

analysis. As an attempt to bridge the study of television and politics, however, *Imagining Politics* is a work of unrealised potential, undermined by a hesitant and uncertain approach towards television as an object of study.

References

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Innes M Keighren and Joanne Norcup (eds), *Landscapes of Detectorists*, Axminster, Devon: Uniformbooks; 108 pp.: ISBN 9781910010242, £12 (pbk).

Reviewed by: Christine Geraghty, *University of Glasgow, UK*

On receiving this book to review, I was aware first of the sheer pleasure of handling it. In the light of the pressures of academic publishers to go digital, it is worth noting the loving attention the publisher has given this book. Everything – from the cover to the illustrations to the quality of the paper to the clear typeface – works to make reading it an aesthetically pleasing experience. And all at a price that is aimed at expanding the readership rather than limiting it to university libraries.

The editors' introduction lays out how this book came to be written about *Detectorists*, a situation comedy which ran for three series on BBC4 and built up an audience extending well beyond those interested in metal detecting and amateur archaeology. The authors were fans of the programme but are also academics in cultural and historical geography, interested in the rural environment, the English landscape and the relationship between memory and place, objects and knowledge. Making a link between these themes and a popular comedy, they organised a panel at the Annual International Conference of the Royal Geographical Society in 2018. This was they felt 'a risk'. 'It smacked of fandom; our passions perhaps too exposed... we risked being seen as unscholarly' (pp. 20–210). Many television scholars will know how they felt.

Out of that successful panel came this short book which is packed with insights and ideas. Four essays are presented here but the editors' introduction outlines three themes which run through them and help bind the book together: an interest in drawing out geographical resonances in *Detectorists* in order to show how 'geographical forms of investigation and analysis' (p. 17) can help us understand the programme and television comedy more generally better; a discussion of the rural landscape as an unusual setting for a sit com and as a preoccupation of the protagonists; and the importance of hobbies which generate social networks and shared skills and values outside the challenges of contemporary employment.

In the first chapter, Innes Keighren takes on series one. He examines how detectorists, like Andy (Mackenzie Crook) and Lance (Toby Jones), learn to read the landscape they are investigating so minutely and relates that to the ideas about the historical construction of the landscape that began to be developed by historian W G Hoskins in *The Making of the English Landscape* (1955). Keighren makes a useful distinction between the different ways the landscape can be read. Lance rather boastfully suggests that it is a matter of instinct and experience: ‘when I look at this landscape, I can read it’. His emphasis on telling a story through exploring the layers beneath, ‘interrogating a palimpsest’ (p. 33), is valued but so too are the more scientific, indeed academic, methods of Andy’s girlfriend Becky (Rachael Stirling) and university student Sophie (Aimee-Ffion Edwards), both of whom help in the search. The two approaches come into dialogue though the final shots leave only the viewer knowing where the Saxon ship burial site they have been looking for actually is.

The second essay by Isla Forsyth draws attention to the detritus of everyday objects which is the common result of the detectorists’ efforts. Drawing on work on memory, history and material culture, Forsyth explores how abandoned litter such as the ubiquitous ring pulls reveals not a connection with the past but an uneasy feeling of about how ‘the banal mundanity of the everyday . . . [is] passing into history’ (p. 51). Altered in their abandonment, these objects re-emerge to remind us of ecological damage and our own transience.

Andrew Harris’s essay discusses the relationship between two contrasting perspectives in *Detectorists*: the horizontal axis associated with the slow walk of Lance and Andy ‘patiently scanning the Earth’s surface’ (p. 59) and the vertical axis of the move down into the layered ground and the aerial perspectives offered by maps and photographs. Harris explores this in fascinating detail – I particularly enjoyed the irony of the golden cache in series three being hidden up in the air, in the magpie’s nest – and concludes that the appeal of *Detectorists* may lie in its valuing of groundedness; ‘*Detectorists* is seemingly able to arrest a sense of the conceptual and social ground being increasingly taken away from beneath us’ (p. 75).

The final essay by Joanne Norcup looks at how hobbies and knowledge are tied in with what she calls ‘geographies of gender’ (p. 79). The suggestion that the male hobbies on display in *Detectorists* are located in a particular space and landscape leads into an interesting discussion of how masculine traits and roles are embodied in Lance and Andy. Norcup suggests that this sit com disputes the idea that women are excluded from such hobbies and shows how intricately the various women characters are woven into the practices of the detectorists and, more generally, into the programme’s celebration of ‘the diversity of lives in the English rural landscape’ (p. 91).

These essays are bookended by contribution from those who created *Detectorists*. Writer/director Mackenzie Crook offers a warmly generous foreword, concluding that ‘the writers have understood *Detectorists* more fully than I ever have, and that’s fine’ (p. 10). Producer, Adam Tandy provides a shrewd afterword in which he comments on and augments the discussion of the key themes presented by the academics. For instance, in a way that reminded me of Todorov’s work on the structure of narrative and characterisation (1977), he takes up Harris’s concept of the vertical axis as it informs the creation of characters whose layers are revealed as the series makes its horizontal progress.

In some ways, *Landscapes of Detectorists* lacks what might be expected in a book about a television programme: a cast list; more discussion of production and viewing;

wider references to debates about comedy, gender and form. But it greatly benefits from a strong focus on its key themes and modes of analysis. Television Studies scholars can be grateful that these authors (and their publisher) took the risk of bringing their own particular knowledge and skills to bear on *Detectorists*.

References

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Author biographies

Hannah Andrews is Senior Lecturer in Media, Film and Television at Edge Hill University. Her research focuses on intermedial relations between cinema and television and representations of real lives on screen. She is the author of *Television and British Cinema: Convergence and Divergence since 1990* (2014) and a forthcoming book on biographical drama on British television. Hannah.Andrews@edgehill.ac.uk.

Aris Mousoutzanis is a Principal Lecturer in Film & Screen Studies at the University of Brighton. He teaches and researches on popular genre (science fiction; Gothic/horror; (post-) apocalypse; utopia/dystopia); trauma theory and memory studies; media, imperialism and globalisation. He is currently working on a project on utopia and biopower and one on media and nostalgia. a.mousoutzanis@brighton.ac.uk.

Michael P Young is a native New Yorker with an insatiable wanderlust who is finally completing his PhD in the Department of Film, Theatre and Television at University of Reading. His research interests include television aesthetics, German Romanticism, analytic philosophy, film studies and meandering around foreign locales looking for beautiful things. He is currently working on aesthetics of the melodramatic in American television political thrillers in-between naps. Often one can find him procrastinating by checking emails sent to m.p.young@pgr.reading.ac.uk.

Joseph Oldham is the author of *Paranoid Visions: Spies, Conspiracies and the Secret State in British Television Drama* (Manchester University Press, 2017). He has lectured in Film, Television, Media, Communication and American Studies at the Universities of Hull, Westminster, Warwick, and Leicester and is now a lecturer in Communication and Mass Media at the British University in Egypt. joseph.oldham@bue.edu.eg.

Christine Geraghty is Honorary Professorial Fellow at University of Glasgow. She publishes on film and television with a particular interest in fiction and form. Her books include *Women and Soap Opera* (Polity, 1991); *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008) and *Bleak House*, (BFI TV Classic, Palgrave 2012). Her most recent article is 'Casting for the Public Good: BAME Casting in British Film and Television in the 2010s' in *Adaptation*. She is Book Reviews editor for *Critical Studies in Television*. christine.geraghty@glasgow.ac.uk.