

Butler, J.G. (2013). *Mad men: Visual style*. In E. Thompson, & J.Mittell (Eds.), *How to watch television*, (pp.38-46). New York, NY: NYU Press

### Synopsis

Butler leads with the idea that “Mad Men” does not exist to recreate the 1960s but rather to provide a harsh critique of the era through a modern lens, specifically the marginalization of women, working class people and minorities and the dominance of wealthier, white, men. This is conveyed through the visual style of the show, namely mise-en-scene, cinematography, and editing. He analyzes these elements, demonstrating the way camera angle, set design, and lighting among other elements work to create 60s culture while working to simultaneously critique it. Set design is also key by physically separating the men, who dominate the space of their personalized offices, from the women, who are relegated to the secretarial pool, stuck at a single desk in an impersonal grid under harsh fluorescent lighting. The mise-en-scene of the Draper house is also important the picture-perfect visuals contradict the multitude of issues that the family possess (40). Butler explains the ways that the show’s mise-en-scene adds narrative and gives context an episode occurs citing the very intentional placement of JFK assassination footage on the TV in the Draper home. Looking at cinematography, Butler discusses the tension in the Draper home in the episode “The Grown-Ups” and how the use of a single camera allows producers to get extremely detailed shots in the heart of the set, highlighting the narrative of the characters as the focus of the show. Lastly, Butler credits the 1960s visuals for drawing viewers to show but says ultimately it is the dynamic of each characters interactions that keeps people tuning in.

### Key Concepts

- **Mise-en-scene:** “Mise-en-scene covers set, lighting, and costume design, as well as the positioning of the actors on the set. (page 38)
- **Single-camera mode of production:** A style of shooting that utilizes a single camera and “allows for more precise visual control than is possible in the multiple-camera mode of production” (page 43-44)
- **Cinematography:** “includes framing, camera angle, choice of film stock, and camera movement.” (page 38)

### Key Quotes

- “Together... mise-en-scene, cinematography, and editing are aspects of television style that...construct their twenty-first-century critique of 1960s American values.” (38)
- “Multiple-camera shows... cannot bring the camera as close to the characters’ perspectives as Mad Men does. A seemingly simple shot... with a camera positioned deep inside the set would be nearly impossible to achieve in a multiple-camera production” (45)
- “The way that Mad Men is filmed and cut is distinctive, but unlike the show’s mise-en-scene, its cinematography and editing do not mimic 1960s television.” (43)

### Essential Question

- What might future producers critique about our current culture and what techniques would they employ to craft this critique?