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**Abstract:**

This paper explores how Cold War nostalgia and nostalgia for the 1970s became key features of the BBC drama *The Game* (2014). It argues that the serial situated the Cold War as a more stable era in international relations where the enemy played by a certain set of rules leading to a danger that was manageable and more predictable than the terror threat of the twenty-first century. Furthermore, the paper argues the serial presents the nineteen-seventies as a golden age which was defined by the continuity of consensus politics and communities of class and family. Finally, the paper examines how this nostalgia is reinforced by narrative devices which engage with generic features such as the storyline playing out like a game. However, in the re-imagined Cold War of the twenty-first century, the traditional Chess trope has been replaced by the more complex game of Alice Chess.

Keywords: Cold War, Nostalgia, nineteen-seventies, class, family, masculinity, chess, *The Game* (2014).

**Cold War Nostalgia in *The Game* (2014)**

Toby Whithouse's six-part BBC serial *The Game* (2014, dir. Niall McCormick) is one of a number of recent dramas and films which are set during the Cold War. Steven Spielberg's *Bridge of Spies* (USA, 2015) is the most famous example of this but others include *The Americans* (USA, 2013-present), *Deutschland 83* (Germany, 2015) and Thomas Alfredson's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (UK, 2011); all of these productions evoke Cold War nostalgia. This article uses *The Game* to explore how nostalgia is evoked by period dramatizations; the serial was set in the nineteen-seventies and is nostalgic for both that decade and for the Cold War. The article demonstrates how *The Game* engages with many of the conventions of the spy genre, such as creating a plot which plays out like a game as devices to evoke nostalgia.

The nineteen-seventies are often portrayed as a 'dark age'. The journalist Christopher Brooker focused on disenchantment during the decade (Brooker 1980), and this view characterised

the 2017 general election campaign with right-wing newspapers claiming that Labour wanted to 'drag us back to the 70s'.<sup>1</sup> This memory was shaped during the nineteen-seventies and was influenced by the twentieth century's recurring 'declinist' theme in British political discourse (Tomlinson 2009). Nostalgia has frequently characterised television dramas and, as Amy Holdsworth (2011) argues, helps to shape popular memory of the recent past. Mary Irwin notes that popular memory has bled into nostalgia for elements of the nineteen-seventies such as unreconstructed masculinity (2013). The 'dark' nineteen-seventies have often been used by politicians to suggest an era in which politically naïve ideas predominated and to justify the subsequent neo-liberalisation of society (Beckett 2009: 1). However, recent historiography suggests a more complex picture of the nineteen-seventies with Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton suggesting that the decade has fallen foul of 'false memory syndrome' (2014: 2; Hunt 1998: 5) and Joe Moran (2010) arguing that the idea of a crisis decade has been exaggerated. Alan Burton (2017) has shown that historical spy dramas are not new, but that *The Game* among other popular culture has engaged with current trends of nostalgia and curiosity about the 1970s. *The Game*, however, plays to both sides of this debate and this article argues that the nineteen-seventies are cast as a decade of crisis due to strikes, nuclear anxiety and IRA terrorism, but also warmly regarded because of the existence of communities of class and family, which are seen to shield people from the worst of the decade. Furthermore, I expand on how the nineteen-seventies are situated as an interregnum during which instability rose between a golden age of consensus between political parties and the 'revolution' of the Thatcher years. Within *The Game* themes such as family and class are fondly remembered and the serial transports viewers back to the 1970s using techniques such as intertextuality and an iconography of the lost past.

The Cold War has similarly been depicted through the lens of 'false memory syndrome'. The historian Jussi Hanhimäki (2010) argues that present-day American policy-makers have fallen for Cold War nostalgia, believing that the conflict was a golden age of certainty because of depictions of Mutually Armed Destruction, which the politicians depict as rational compared to today's terrorist

threat. He elaborates on this myth by suggesting that politicians believe the era was characterised by bipartisanship and that nostalgia has been facilitated by subsequent American perceptions of decline. Similarly Beatrice Heuser suggests that the often assumed 'bi-polar' division of the Cold War world created easily discernible ideas of right and wrong, causing some to have 'a little nostalgia for the world of blue and red'(2014: 457-8). This article builds on Hanhimäki's interpretation by seeing British nostalgia for the Cold War as influenced by the perception of today's terrorist threat and suggests that the rules that are implied by *The Game* create an image of a Cold War enemy that was knowable and ultimately predictable.

The article also expands on previous examinations of 'gameplay' as a narrative device within spy fiction, cinema and television such as Umberto Eco (1979: 155). I argue that the nature of the game changes within this serial and that once the British security services work out that they are playing the 'Alice' variation of chess they are able to lure the Soviets into a trap. The deployment of these generic conventions within *The Game* are a continuation of Michael Denning's identification of national representation within the spy genre, with the Soviets often seen as calculating chess players and the British as gamblers who play a game of chance (1987: 100-1; Barnett: 2018). By displaying familiar Cold War characters and games to represent the conflicts the serial evokes nostalgia for how spying 'used to be done'.

*The Game's* plot revolves around the exposure of the Soviet's 'Operation Glass', which viewers are informed by the defecting Soviet agent Arkardy (Marcel Iures) will 'tear everything down'(i). This operation indicates a change in the rules of the game by the Soviets which is discussed in the last section. The main character is Joe Lambe (Tom Hughes), an agent of working-class origins who is an outsider in the class-riven security establishment. The team is led by 'Daddy' (Brian Cox), the un-named long serving head of service, who is assisted by Waterhouse (Paul Ritter), the head of counter-intelligence; both inhabit the upper-class world. Other team members are Alan (Jonathan Aris) and Sarah Montag (Victoria Hamilton) who excel in gathering and interpreting data respectively

and Wendy the secretary (Chloe Pirrie). They are joined by Jim Fenchurch (Shaun Dooley), a Special Branch officer in the mould of nineteen-seventies crime dramas, who is seconded to the team. Various members of the team are suspected of treachery before they expose Sarah as the mole and defeat the Soviet attempt to take over the British government.

As the drama unfolds, however, the certainties of the game become more insecure: potential threats emerge as the team attempt to decipher Operation Glass. They initially believe it is a nuclear strike, then a bombing before eventually discovering a plot for a coup at the highest levels of Britain's government, with Soviet agents infiltrated throughout the establishment, which is rotten because of the persistence of class deference. Operation Glass demonstrates the changing of the rules of the game. I suggest that the name represents the looking glass made famous by Lewis Carroll's novels and a feature of spy fiction throughout the Cold War (1947-1991). The Soviets, therefore, are now playing 'Alice Chess', a variation using two boards where players pieces switch to the other board after they have moved. The switching of boards causes confusion for the British agents. The programme therefore displays a twist on the 'authentic' Cold War spy drama which tends to treat spying in terms of normal chess.

## **Nostalgia**

*The Game* echoes historical news events such as the Cambridge spies scandal, where five members of the security service and similar establishment roles spied for the Soviets, and Harold Wilson's fears that the security services were plotting to topple him. The plot therefore reminisces about events at the margins of living memory. Britain's class system is simultaneously shown to be corrupt but also acts as protector of the nation because of the apparent incorruptibility of certain upper-class people within M15. The serial presents the early nineteen-seventies as a period of destabilisation with the Cold War becoming icy. In many ways the decade represents a golden age compared to the more aggressive conflict of the nineteen-eighties and the apparently random terror

attacks of the early twenty-first century. *The Game* is situated at a calming point in history which acts as a form of teleology – with the threats becoming more unpredictable as time progresses.

The Cold War of the nineteen-seventies is remembered using an inter-textual relationship with news events. The opening titles feature a series of newspaper headlines and images of world leaders. These figures include the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, Richard Nixon and pictures of missiles at military parades. These headlines and images act as a temporal anchor and evoke the Cold War. This time-shifting technique is also employed through the insertion of news reports into the storyline. In Episode One Joe watches a report of the 1972 miners' strike on a wood-panelled television. The clips of reporter Martin Bell allow viewers to reminisce. The technique emerges again in Episode Two when footage of a *Panorama* episode about the miners' strike is shown (possibly 'King Coal', 28 Oct 1974). Many viewers will be too young to remember 1972, but other strikes by miners during the nineteen-seventies and nineteen-eighties and their disruptive nature form part of the popular memory. For instance the 1974 and 1984-5 miners' strikes mean that more people remember the poor industrial relations of the era, giving an almost timeless quality because of the serial's engagement with an important part of recent British history.

Much of the nostalgia displayed in *The Game* craves an earlier form of politics which is deemed to be fairer and more equitable: it is the nostalgia for consensus. The politics of consensus, which some historians have argued characterised the post-war era until the election of Margaret Thatcher (Addison 2010; Kavanagh & Morris 1994), but which others suggest is a myth that masks key political differences (Jones & Kandiah 1996), acts as a form of comfort in many representations. Consensus meant the maintenance of a welfare state, full employment, trade union power and both Conservatives and Labour fervently waging the Cold War. Throughout the serial viewers are shown images of working-class aspirations such as cars, television aerials, the growth of air transport, and the emergence of a night time economy, all suggesting that the Britain represented in *The Game* is one of high disposable incomes. Whilst the miners' strike of 1972 contextualises the serial, its

situation within class politics makes the disruption indicative of a levelling of the classes and redistribution of power that is perceived to be slowly taking place, rather than a power hungry trade union that would later be demonised as 'the enemy within' (Thatcher 1984). The nostalgia creates a cosy image of rising aspiration and disposable incomes, but also of a period riven by undemocratic power structures. The nineteen-seventies act as an interregnum between the perceived golden age of the late nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties but before the chaotic economic revolution of the nineteen-eighties.

The figure who most represents consensus between the political parties is the Prime Minister. This unnamed figure is ambiguous enough to pass for either Harold Wilson or Edward Heath. *The Game* employs uchronism as it is set during Heath's rule but, during Wilson's final ministry, rumours abounded of secret service and military figures plotting to remove him from power. Wilson became paranoid about his belief in a coup, which became one of the contributing factors towards his resignation in 1976 (Beckett 2009: 166-7). In *The Game* Whithouse re-imagines these rumours. However, the establishment is filled with Soviet agents and the coup is choreographed from Moscow rather than London. Whilst the Prime Minister is indicative of the nostalgia for consensus and security at the level of the ultimate authority, those immediately beneath him are depicted as corrupt and criticism is aimed at the failings of consensus to challenge class deference. Whilst *The Game* partially rehabilitates the nineteen-seventies it does not fully absolve the decade which has often been seen as something of a dark age, with the blackouts being a metaphor for this representation.

The nineteen-seventies signify the ending of an 'older' intelligence war. Throughout *The Game* we see the evolution of espionage from a predictable game played by the Soviets to random acts of terror, which signpost the intelligence world of the twenty-first century. Episodes Five and Six feature a bombing and the infiltration of all layers of government by the enemy. Therefore, the intelligence game becomes less predictable. This loss of certainty is alluded to in Episode One when

Arkardy says 'History books will talk about the world before Operation Glass and the world after Operation Glass'. *The Game*, therefore, suggests that the intelligence services have protected Britain from World War Two to the current day – with the Cold War simultaneously marking a simpler, nobler intelligence game that was more familiar and had a common enemy but also a transition to a dangerous game that endangered and killed civilians.

Nostalgia framed the way that a number of reviewers perceived the serial. The *Guardian's* Vicky Frost wrote, 'This is spying as George Smiley would recognise it, filled with grey shadows and unease, worrisome defectors, misinformation, and lives taken too easily'.<sup>2</sup> Frost's comparison to John le Carré's nineteen-seventies Karla trilogy and the television productions of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1979) and *Smiley's People* (1982) presents these serials as part of a 'golden age' of espionage and representations of it. The *Observer's* Sarah Hughes compared *The Game* to present-day espionage: 'There is also the sense that the cold war era provides an interesting counterpoint to our own turbulent times'.<sup>3</sup> Hughes' comparison between two, apparently very different, eras of spying, results from the changing nature of security threats which depict the Cold War as a less turbulent time by contrast. She continues with a quote from the drama's creator Toby Whithouse,

The 70s don't feel far away at all. What attracted me to the period was the idea of this secret war where great victories could never be celebrated or conspicuously rewarded and great losses were dealt with in private...There's also a romantic element – the whole idea of secret codes and rendezvous and the low-fi nature of the work.

Whithouse, therefore, reveals that his own nostalgic perception of the nineteen-seventies and of espionage have been learned through spy dramas. For him the nineteen-seventies are the recent lost past. They are too far away to accurately re-create, but close enough to capture the popular memory of the mood of the era. Whithouse's nostalgia for the decade is augmented by his sense that much has changed – the nature of international relations and of espionage agencies as well as of Britain itself. *The Game* aimed to make viewers feel similarly about the era.



Other reviewers echoed this nostalgic perception of the Cold War and hinted that the world had become more dangerous. The *Daily Telegraph's* Benji Wilson stated,

As a boy weaned on **Bond**, the Cold War and heartening glow of mutually assured destruction, one of my favourite books was *The Know How Book of Spycraft* [sic]... It taught you how to pass messages between you and "a contact" (I used it to transfer highly classified intel like "Dom stinks" to fellow classmates) and make dead letter drops that I believed a cartoon spy from the book called *Black Hat* (sic), who actually had a black hat, would pick up later.<sup>4</sup>

Wilson views espionage as a childhood fantasy. His reminiscence of schoolboy imagination demonstrates the effect of nostalgia as creating the sense of an easier time; before the existence of today's terrorist threat (despite numerous attacks on Western targets during the last two decades of the Cold War), when the world was 'protected' by mutually assured destruction. Most of all, however, he remembers his youth. A similar cosy view of the past colours the *Daily Express's* interview with Brian Cox (Daddy). In her introduction Vicki Power writes that *The Game*,

harks back to the John le Carré era of low-tech spying and at a time when the West's biggest fear was a nuclear strike by Russia...In this time of global terrorism, *The Game* harks back to an era when the threat was different but no less real.<sup>5</sup>

That nuclear war never happened is presented as proof that MAD worked and Power depicts the era as more secure because of this espionage game and the balance of power, which is seen as more predictable, than the terrorist attacks that have characterised the early Twenty-First Century. Power, like many contemporary journalists, ignores that fact that a single nuclear explosion – whether purposeful or accidental – would cause more damage than thousands of small-scale operations carried out in Western countries. Both threats are seen as at least as dangerous: at least as terrifying. These reviews situate *The Game* as a serial that reminisces for the security of the Cold War and for a form of espionage familiar through the genre of spy drama.

Episode Two provides an example of why some contemporary commentators view the Cold War nostalgically. A former naval officer turned traitor, Tom Mallory(Steven Mackintosh) tortures the Prime Minister's secretary forcing her to reveal that the 'letter of last resort', instructing the POLARIS nuclear fleet captains on how to respond to a nuclear attack on Britain, had ordered 'No retaliation'. When this information is revealed in a team meeting Jim becomes angry and says,

The Prime Minister said no? That if they attack us, we won't fight back? Are you Serious? Oh so we're completely vulnerable. Everything you... The whole bloody Cold War everything it's nothing but a bluff?

At each accusing question the camera shows the placid face of another team member. The news does not concern them; perhaps they suspected it all along. To them the Cold War is a series of bluffs, maintained through their game with the Soviets in order to uphold the balance of power and peace. This comforting belief of the twenty-first century is projected upon the Cold War by commentators like Wilson and Power who nostalgically believe that deterrence worked because no nuclear war has yet occurred.

*The Game* frequently presents the Cold War world as 'bipolar'. This representation of a divided world evokes a sense of predictability and comfort because the conflict is perceived to be about maintaining the balance of power. Twenty-first century viewers see the context nostalgically and they are mirrored in this nostalgia by 'Daddy', the un-named head of service (his code-name makes an ironic connection to other anonymous service heads in the spy genre) who makes frequent reference to 'war'. In Episode Two when discussing Mallory's World War Two service, Daddy proclaims 'that was a war that made heroes, not this one'. Daddy evokes a sense of loss for a heroic era of war. However, his words are ironic because they also suggest a similar sense of loss about the Cold War: Daddy is depicted as the embodiment of a Cold War intelligence 'hero'. Later in the episode he says 'I miss the war: the other one. We knew where we stood'. Daddy echoes a similar view expressed by Arkady who at the beginning of the episode had stated 'My father fought in

Stalingrad[...] That was a war that made heroes, not this'. These statements allude to a shadow war whose victories ensure that the status quo is maintained but cannot be celebrated. But viewers are also able to situate the Cold War as a changing point in the timescale of war which continues – becoming progressively less predictable as the nature of intelligence and threat has changed in the twenty-first century. The world today is by implication more insecure than the Cold War world, which lacks the certainties of World War Two.

Nuclear fear runs through many of *The Game's* episodes. The spectre is first raised in Episode Two but continues into Episode Three when it is suggested that the MI6 agent Kate, who is suspected of being a Soviet agent, is going to detonate an American nuclear warhead and disguise it as an accident. Like the belief that a pre-emptive strike by the Soviets was imminent in Episode Two the intelligence is found to be faulty, but the team uncovers something 'bigger'. Both scenarios promote the idea of security via Mutually Assured Destruction's ability to prevent accidental nuclear war. The Soviets in this instance never planned such a strike and the plot makes it appear inconceivable that these destructive accidents might occur – despite the catalogue of near disasters that Eric Schlosser (2013) has uncovered, as well as the crises of the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962) and Operation Able Archer (1983). The programme mixes the memory of nuclear anxiety with the belief that the espionage game, and ultimately mutually assured destruction, provided safety to create a contrast with the terrorism of the Twenty-first century.

Episode Five shatters the nostalgic view of the Cold War and raises the spectre of terrorism. Phillip Denmoor is a former bomb disposal officer whose loyalties changed following horrific injuries sustained in an IRA bomb. He was approached by an unnamed enemy, who MI5 recognise as the Soviets, and detonates a bomb at Conservative party headquarters. The episode exudes nostalgia: in a flashback Joe asks his love-interest Yulia (Zana Marjanović), who has since been kidnapped by the Soviets, 'What do you miss the most?' 'About England?...Magazines, the washing machine, sherbet dips'. The line evokes a sense of domestic life in England that – whilst not rooted in the nineteen-

seventies – recalls a recent lost past and the simplicity of consumer comforts in the nineteen-seventies. Phillip’s bomb links the serial to anonymous isometric terrorism. Whilst his attack is reminiscent of IRA violence or the ‘Angry Brigade’ attacks of the early 1970s; it also acts as a precursor to the post-Cold War world.

Episode Five also leads to the apparent capture of the ‘mole’ in MI5. After setting a trap Joe, Jim and the newly released Kate capture Alan and he seemingly confesses to treachery. When Joe later suggests that it does not make sense for Alan to be the traitor Daddy responds ‘What he did was an attack on all of us. This....nostalgia was what he exploited’. The rules of the game have changed and Daddy refuses to feel nostalgic about the older form of spying – which is more representative of the Second World War and the early Cold War. Daddy forms a continuous link between the last war and the Cold War but he is also part of a changing intelligence landscape that has become difficult to negotiate. The connection between the confusion of the intelligence ‘game’ and the changing nature of the threat becomes clear in Episode Six. When Sarah is eventually captured and the KGB plot is defeated, she remains unrepentant and tells Joe, ‘[t]he establishment is rotten. Democracy is a confidence trick. Now others will take up the fight’. Her words evoke a perpetual threat to democracy and to the Western system that could exist within the Cold War system or outside it. They help to situate the Cold War on a line of historical change in the history of intelligence. The case of Sarah suggests that despite changes in methods the ‘game’ must be continually played in order to defend Britain and the West from unseen internal enemies.

*The Game* uses intertextuality with the nineteen-seventies and the Cold War in order to temporally situate the era. The Civil Defence film *Protect and Survive* signifies both the Cold War and the nineteen-seventies. This intertextuality is anachronistic with the serial set in 1972 but the film made in 1976 and reserved for emergency. However, as Dan Cordle shows, it became public knowledge following press investigations and when a leaked version was shown on the BBC’s *Panorama* in 1980 thereby exacerbating British nuclear anxieties (Panorama 1980; Cordle 2010:

656). This intertextual presentation of the film heightens the sense of terror. The film is screened on the wood-panelled TV set of Waterhouse's mother and follows the nineteen-seventies comedy *The Two Ronnies*. Viewers are therefore drawn from a comedic nostalgia to one of terror. The intertextuality creates a sense of common memory with viewers who may remember the comedy if not the civil defence film.

As *Protect and Survive* plays the siren, which opens the broadcast, sounds and amplifies. The scene had begun with Waterhouse clumsily calling his mother trying to gain comfort whilst revealing nothing about the suspected plot. Wendy had previously asked Waterhouse for permission to call her family just to hear their voices. The reflective coda continues as we cut to various characters from *The Game*: Jim tucks his children into bed. Joe, however, is depicted as having no family and he is shown in the rain prowling within his dark underworld in order to try and reunite himself with Yulia. Daddy also appears to only have professional family and is shown continuing with the intelligence game. The voiceover from *Protect and Survive* continues throughout and soundtracks the panorama. The family motif and the inability of the team to speak openly about the nature of their work, even when threatened with nuclear destruction, reveals the loneliness of this shadow war.

### **The Family**

Part of the nostalgia in *The Game* emerges from a sense of loss of family communities, a theme of which is ever-present. The nineteen-seventies is presented as the watershed decade for family values. *The Game*'s main family structure is the British secret services, with MI5 acting as a dysfunctional household. MI5 is one branch but in several episodes they encounter their cousins at M16. MI5 is depicted as a failing patriarchy with 'Daddy' as an aging figure who no longer commands the respect he once did. If MI5 has a 'Mummy' then it is Waterhouse the closeted homosexual who is the head of counter-intelligence. The stereotyping that the show applies to the mistrust of homosexuals is another generic convention, but ultimately modern values are applied to

Waterhouse as he remains loyal and plays a large part in uncovering Operation Glass. The drama situates the nineteen-seventies as a 'fall' where traditional masculine roles have been undermined and their passing is mourned. Daddy is hetro-normative but he is also weak and vulnerable because the male domination of society has been challenged throughout the previous decade. These two authority figures command the rest of the family. Sarah and Alan are married but whilst Alan is a great sound technician he is socially inept and lacks basic communication skills. The version of masculinity characterised by Alan, like that of Waterhouse, is different to the strong upper-class ideal; instead it is similar to the war hero and family man depiction of masculinity that Segal has identified in post-war masculinity and which Daddy, as patriarch of the intelligence family, represents (Segal 1997: 21).

Each character has a real family that contrasts with the service. When Joe visits his father in Episode Five we learn that he was abusive. Alan and Sarah are having trouble conceiving children and their failure to start a family indicates their strangeness and difference to the post-war British norm. It is only later that we learn that the real reason for their failure to conceive is that Sarah is a double-agent and therefore takes the contraceptive pill. But the effect is to raise suspicion around those non-conventional figures. Waterhosue is dominated by his mother who frequently berates him. At one point she physically abuses him (i). However, they remain a close knit family with Waterhouse telephoning his mother when he fears a nuclear war is imminent and affectionately calling her 'Mother Goose' (ii). In response to the suspicion which is raised because of his homosexual encounters Waterhouse fears for his career and attempts to use Wendy to disguise his sexuality (iv). His susceptibility to blackmail is foregrounded and his non-conventional 'family' life becomes a threat to British security.

In Episode Four Yulia asks Joe about the family he claims have all died. When she asks if he has any memories of his father he says 'Not any more. It's just a blank'. Joe's attitude to family is different to many of the characters and demonstrates his commitment to his mission. In the same episode Joe

and Jim stand in GCHQ as the mail is brought in. Joe asks when the postal strike ended. Jim's immediate thought is 'oh damn I was supposed to post our Carol's Mum's birthday card'. Joe, however, has already left to watch the secure post-boxes that are part of his surveillance of Arkardy. The scene is another indicator of the importance of family in the nineteen-seventies to the 'normal' characters like Jim – who comes from outside the service. This attitude contrasts with the detached and seemingly emotionless approach taken by Joe, whose immediate thought lies with his mission: Joe's family is MI5. Even for Joe, however, viewers are reminded through constant flashbacks that his motives are not necessarily his mission but to avenge Yulia. Therefore, the family values that have seemingly been lost in the recent past motivate many characters' actions.

### **The nostalgia of class**

Another form of nostalgia in *The Game* relates to class. However, this is not a longing for a re-emergence of the class system; instead the passing of class politics is grieved. Viewers are reminded frequently of class. Each time the MI5 headquarters is shown a class-based dichotomy becomes visible. The service is dominated by Daddy and Waterhouse who are both archetypal public school figures. Whilst the upper and working-class characters can mix in the office, outside of this they inhabit very different worlds.

Nineteen-seventies Britain is portrayed as riven by binary class divisions which are holding back the nation. The nineteen-seventies contrasts with the nineteen-fifties and nineteen-sixties, which in the popular memory are characterised by growing consumerism and cosy consensus (Sandbrook 2010: 10-12). The key symbols of class conflict are the seemingly frequent miners' strikes, which caused blackouts across Britain as the electricity supply was threatened. In Episode One Waterhouse sits alone wearing a pinstripe suit. As he pours himself a glass of whiskey the lights go out and he exclaims 'Bloody miners'. His statement and attire expose his class, but are also part of the ironic exploration of the spy genre: viewers are already aware of the class division and see Waterhouse as different from the rest of the population. The blackouts also reinforce the drama's

*noir* features with dimly lit and heavily shadowed scenes. Episode Three features the trailing of a suspected agent by Sarah and Alan during one of the blackouts. As the street descends into darkness, Sarah says 'I'll say this for blackouts they make shadowing easier'. This device could be seen as lazy exposition on the part of the screen-writer but it helps to evoke a sense of British identity: life continues despite the class conflict. It is another knowing moment where viewers are dropped into a dark underworld. *The Game*, therefore, engages with the generic conventions of spy drama but also pays homage to *noir*, which helps to create elements of nostalgia for a simpler time. The nineteen-seventies act as a precursor to the class war waged by Margaret Thatcher in the nineteen-eighties; but this representation of the decade also provides a justification for her actions and supports the popular myth that 'something' needed to be done about trade union power.

Episode One shows Waterhouse in his gentleman's club. The scene relays an iconography of the upper-class club with a library, an open fire and the wood panelling that adorn the room complete with Chesterfield style chairs. All are warmly lit by lamps evoking a sense of comfort. Waterhouse's pinstripe suit contrasts with the white jacket of the club's steward. Later as Daddy and the Home Secretary stroll along the corridors there are a number of stags head's mounted on the wall, further indicating the hunting activities and class status of the members. Daddy, because of his class background, is able to move in the upper-class world of cabinet ministers, where Joe could never go. This narrative of class division creates a binary between characters like Joe and Daddy which echoes the international Cold War divisions.

On the other side of the class divide are Joe and Jim who inhabit a different world to Waterhouse and Daddy. Theirs is a working-class world of working men's clubs including one in which a comedian is telling an Irish joke (i). This club scene features an iconography of the working class with the bottles of spirits in optics including Malibu, Jack Daniels and Famous Grouse with clay water jugs on the bar, dimple mugs and ashtrays on the tables. These props represent not just the distant past, many of these spirits were not sold in Britain in 1972, but along with smoking they



evoke a more recent lost past. The smoke filled room, and frequency of smoking throughout the serial, reminds viewers of a time which remains within living memory but is very different to the present.

Joe also frequently operates within a neon underworld. These scenes familiarise viewers with his working-class world, which people like Daddy or Waterhouse could never enter. In Episode One he enters a working man's club ran by the Russian émigré, Kitty (Gabrielle Scharnitzky). He walks through London, which is shrouded in fog; the scene's main light is the neon entrance sign. As he talks to Kitty about the 'Russian hoods', who had threatened her, they become enveloped by cigarette smoke, which adds to the *noir* effect. A similar underworld is shown in Episode Two. Joe is sent to talk to Alice (Georgina Rich), a prostitute who had been beaten by Mallory. This time he enters in daylight. He walks along the narrow streets with the neon sign of the strip club and another bearing a 'XXX' slogan guiding him into a darker underworld of smoky dimly lit corridors. He tries to persuade Alice not to prosecute Mallory so that they can track his movements but she accuses him of protecting the 'posh' naval man. He responds 'It's for the good of the country; it's nothing to do with class'. To which Alice replies 'Of course it is. Everything is'. The division of class that frames the drama is clear within the service that transcends these barriers. Joe, however, puts nation and his sense of service above any class loyalty. This neon underworld is inhabited by only Tom and Jim; it is a world far removed from the gentleman's club, ballet or corridors of power that Daddy or Waterhouse inhabit.

Whilst class acts as a backdrop for the serial the values that are often attributed to the era of consensus signpost the features which were later challenged during the Thatcher era. In Episode Six Joe visits his ill and abusive father, who he previously claimed had died. The scene occurs within a working-class community. A group of children play football in a back alley and the panorama contains nostalgic elements: a steel dust-bin and television aerials. This iconography symbolises a suburban aspirational working class which appeared safe. The growth of domestic comforts such as

television and transport depicts the era as one of relative prosperity. However, the scene later reveals the child abuse that Joe's father committed. At the heart of this working-class family-based community is a dark secret that blurs the cosy image of a lost past where children played football in the streets. Whilst working-class communities are looked back on warmly, in this episode the patriarchal and sometimes abusive nature of them lurks darkly in the background.

### **Playing the Game**

One of the main ways that *The Game* evokes Cold War nostalgia is by engaging with the spy genre through repeated explicit and implicit references to games. The spy dramas of the nineteen-sixties and nineteen-seventies act as an anchor and the predictability presents the Cold War as stable: when both sides watched and mirrored each other – creating a tense stalemate. The programme's title makes this trope obvious and this 'knowing' element forms a conversation between director and viewer. The use of the technique in *The Game* adds to the sense of nostalgia: viewers know that they are watching a serial based on Cold War spying, and they can predict the outcome and unfolding of the plot. In part this is because they are familiar with older spy dramas such as *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* which was set and first screened in the nineteen-seventies and inspired *The Game*.

The most constant game metaphor is chess. This narrative device becomes visible from the first episode as either side offers 'pawns' in setting up an attack on the other side's intelligence services. Joe arranges a meeting between David (Scott Handy), a British man who had been passing low level intelligence to the Soviets, and their spymaster Odin (Yevgeni Sitokhin). David is used to attempt to entrap the Soviet spy and the characters joke about the danger of him being killed as Alan clumsily asks 'Do we have a coffin?... To put David in? When he is killed by the KGB? To put his dead body in?... Humour. To lighten the mood'. This exchange indicates that David is disposable. The awkward moment brings the viewer in on the 'joke' and indicates that this serial will follow the generic spy story narrative: they are party to the 'mood' that the writer and director want to create. Joe sits in another room in the building and controls the play by listening in on microphones. He instructs

David that if Odin attends the meeting he should say 'I was going to get some vodka, but thought it would be a bit of cliché'. Similarly, Arkardy is Odin's pawn who is offered to the British to draw them in and later disposed of. By playing up to the clichés of the spy genre *The Game* recalls the nineteen-seventies spy dramas, which it sees as a golden age of espionage.

The nature of the game changes frequently, however, further enhancing the drama. As MI5 decipher Operation Glass they are also working out which game the Soviets are playing. In Episode Four the type of game becomes confused. As Joe tracks, Kate (Rachael Stirling), a woman he suspects of being a Soviet spy, he follows her to a train Station. She checks for shadows by browsing the rotating book stand. He notices that she buys *The Dice Man* (1971) by Luke Rhinehart. Joe also buys the book, in order to enter into conversation with her. The novel indicates the plot's return to being a game of chance. Joe is taking a risk whilst trying to investigate Kate. This episode also continues the chess theme with a series of opposites. Whereas previously the system of opposites had generally been British and Soviet now MI5 is pitted against MI6, for whom Joe later discovers Kate works. It becomes clear that the two services are in opposition to each other and, after MI6 threaten MI5 for accusing their agent, Daddy and the head of MI6 meet in the back of a car. The two opposites are strikingly similar because of their shared class background; yet they are mirror images. Later Joe goes to Kate's flat on the pretence of apologising and she tells him to 'take the night off' and relax with her. As they sit down there is a chess set in the shot. The game is being played even when formally suspended. Joe is interrupted by a phone call that directs him to the planted evidence that Kate has stolen documents to share with the Russians. MI5 and MI6, and Joe and Kate are seen as opposites because of 'the looking glass' which has created confusion. Odin's subterfuge – his game of Alice chess - played through Operation Glass, has turned ally against ally, because their swapping of boards after making moves has caused them to land on the same board, whilst becoming confused about who the enemy is.

Many of the episodes feature the intelligence family around a meeting table. At this table the team face each other as though at a poker game. Each member attempts to consider which of the others might be the mole; one of them is playing the game of bluff by deceiving their colleagues. In Episode One Daddy introduces each member in turn. This circular motion resembles a poker match. The narrative structure is therefore driven by elements of game-play. In Episodes Five and Six the narrative again returns to the structure of a poker game as Joe uses a set of playing cards to represent his colleagues and work out who is betraying the nation. The game becomes more strategic and Joe employs risk and bluff to ensure that his investigation of his own side remains covert. No single game characterises the serial and it appears that the Soviets and British are sometimes playing different games.

Episode Four features some of the strongest images of game play. The characters sit around the table with the chess-board motif behind them formed by the black and brown sound-proofing on the wall. Each character is shot from the mid-body upwards with their head and shoulders resembling chess pieces and their reflections in the polished table representing the looking glass of Alice Chess. The chess-like structure of the team is formed by their position at the table with Daddy, the King, at its head. He is protected by Joe, a knight (his image as a knight is further demonstrated in Episode Six when the Deep Purple song 'Black Night' (1970) plays as he continues his investigations using a record store tape deck despite being accused of treachery), and Sarah, a rook; next sits Alan, a rook; and Bobby, a bishop; with Wendy, another bishop and Jim a knight on the outside. At another point Bobby gives orders on the telephone. The shot frames his tall and thin body within a box and the side-on view making him appear as a bishop. As he and Wendy advance along the corridors giving out orders they move rapidly across the same colour background with the camera panning in a smooth continuous motion showing them as the bishops of Chess.

The chess play continues as Arkady meets his compatriot Bogdan(Goran Navojec) in a London square with the hope of entrapping Odin. The square acts as the chess board. At the corner

sits Sarah and Alan. Sarah's head and shoulders are framed as the rook in the rear-view mirror, another representation of the looking glass of the operation and indicating the subterfuge of playing on two boards at once. Arkardy, the Pawn, enters the square. He is tailed by the knights Joe and Jim who are briefly framed in the wing mirror of the car with similar head and shoulders shots. As Arkardy advances down the central path of the park Joe and Jim move like knights by turning corners and flanking him before he departs alone to meet his contact or his killer. After the meeting Arkardy is filmed with a head and shoulder shot from below. The framing of his head between his lapels suddenly makes him appear like a pawn who is vulnerable to attack, until the knight, Joe, turns a corner to protect him. The game-play visible in the structures of *The Game* is part of the knowing engagement with the spy genre. In recalling a genre whose classic films, series and books also make frequent reference to games – especially chess – the serial recalls the predictability not only of the genre but also of the Cold War.

Odin tends to appear suddenly, undertake a murder and then promptly disappears before the British can react. These movements are representative of his game of Alice Chess: his moves bring him into the board and rapidly take him out as he switches between two boards. In Episode One Joe and Jim pursue Odin after he murders David. They follow him to an abandoned fairground where Odin's accomplice points a gun at Joe. However, M15's next move involves Jim hitting the man and therefore 'taking' the piece. Later Odin holds a gun to Jim's head and Joe points a gun at Odin. It is Joe's move, which is defensive as he drops his gun. Odin's next move is also defensive and he quickly retreats off the board altogether. Likewise, in Episode Four, Arkardy is taken to the safe house. It is here that Odin's trap is sprung. As Arkardy enters the living room Joe turns away. Three gun shots ring out and Arkardy collapses. Odin holds the smoking gun but then quickly disappears. Odin's appearances apart from at the end of the last episode are only ever momentary; he rapidly disappears after entering the action. This movement is symbolic of Alice Chess: he makes his move and disappears to the other board.

The confusion caused by Alice Chess is repeated in Episode Six when MI5's two knights seemingly play against each other. The KGB set Joe up and Daddy orders Jim to arrest him. Joe goes to his father's house and makes his play by collecting a hidden gun. He moves away from the house unaware that Jim waits behind a wall. When he passes the wall he enters the other board and joins Jim's game. Jim calls his name and moves against him. Once Joe counters the move by running he switches out of Jim's board to escape. When MI5 ultimately uncover the plot they have to play Alice Chess against the Soviets. The shooting of Odin shows that MI5 now play Alice rules (vi). Odin has an agent ready to assassinate the Prime Minister as he steps out of the car when visiting the bomb site and plans to frame Joe who has gone to the building on the auspices of being reunited with Yulia. As the car pulls up, however, Jim steps out: MI5 pieces have switched from various boards and now the Soviets are trapped. Joe, who is on the same board as Odin, issues an order, 'take the shot' and the M15 team shoot Odin having lined up their pieces on the other board. However, Odin moves again and escapes the trap by moving out of the board before being caught in 'check' by Joe. Whilst it appears that Joe, having played 'Alice' chess, has finally caught Odin in check mate, the Soviet springs a trap by creating doubt about Yulia's loyalty and says 'Doubt. It will kill you as sure as any bullet'. This phrase reverses the situation and ensures that stalemate continues in the personal and professional intelligence game.

## **Conclusion**

*The Game* is an example of Twenty-first century spy dramas that evoke nostalgia for the Cold War, but it also partially rehabilitates the nineteen-seventies by creating feelings of nostalgia for elements of society that are often deemed to have disappeared. The security of the Cold War nuclear stand-off is alluded to throughout the serial and the system of secret espionage is depicted as ensuring that parity in the balance of power is maintained. Reviewers lamented the Cold War's disappearance by comparing it to an era when civilians are routinely victimised in terror attacks. The nineteen-seventies is depicted as a potentially unstable decade but one in which the post-war consensus,

rising prosperity and communities of class and family, which have since been eroded, characterise domestic life. The decade is shown as a changing era, with challenges to patriarchy and the shape of the modern family. However, the nineteen-seventies maintain a dark side with families- including the intelligence family - being dysfunctional and sometimes abusive.

The metaphor of the game, which characterised earlier spy films and spy fiction, helps to create Cold War nostalgia by showing how the intelligence game is played to stalemate creating a stable balance of power and consequently a safer world. This nostalgia for a security policy that protected is alluded to throughout the serial not least when Jim discovers the Prime Minister's decision not to risk nuclear annihilation by ordering 'no retaliation' showing the role of bluff in the Cold War game. The use of the game trope in this way links viewers to an older way of waging warfare that is often deemed to have brought security during the Cold War. This game that is played by either side is lacking in the twenty first century when small scale attacks on populations in the developing world, and to a lesser extent, the West occur regularly.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Labour's manifesto to drag us back to the 1970s', *Daily Mail*, 11 May 2017; 'Revealed: Corbyn's manifesto to take us back to 1970s', *Daily Telegraph*, 11 May 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Vicky Frost, 'The *Guardian* TV and Radio Blog', *Guardian*, 30 April, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/tvandradioblog/2015/apr/30/the-game-recap-series-one-episode-one-spying-as-george-smiley-would-recognise-it>

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Hughes, 'From Spooks to The Game, why the bleak world of spy thrillers is back', *The Observer*, 10 May 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Benji Wilson, 'The Game is a spy thriller too far', *Daily Telegraph*, 2 May 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Vicki Power, 'Actor Brian Cox on new spy series The Game: "It's about the nitty gritty stuff"', *Daily Express*, 26 April 2015.