

Performance and Television Space

20 April 2012

ABSTRACTS

Keynote

'Twitchy editing and careening cameras': the presentation of performance in *Bleak House* (2005)

Professor Christine Geraghty (University of Glasgow)

This paper will comment on the impact of setting on the presentation of performance in two BBC adaptations of Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* in 1985 and 2005. Classic serials raise expectations about the use of place and the quality of acting and I will discuss how these adaptations reacted to those expectations in different ways. In addition, I will comment on how different kinds of critics understood the visual innovations of *Bleak House* (2005) as separate from other elements of the serial and suggest the benefits of a more integrated approach which is less concerned with the process of adaptation. This presentation will compare characters and scenes from the two adaptations to examine the particular ways in which meaning is generated through the positioning of performance in a specific space.

Christine Geraghty is Honorary Professorial Fellow at the University of Glasgow, and Honorary Research Fellow at Goldsmiths, University of London. She has published extensively on film and television with a particular interest in fiction and form. Her early work on soap opera led to an interest in the organisation of fictional space and her most recent work on adaptation has been concerned to established setting and performance as important elements for adaptation. Her book *Now a Major Motion Picture Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2008) pays particular attention to genre, setting and performance in different kinds of adaptations including westerns and musicals. She is on the editorial board of the *Journal of British Cinema and Television* and sits on the advisory boards of a number of journals, including *Screen*. Her TV Classic on *Bleak House* (2005) is to be published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2012.

Panel 1: *Performing Studio Languages and Practices*

Spaces of Television: The Dining Room

Lez Cooke (Royal Holloway, University of London)

This paper will examine the ways in which television space and performance interact in two British television dramas from the 1960s and 1970s, with reference to scenes set around a

dinner table. Dining room scenes enable rituals of social etiquette and performance to be played out and these two scenes, from the first episode of *Coronation Street* (1960) and Jack Rosenthal's *Bar Mitzvah Boy* (1976), are particularly revealing of the social mores and tensions within the families concerned. The two scenes also illustrate changes in aesthetic conventions and performance styles in television drama between 1960, when much TV drama was still broadcast live (or recorded 'as live'), and 1976, when, especially in single play anthologies such as *Play for Today*, dramas were increasingly being shot on film and adopting 'cinematic' techniques (such as continuity editing, rather than vision mixing). This comparative analysis will illustrate how the construction of meaning in these scenes is subject to a number of determinants: aesthetic, technological, social, cultural, economic and institutional. It is part of a larger project exploring the history of style in television drama, with particular reference to dinner table scenes, from 1954 to 2012.

Inviting The Camera In: The Television Frame as a Space of Drama and Performance **David Dunn (emeritus, Queen Margaret University)**

The camera is witnessing you, it's absorbing you, taking you in. You can never dominate the camera; you can only invite it in. *Simon Callow*

British television drama's origins in theatre and in the word resulted in what Jason Jacobs has called 'the intimate screen' of early drama output, one defined by a technologically imposed reliance on talking heads in close up rather than on the spectacle of setting and action. The studio floor with its three wall sets replicated the stage and proscenium arch of the West End theatre and became a place where live or 'as live' multi-camera electronic shooting was opened out by occasional location sequences shot single camera on film to contrast with the predominantly interior sets of the studio. Even after new technology allowed first for more flexible shooting within studio and later freed drama entirely from the constraints of studio, something of the legacy of privileging the close up remained; hence producer Tony Garnett's description of the history of British television drama as 'the exploration of the human face'.

This paper argues that regardless of the place or the medium of shooting it is the frame, what the camera shows, that is a prime performance space of television drama and that this is a space of varying size that has to be 'filled' appropriately. Given the initial primacy of the close up, a space which confined performance, the concept of the intimate screen conventionally imposed a one size fits all technique of 'less is more' on aspiring television actors. This has long been at odds with the plurality of performance and shooting styles which different types of drama require and which different directors choose to deploy.

The paper will further suggest that given television production's diversity of skills the frame is a space for collaborative performance. A static close up is a space in which acting is supported by framing, design and lighting, while in the 'long take' or developing shot actor and camera operator perform a duet in which histrionic and pictorial skills ensure that the changing space of the frame is filled to provide the appropriate dramatic effect relative to its size. If there is a critical belief that the move from studio to location has effected a cinematic 'turn' in television drama, with location bringing a new set of determinants to the business of performance, this paper will suggest that the terms studio and location had already become increasingly interchangeable and thus unstable. Drawing on the work of directors such as Jonathan Miller, John Irvin and Christopher Morahan, examples of this blurring of distinction will be discussed both with regard to studio, where the quasi-cinematic fluidity of the 'long take' and a heightened performance style had become an appropriate response to the needs of the text, and also with regard to location, where the intimacy, and static nature, of the close up continued to serve that

defining quality of British television drama which John Caughie has argued has been one 'of incident and character'.

Performing Spaces: The Influence of British Actors' Equity on BBC Studio Drama

Douglas MacNaughton (PhD student, Queen Margaret University)

Critical orthodoxies around the multi-camera television studio characterise it as a 'theatrical' space, driven by dialogue and performance. Troy Kennedy Martin (1964) decried television drama's essential naturalism, demanding a more filmic form of drama in a polemic which has strongly influenced critical thinking on multi-camera studio television. Caughie (2000) suggests that *Armchair Theatre* (ABC TV, 1956-68) created a 'space for acting' with ambitious camera movements within that space, but in the main, studio is seen as a constraining and interiorising dramatic site, in thrall to liveness and reliant on theatrical unities. This paper draws on research at the BBC Written Archives to extend current understanding of the determinants working upon multi-camera studio television up to and into the 1970s. Characterising studio as a Bourdieuan (1998) 'force-field', it shows how the performers' union Equity insisted on preserving continuous performance as a specific feature of television drama. While other determinants (technical, institutional and economic) of course come into play, Equity's insistence on 'theatrical' continuous performance inhibited the narrative and aesthetic possibilities of studio drama, resisted the move to rehearse-record studio taping, and delayed the turn to all-film drama production at the BBC. Drawing on key case studies which acted as contentious 'test cases' for negotiations, this paper explores tensions between institutional, artistic and external determinants, complicating technologically determinist accounts to argue for a greater understanding of the role of Equity in dictating arrangement of space and material conditions of production in the multi-camera studio paradigm.

References

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Panel 2: Community Performance

Rock Follies: feminism, performance and the television studio

Leah Panos (University of Reading)

The 1976 television pop musical *Rock Follies* charted the experiences of a fictional female group, 'The Little Ladies', presenting their struggles in the exploitative entertainment industry and their unsatisfactory relationships with boyfriends, housemates and managers. This paper demonstrates how the television studio functioned as a feminist performance space, by showing how The Little Ladies were depicted within three very different environments: fantastic spaces, intimate spaces and satirical spaces. Choreographed, 'dream' musical numbers expressing the

women's aspirations and concerns featured regularly, performed within fantastic studio sets that operated as utopian televisual spaces. The close intimacy of the studio was exploited in the representation of the women's personal lives: the dynamics of their relationships, and their new-found confidence after forming the group were often signified through physical aspects of their performances within tight domestic settings. The stylized quality of *Rock Follies'* dramatic spaces and its caricatured characters underpinned its satirical showbiz critique, and its representation of culture as a symbolic realm, in which the women's image is manipulated. This paper demonstrates how the programme's feminist discourse was carried through The Little Ladies' performances within studio spaces of fantasy, domesticity and the entertainment industry.

"Views from an Iron Bridge": A Musical World and the performance of Midlands' regional identity

Julie E. Robinson (PhD student, University of Leicester)

In autumn 1980, ATV, the independent television contractor for the Midlands, broadcast a five-part regional television series for children entitled *A Musical World* (1980). A spin-off from the company's popular regional documentary strand, *England, Their England*, the programme offered schools in the region the opportunity to devise and perform their own musicals with the support of a professional television crew. The first series, which featured schools from Birmingham, Solihull, Telford and Stourbridge, was successful enough to ensure a network repeat and for ATV's successor, Central, to revive the format for a networked second series in July 1983. This widened participation to the previously neglected eastern half of the region with the inclusion of two schools from Derbyshire.

Although several programmes deal with universal themes, such as the impending threat of nuclear war, the majority address issues which have particular, or even mainly, local resonance. It is on these episodes that this paper will focus, considering how the performers draw upon their own experiences and/or local history to create the pieces on which the programmes are based and how, along with the programme makers, they interpret these for a television audience. In particular, it will explore the influence of the landscape on the way these regional narratives are presented and performed, such as the use of the industrial skyline of the Black Country in "Setting Out", and interrogate the links between performance and regional identity, through accent, the use of language and the interaction between the young people and their surroundings.

Relationships between radical black theatre performance and television space as exemplified in *Black Feet in the Snow* (1974, BBC)

Sally Shaw (University of Portsmouth)

Black Feet in the Snow (Skilton, 1974, BBC) was broadcast on BBC2 as part of its innovative community series, *Open Door*, whose primary aim was to give airtime to communities hitherto unrepresented in mainstream programming. Written by the black poet and playwright Jamal Ali and featuring a cast of Brixton-based, non-professional black actors drawn from Ali's theatre

group RAPP (Radical Alliance of Poets and Players), *Black Feet in the Snow* is a searing examination of alienation and racism in 1970s London. Aside from budgetary constraints, Brian Skilton (the programme's producer) allowed RAPP complete artistic freedom; "we were able", Ali later said, "to tell it like it is". The story of Jahn-Jahn (Shango Baku), a 'country boy' from Guyana whose experiences in a hostile Brixton mould him into a radicalised firebrand originated in conversations Ali had with the young black people who would go on to perform the play on television; in this way, *Black Feet in the Snow* makes the relationship between performance and wider social themes explicit. In terms of performance, *Black Feet in the Snow* is both innovative and political; actors speak in a black vernacular that Keir Elam (1995) has described as a dazzling hybrid of 'Island acrolet and urban street' and their physical performances demonstrate a raw and expansive corporeality. Drawing on interviews with Jamal Ali and material from the Lambeth archive, this paper uses *Black Feet in the Snow* to explore the intersection between radical black theatre and television drama and to examine performance style and dramatic space across the two media. More broadly, it argues that a relationship with black theatre was also central to other 1970s television dramas such as *Empire Road* (Ove, 1978-79, BBC).

Sally Shaw is a Lecturer in Sociology and Politics at the University of Portsmouth, where she is completing an AHRC funded doctoral research project on the social and cultural history of black Britain in 1970s television and film. Within the thesis, key emphasis is placed on uncovering 'lost voices', using extensive archival research and oral testimony.

Panel 3: *Genre and Performance*

Adventures in Space and Time: Regenerating Performance Style in *Doctor Who*

Richard Hewett (PhD student, University of Nottingham)

Since its re-launch in 2005 *Doctor Who* has become one of the BBC's flagship dramas, as representative of modern television production techniques as its predecessor was of the traditional studio system employed by the Corporation until the early 1990s. The two versions of the programme present marked contrasts in terms of both production process and performance space, from the multi-camera studio recording of the original to the single camera film utilised for the current version. Such contrasts offer a unique opportunity to examine the changes in acting style for television drama which have taken place over the last few decades. Rather than being painstakingly mapped out in rehearsal rooms before transferring to the studios of Lime Grove, Riverside and Television Centre - a template dating back to the days of live broadcasts, and imported from the theatre - performances are now evolved entirely on site, either at real locations or on soundstages of the type used by *Doctor Who* at Upper Boat in Cardiff, with a minimum of prior preparation. This is a significant alteration in production process, representing a huge adjustment in approach on the part of actors and directors alike. Utilising a combination of textual analysis - selecting scenes from both the 'classic' and modern series - with production staff and cast interviews, this paper examines how the changing times and spaces of *Doctor Who* reflect broader trends with regard to the development of television drama performance.

Going Undercover: detectives, police officers and the infiltration of criminal spaces

Ben Lamb (PhD student, University of Glamorgan)

This paper examines the development of performance space in the British television Police series by analysing episodes from *Z Cars* (BBC 1962-78) and *Strangers* (Granada 1978-82) that depict police officers going undercover. These storylines provide a performance of three layers; firstly an actor plays a character, the character assumes the role of a police officer who then adopts a further identity to infiltrate criminal spaces. A comparison between police drama produced by the BBC and Granada will demonstrate how the social and cultural meanings of performance can alter in different institutional contexts.

Z Cars' Bob Steele will be deconstructed as he is the first police character to provide a disjuncture between private and professional life, thus drawing attention to the layered characterisation of an undercover policeman, particularly when he is vilified for going undercover to deceive a friend. The lead detectives from *Strangers* will then be analysed in relation to Steele as their undercover work, in stark contrast, provides a liberating environment to articulate their hidden ideological worldviews suppressed in the station setting.

Z Cars and *Strangers* were shot in the studio where narratives occur in real time. This ensures an actor's interaction with their surrounding space is central to the drama, thus heightening the tension of an undercover police officer penetrating criminal settings. In contrast to using film on location that often foregrounds the use of editing, e.g. *The Sweeney*, a semiotic discourse will be adopted to analyse the performances and provide a revisionist history of British television drama.

Ben Lamb is a PhD student based at the University of Glamorgan who is part of the the 'Spaces of Television' research team. His thesis examines the developing aesthetics of British television studio drama with a focus on how certain technologies impacted upon performance styles. Through an examination of key police series and dramas with a modernist sensibility, his thesis aims to ultimately chart how desires, expectations and evaluations of fictional space changed for programme makers, performers and reviewers.

Cracker: performance and casting issues

Steve Blandford (University of Glamorgan)

The casting of Robbie Coltrane as Edward Fitzgerald, the police forensic psychologist at the heart of *Cracker* (1993-2006) was widely acclaimed as being inspirational and fundamental to the critical success of the programme. However, for the series' original writer, Jimmy McGovern, the initial proposal to cast Coltrane went very much against his own sense of the character that he had created. This paper will examine the impact of casting someone of Coltrane's very distinctive physical appearance, accent and performance history not only on the programme, but also on the way that *Cracker* has made a contribution to the police series genre itself, especially in its uses of space. In so doing it will also seek to examine *Cracker*'s relationship to the changing ways in which gender operates, performatively and spatially, in the police series, particularly in relation to notions of conventional sexual attraction.

A large part of *Cracker's* distinctiveness of course is its extension of the police series legitimate 'territory' into the realms of forensic psychology. The paper will consider this in relation to the performance of the role by Coltrane together with brief consideration of the relationship between this landmark representation and those that have succeeded it as a staple of British television crime fiction.

Hunters Walk and Juliet Bravo: Representing rape in the studio police drama.
Billy Smart (University of Reading)

This presentation discusses the depiction of rape in individual episodes of two popular television police series set in small provincial towns, *Hunters Walk*: 'Local Knowledge' (ATV, 1973) and *Juliet Bravo*: 'Abuse' (BBC1, 1984). Both of these episodes placed the viewer in the same position as the policeman and policewoman, having to reconstruct the events of the alleged crime from the victim's description, having to adjudge the events' credibility as evidence and in turn form judgments upon the character of the victim. In this paper, I will demonstrate how both episodes presented the viewer with an understanding of the effects of rape upon the victim, through methods and performances that were specific to the form of the studio-made television drama.

The close-up intimacy of the television studio provided these dramas with the means to convey small looks and gestures during dramatic scenes, giving the viewer an insight into the situation and anxieties of police and victims far beyond that made explicit in dialogue of the script. The naturalistic representation of the environment of the room in television drama allowed the viewer to understand each interior in the drama as an expressive space that carried its own inherent significance and meaning. In these programmes, this operates through the viewer's expectation of the police station interview room as a formal space of ritualized communication, and the assumption that the domestic living room will function as a place of retreat and safety.

Hunters Walk: Local Knowledge (ATV, 11 June 1973): w. Richard Harris, d. Ron Francis.

Juliet Bravo: Abuse (BBC1, 10 November 1984): w. Susan Pleat, d. Jan Sargent.

Panel 4: Theatrical Performance

Alienating the audience: *The Old Crowd* (1979)
John Izod (University of Stirling)

The paper considers the Brechtian satirical devices and press reaction to them that made this play, transmitted during ITV's Saturday evening primetime, the object of controversy and ridicule.

Before accepting the invitation to direct *The Old Crowd*, Lindsay Anderson negotiated for artistic control. Stephen Frears (commissioning editor for London Weekend Television) and Alan Bennett, (scriptwriter) agreed. Reassured, Anderson immediately focused on making Bennett's script less amusing, less naturalistic, more absurd and biting.

The actors project their voices and presence grandiosely as if on stage, often leaving pauses between speeches. The prejudices of their upper-class characters, rabid commentators on social issues, blind them to the root causes of the malaises on which they pontificate. As Erik Hedling observes, that malaise is generalised by newspapers pasted over the windows, the printed press becoming a screen that blocks out real views of the outside world.

Panning shots violate naturalism when revealing other cameras and crew. Occasional shots in monochrome alternate with colour, one of Anderson's authorial signatures. But the toffs' blindness seems to infect the *mise-en-scène* entirely: the action takes place in a grey interior relieved only by the women's colourful dresses. But although they stand out as bearers of their husbands' wealth and objects of other men's lust, their spouses find them invisible.

Those who knew the director's earlier satires should not have been shocked. But *The White Bus*, *If...*, and *O Lucky Man!* were made for cinema. *The Old Crowd* assaulted the sacred precinct of the British home both in theme and presentation. As such it was wildly out of kilter with 1970s domestic TV drama. Critics had a field day decrying it.

John Izod is Emeritus Professor of Screen Analysis at the University of Stirling. As principal investigator funded by an Arts and Humanities Research Council grant, he recently led a three-year project on the cinema authorship of Lindsay Anderson. The resultant book, written with Karl Magee, Kathryn Hannan and Isabelle Gourdin-Sanguard, is forthcoming in 2012.

'Performing Antiquity: Translating Ancient Greek Theatre Space and Practice to the BBC Television Studio'

Amanda Wrigley (University of Westminster)

This paper explores how three BBC productions of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* responded creatively and technologically to the performance styles and dramatic conventions of 5th-century Athens. Of the twenty-five or so known productions of Greek drama on British television from 1958 to 1990, this paper draws on the 1972 *King Oedipus* directed by Alan Bridges (with Ian Holm as Oedipus); the 1977 *Oedipus the King*, a BBC/Open University co-production transmitted for distance-learning students of drama, directed by Richard Callanan (with Patrick Stewart); and part one of the 1986 *Theban Plays trilogy* directed by Don Taylor (with Anthony Quayle).

I consider the extent to which set design and camera work sought to represent ideas of ancient performance space (e.g. the *skene*, theatre building, and *orchestra*, circular playing space) or to reconfigure ancient physical space and to represent ancient imaginative space (e.g. Oedipus and Jocasta's bedroom) for television. The paper, therefore, also examines televisual responses to the dramatic convention of all action taking place outdoors, with events from within the palace (e.g. Jocasta's suicide) being narrated to the audience through the traditional Messenger Speech (vivid narration of off-stage action). The paper then documents how such televisual responses to the configuration of ancient theatre space complement production choices relating to the stylized nature of ancient Greek acting, the representation of the chorus and the sung and danced elements of the play.

Dr Amanda Wrigley is postdoctoral Research Associate on the three-year AHRC-funded research project 'Screen Plays: Theatre Plays on British Television' and a part-time Associate Lecturer for the Open University (teaching A219: Exploring the Classical World). Previously she was Mellon-Sawyer Postdoctoral Fellow in Classics, Northwestern University, Illinois (2009-10) and Researcher at the Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama, University of Oxford (2001-09).

Performance from the Whitehall: the Brian Rix comedies in a 'third space' of production
John Wyver (University of Westminster)

Between 1952 and 1969 BBC Television featured some seventy live broadcasts of Brian Rix-produced comedies from the Whitehall Theatre, London. Almost all of these transmissions, which were invariably scheduled on Bank Holiday weekends, were staged especially for the cameras. The theatre was converted, physically and contractually, into a television studio for a single night. At the same time, for each broadcast there was a live (and often loudly appreciative) audience, a production space defined by a stage and auditorium, and characterisations and performances pitched to the back row of the upper circle.

Neither conventional television studio nor location, the Whitehall became a kind of 'third space' for an unconventional hybrid form of television production. What implications did this have for the performance of broad comedy and farce? How were performance styles shaped by this production set-up? And what social and cultural associations were carried across from the theatre to this television context?

Drawing on the production files for these largely forgotten broadcasts in the BBC Written Archives Centre, and on the recollections of participants, and illustrated with extracts from the few recordings made of these dramas, this paper explores this 'third space' of production and examines the approaches to performance that it made possible.

John Wyver is a producer of performance films with Illuminations and Principal Investigator of the AHRC-funded research project Screen Plays: Theatre Plays on British Television. His recent productions include *Hamlet* (BBC/RSC/WNET13/NHK, 2009) and *Macbeth* (BBC/WNET13, 2010), and the forthcoming *Julius Caesar* (BBC/RSC). He is a Senior Research Fellow with the University of Westminster and the author of *Vision On: Film, Television and the Arts in Britain* (2007).

Doubled Performances: Engagement with Notions of the Courtroom as Stage in the Legal Drama

Patrick Pilkington, (PhD student Warwick)

This paper investigates the changing role of performance and the space of the courtroom in three British legal dramas spanning the last several decades, *Rumpole of the Bailey*, *Kavanagh QC* and *Silk*. The privileged position of performance within courtroom drama is evident in the frequent parallels drawn between the courtroom and the theatrical stage (see Greenfield, Osborn and Robson, and Kuzina). The use in all three series discussed, of the 'triple structure' of

home/office/case (as noted by Peter Robson) creates spaces that are juxtaposed with the courtroom setting, foregrounding notions of the latter as a stage set for a 'performance' by the barrister protagonist. *Rumpole of the Bailey* emphasises this staginess of the courtroom setting and consistently shoots and edits its trial sequences in ways that foreground the seamless star performances of both Leo McKern and his character Horace Rumpole. *Kavanagh QC* and *Silk* move away from notions of theatricality in their presentation of the courtroom, a move which corresponds with a more 'democratic' visual style in their courtroom sequences that draws viewer attention to the non-'performers' (plaintiffs, defendants, witnesses) in the courtroom alongside the star barrister performance. This democratic approach to performance allows for a greater interrogation of socio-political issues in *Kavanagh* and *Silk*. Issues of the courtroom as a space of performance remain, but in ways that emphasise the social and ethical tensions subdued and difficulties involved in maintaining the 'good performance'.

Maurice Reeves has had a distinguished career in film, theatre and television for almost fifty years. Early roles included Macduff to Alec Guinness' Macbeth at the Royal Court in 1966, and as Stephen Dedalus in the 1967 film of *Ulysses*. Working in both Britain and Hollywood, subsequent film roles have included Colonel Munro in *Last of the Mohicans* and God in *The Acid House*, and stage work includes appearing at the National Theatre in Gregory Burke's *Gagarin Way*. Maurice has appeared in hundreds of television programmes in Britain and America, and today talks about his experiences from the sixties to the eighties in *The Journal of Bridget Hitler*, *Tutti Frutti*, *Danger UXB* and *Doctor Who* and other shows