolfenstein*, namely, as a free market ideology, where the individuality of the era translates into an ideologically defined freedom. We can see this in several instances, such as in the episode, "The Grown Ups" (Season 3, Episode 12). *Mad Men* often uses events, characters, and cultural and social markers from historical accounts as structuring elements for its narratives; the historical event in this episode is the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on 22 November 1963. Per its format of concluding the last few scenes of each episode with a song, usually played to its full length, "The Grown Ups" ends with *The End of the World* by Skeeter Davis (1962), a ballad sung from the perspective of a forsaken woman to the man who has abandoned her. Yet, placed in the narrative context of the *Mad Men* episode, the song not only references the early 1960s from its origins in the era, but, more importantly, imposes on the historical moment of JFK's assassination a renewed emptiness, devoid of any idea or inkling of the future, stark and terrible in its desolation. The song mourns for the forsaken woman experiencing "the end of the world" which "ended when I lost your love" (Kent and Dee, 1962). With the death of Kennedy, it is America that has lost her love, and it is America's world that is now blank and facing this "end". Throughout the episode, this blankness is reflected as a sonic void: at least three characters ask "what is going on?" without receiving any response; when the death of the President appears on the television news in a deserted office, the only sound we hear is the ringing of unanswered telephones, so that the shrill insistence of inanimate objects underscores the silence of all other human activity in the paralysis of an American society consumed by shock and grief. By the time we get to the

auditory summary of *The End of the World*, the song becomes not only a sad love song from the era, but a sad love song with which *Mad Men* personalizes JFK's death as a historical event by articulating this void via the rhetorical questions in its lyrics: "Why does the sun go on shining? / Why does the sea rush to shore? ... / Why do the birds go on singing? / Why do the stars glow above? ... / Why does my heart go on beating? / Why do these eyes of mine cry?" There are to be no answers to these questions, just as there are to be no answers to the shock of America to JFK's death as portrayed in "The Grown Ups". In this love song to John F. Kennedy, the collective will of politics becomes the individual cult of the fallen leader. Such an elevation of the individual, both as the victim and the determining figure of history, adds to the neoliberal ideal of individual power over institutional concerns. Via the song, the murder of Kennedy becomes the death of a handsome romantic hero, rather than the corruption of a political system and the beginning of a decade of upheavals that would end in Watergate and the disastrous war in South-East Asia. In turning the forlorn sadness of the love song into the framing of the historical event, the song thus presents pastness in terms of historicity, emotion and, most importantly, its framing within the central ideology of neoliberal individual will and power.

The *Mad Men* episode of "The Strategy" (Season 7, Ep. 6), set in 1969, is perhaps the clearest example of how the TV series regards the era's emerging freedoms as the freedom to work and consume as a neoliberal subject. In the concluding scenes of the episode, character dialogue centers on an advertising strategy to sell "Burger Chef", a fast-food chain, to working mothers (a demographic which emerged from market research in the episode). Alongside this unexploited demographic, the episode already contains several references to changing concepts of the family, such as in-the-closet gay character Bob Benson's (James Wolk) attempt to build a cover life for a promotion by proposing marriage to Joan Holloway (Christina Hendricks), and a narrative concurrence to the Stonewall riots which occurred in the same year in which the episode is set. *Mad Men*'s derivation of the individual freedom emerging from the 1960s is thus also grounded in these portrayals of the family under pressure and undergoing radical change, often in response to the demands of working in corporate life.

What is notable in "The Strategy" is how the image of the family, in all its conceptual flux, is inextricably bound to consumption. As the episode closes, Frank Sinatra's *My Way* (1969) plays, set to, among others, scenes of Peggy Olsen (Elisabeth Moss) dancing with Don Draper,

as well as against the context of working mothers feeding their families from burger take-aways. *My Way*, a song of strong individual spirit defying social conformity as embodied in its lyrics such as “to say the things he truly feels / And not the words of one who kneels”, is applied here to the figure of the mother asserting *her* individual spirit as a neoliberal subject, defying previous social conformities for her to be a stay-at-home child-minder and housewife, and now blithely consuming fast food in order to balance her busy life. *My Way* thus becomes *Mad Men*’s ironic comment on these momentous social changes made in the lives of women at the close of the 1960s: emancipated and given the freedom to work and the power to consume, the working mother, ostensibly doing it “Her Way” to the strains of Frank Sinatra’s song, nevertheless remains more tightly chained than ever. For she is now co-opted into a larger corporate culture, one in which all social institutions, including the family, are secondary to the demands of capitalist production and consumption.

The music of the two media texts thus uncannily pair up on this ideological meeting point which critically informs the 1960s. The music of *Wolfenstein* references an American-led era of freedom and emancipation as the counter-ideology to match its narrative of a counter-historical 1960s. Yet, in *Mad Men* this freedom is actually one prescribed by the values of work and consumption in a neo-liberal conservative culture. This ideological stance is emphasised throughout the series, with one of the clearest examples being the episode of “Guy Walks into an Advertising Agency” (Season 3 Episode 6). In this episode, executives from the parent company visit the advertising agency, bringing with them a whole sweep of changes. One of them is the transfer of one of the local bosses, Lane Price (Jared Harris), to Bombay and his replacement by the visiting star from the British office of the agency, Guy McKendrick (Jamie Thomas King). However, that storyline takes an unexpected turn when Guy has his foot shredded at the office party by a drunken secretary who drives over it with a John Deere lawnmower. Unable to walk out of the office which he walked into just hours ago, Guy is rapidly fired and removed from the promotion position. At the same time, a separate storyline concerning Joan Holloway mirrors the cruelty of career setback, albeit with a little less tragedy. Following their wedding, her surgeon husband fails to get a promotion, and Joan is forced to return to work as they need money. Bob Dylan’s *Song to Woody* (1962) ends the episode, which includes the lines: “Here’s to the hearts and the hands of the men / That come with the dust and are gone with the wind”. A song about those that had gone before Dylan (in particular Woody

Guthrie), it is applied here in the context of the episode with new meaning, driving home the expendability of office workers in the 1960s as exemplified by the footless Guy and the overlooked Dr. Harris. Freedom here is thus prescribed by the utilitarianism of production and consumption, reframed by the radical poetic resonance of a young Bob Dylan as set within the historical detail of *Mad Men*.

Both media texts thus contribute to this half-imagined past of freedom through clever referencing of music – the sounds of schlager as ironic reference in *Wolfenstein*, and the application of signature tunes to momentous movements of social emancipation and political ideologies in *Mad Men*. In this sense, the musical parodies of *Wolfenstein* answers the music of *Mad Men* as a comment (or counter-comment) on the culture of the time as a historical period of breaking away from conformity, yet which only leads onwards to an inexorable hyper-capitalist present where the freedom to consume is simply a freedom that cannot be questioned. In both texts, the audience consumes their music as specific pointers towards imagining the referenced era, yet they are pointers grounded in Liberal and Modernist ideals of progress, with individual freedom only to be realised through consumption and labour. The 1960s as we remember them through these media texts are therefore constructed as a time of an emerging freedom, but one which is imagined to exist merely in the service of cold and all-consuming capital. As such, the strategies of music in *Mad Men* and *Wolfenstein* also ultimately solicit from the viewer specific connections between history and pastness, compelling answers from her about questions of past events, how they are called up, and how they are adjudged.

## Conclusion

In this article, we have analysed the music of *Mad Men* and *Wolfenstein* in terms of how it presents what we call the half-imagined past, where music is used to comment on, parody or summarise the themes or events in the texts. Moreover, via these strategies, the music resonates with the viewer/listener based on their revelations of the ideological referencing that emerges from the works' contexts. For example, the schlager re-workings of popular songs in *Wolfenstein* and the single-song summarising of *Mad Men* episodes drive ideological and emotional considerations to the fore in the works' representation of pastness. These strategies thus drive the half-imagined past in screen media: temporality that is created with audience imagination (in the case of *Mad Men*, to augment its thematic and narrative resonances; and in

the case of *Wolfenstein*, to imagine a time period according to an alternate history) and textual historical accuracy.

In that sense, the half-imagined past is neither purely historical nor an audience creation: it is a memory bank shared between the audience and the text itself in how the latter reworks and appropriates pastness through selective historical referencing and audience imagination. In that process, pastness becomes ideological – a dialogic matrix of associations and understandings, operating across media and through representations of history. The central theme to this half-imagined past in *Mad Men* and *Wolfenstein* is the freedom gained in the capitalist western world of the 1960s as the freedom to work and consume. In the latter, this freedom is promised; in the former, it is lived. The music of each work thus becomes a technique for selling this vision of history, with each song bearing an implied authenticity as a historical artefact from the relevant period. However, in order for this authenticity to be accepted, it is necessary for the music to act upon the imagination. In the case of *Wolfenstein*, this is activated in the revolving of its pastness around a popular vision of the 1960s – of youth rebellion, social conflict and most of all, of a time of music – that forms the base of its counter-factual history. In the case of *Mad Men*, our mediated understanding of the historicity of its era is necessarily coloured by music for additional meaning as a frame for the totality of narrative. The understanding of pastness in screen media thus entails close attention to such levels of intratextuality, which should be important considerations when trying to understand media today and the ideological representation of history.

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## Résumé

Dans cet article, nous étudions la façon dont la musique est utilisée dans *Mad Men* (Lionsgate, 2007-2015) et *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (Bethesda Softworks, 2014) afin de créer une temporalité médiatique que nous appelons « passé à demi-imaginé » : un temps antérieur situé partiellement dans l’imaginaire médiatisé et partiellement dans la référence historique. Nous faisons donc référence à un concept du passé représenté par des marqueurs temporels à travers des médias, des objets, des émotions, des symboles et des expériences sensorielles. Nous soutenons en outre que le passé à demi-imaginé dans les médias audiovisuels converge dans l’imagination, la mémoire et la référence historique, mais le fait également dans une perspective de connexion entre des politiques idéologiques et culturelles. Dans ce sens, le passé dans les médias populaires ne constitue pas seulement une représentation audiovisuelle, mais aussi une co-construction entre médias et public, composée à la fois de l’imaginaire et du positionnement de références historiques, dans ce cas précis par l’entremise de l’utilisation de la musique.

**Mot-clés:** passé à demi-imaginé, musique, idéologie, *Mad Men*, *Wolfenstein*