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## **Performance, place and screen: 'visible' and 'invisible' performance in Outside Broadcast television drama**

### **Abstract**

Screen performance is characterised by the interaction of performance, place and screen, but has suffered from critical neglect. Most accounts of this collaborative process focus on the performer in front of the camera, rather than the activities going on behind it. This article examines how performance is shaped within the BBC's Outside Broadcast (OB) drama production paradigm of the 1970s and 1980s.

The interactions of performers and camera operators combine to construct onscreen performance, since the generation of the screen frame necessarily 'frames' performance both literally and figuratively. Camera operators therefore offer 'invisible' performance through their manipulation of the frame and the choreography of their interactions with actors. The article's key case study is *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1978), the BBC's first drama serial to be made entirely on location on Outside Broadcast (OB) videotape, and also considers OB production on *Boys from the Blackstuff* (BBC 1982).

Keywords: BBC, Television Drama, Outside Broadcast, Videotape, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Survivors*, *Boys from the Blackstuff*, acting, performance

**Performance, place and screen: ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ performance in Outside Broadcast television drama**

Screen performance is characterised by the interaction of acting, place and screen, but has suffered from critical neglect. Cantrell and Hogg (2016) note the paucity of work on television acting and the way in which the interdisciplinarity of television studies ‘presents the possibility of obscuring some of the particularities of television as a technological, industrial, cultural and artistic form, through the imposition of ideas and agendas that have originated elsewhere’ (2016, 284). They argue therefore that more attention should be paid to the activities of actors in preparing for, rehearsing, and delivering a performance in front of the camera. Accordingly, Hewett (2017) has focused on the processes of actor preparation and television acting, using a methodological combination of textual analysis and practitioner interview.

Television acting, however, takes place within a matrix of technical elements and creative choices within which actors often have only limited agency. Pearson (2010) discusses the multiple determinants of television acting, but focuses on interaction between actors rather than other creative personnel. Cantrell and Hogg make a useful distinction between ‘television acting’ and ‘television performance’:

For our purposes, ‘acting’ refers specifically to the actor’s portrayal of a character within a dramatic context, while ‘performance’ extends more broadly

to other forms of performative involvement within television production, such as [...] the inflection of an actor's work by other elements beyond the contribution of the actor themselves, such as costume, lighting, framing and editing. (Cantrell and Hogg, 2016: 285)

Fife Donaldson (2013) analyses the interaction of camera and performer in contemporary US police dramas, using Charles Affron's metaphor of a 'dance' to highlight use of Steadicam and handheld cameras to generate a 'tactile space' which encourages the audience's impression of being 'in' the action (Fife Donaldson 2013: 213). Zucker (1999) and Tucker (2003) discuss how actors are aware of camera framings and shot sizes and scale their performances accordingly. Jacobs (2000) argues that television's normative performative mode is the 'intimate screen', with close-ups of the face driving dialogue-led dramatic narratives. Television performance is mediated by the generation of the frame, and the performative nature of camera operators generating that frame has been almost totally overlooked in television scholarship. This article argues therefore that there are two categories of performance at work within the interaction of actors and camera operators, 'visible' (onscreen) performance and 'invisible' (offscreen) performance.

Bourdieu (1984) argues that individuals possess various forms of personal capital, social, symbolic, and cultural, comprising qualities such as tastes, abilities, and education, which gives them distinction within particular social fields. Bourdieu (1986) argues that cultural capital presupposes embodiment and is incorporated in the body of the holder of cultural capital. This assimilation is a work of self-improvement, for example, bodybuilding. Cultural capital is incorporated into the habitus of the individual and because it is invisible, it is predisposed to function as

symbolic capital. In this context, the abilities of the camera operator function as what might be termed ‘creative capital’, forms of embodied skills which give individuals distinction within the sphere of screen production. Within the collaborative matrix of television production, camera operators exist within a hierarchy of creative capital. The proxemics of the interaction between actors and camera operators is a vital factor in the generation of screen performance. Therefore, in considering the nature of television performance in this article, this article will focus on Cantrell and Hogg’s ‘adjacent performative components within the construction of the text’ (2016: 285) and how ‘television acting’ is literally framed within ‘television performance’.

My other work in this field (McNaughton 2018) has focused on the performative qualities of multi-camera studio camera operators working with cabled, pedestal-mounted video cameras. Within the mixed ecology of 1970s television production, video camera operators were looked down on by film crews (see Englander and Petzold 1976) as being passive functionaries, capturing performance under the orders of the director in the production gallery. However, my practitioner interviews identified a hierarchy of distinction within which individual camera operators demonstrated their embodied creative capital through ‘invisible’ behind-the-screen performance; director Waris Hussein used the metaphor of a ‘dance’ (see Fife Donaldson 2013) between actors and camera operators to describe how actors’ performances were framed onscreen (Hussein 2010, personal communication). Furthermore, my textual analysis identified the capacity of the 1970s pedestal camera to supply what Jason Jacobs (2000) has called ‘exhibitionistic camera movement, a mobility on display as mobility, and not motivated by performance, but *is* the performance’ (Jacobs, 2000: 144, emphasis in original). So, acting performance is

mediated through the embodied skill of the camera operator, which in turn can be considered as contributing a form of performance in itself.

This article will leave the studio and consider the contribution of Outside Broadcast (OB) camera operators to the mediation of screen performance in television drama. First, it will explore the nature of OB and its position in the production cultures of the 1970s.

### **Outside Broadcast and Television Drama**

Outside Broadcast was devised as a means by which electronic cameras could be taken on location and produce either live broadcasts or video recordings. Live relays from theatres had been a staple of television broadcasting from 1938 (Jacobs 2000). Both BBC and ITV experimented with using OB to produce drama on location from the early 1960s (Cooke 2012; Cooke, 2013: 151). For example, Philip Saville's pioneering *Hamlet at Elsinore* (BBC 1964) used six OB cameras on location in a real castle in Denmark (Cooke, 2005: 87). Experimental LMCR (Lightweight Mobile Control Room) OB units were constructed at the BBC in the early 1970s, and by 1977, a two-camera unit was available with two Bosch Fernseh KCR 40s with Canon 10-1 zoom lenses, recording onto 2-inch videotape (Fone 1978: 66). Also called a Lightweight Production Unit (LPU), this 'lightweight' unit still involved bulky 11-ton trucks, set up at a distance from the performed action due to their size and noise, and cabled cameras umbilically connected to 'scanner' vans.

OB was a cost-effective alternative to the more expensive 16mm filming process. In his memoirs, former BBC Head of Drama Shaun Sutton notes the differences between single-camera film and multi-camera OB:

the lightweight film camera, with its single eye on the scene, is a purer, more technically perfect tool for production; each scene is separately set up, rehearsed, and lit. In tape (as in the studio) the lighting must often serve for a variety of angles of the scene. (Sutton, 1982: 100)

In film, each shot may be performed many times for each camera position, whereas multi-camera vision-mixing selects shots continuously from a single performance. Millington and Nelson note editing's advantage over vision-mixing, despite the expense of the slower filming process:

film is more flexible [...] because decisions about the ultimate organisation of shots are deferred until post-production [...] During the editing of film, the best shots can be individually selected and ordered to add pace and vitality to the finished drama in a way that is quite impossible using the vision-mixer. (Millington and Nelson, 1986: 111)

Editing is still constrained by the availability of material actually shot. For director Kevin Billington, who made the BBC Shakespeare *Henry VIII* (1979) on OB, location OB could be approached either as filming (one-camera) or an outdoor studio (multi-camera), with the two-camera OB unit constituting 'twice one or half of four' (cited in Winser and Fone 1980: 38). This suggests that OB offered a compromised aesthetic, affording neither the filmic composition and editing of single-camera, nor multi-camera's versatility and speed. Former Head of BBC Drama Jonathan Powell suggests that using OB was a compromise between practitioners and institution,

allowing drama productions to use location without the expense of film. In negotiating the demands of capital and creativity, OB was an attempt to

do a deal between the programme makers and the institution [saying] if you let us out of the studio, we'll still use some of your big plants of equipment and we'll use them in downtimes when you're not doing sport and stuff like that so we'll try and give you an economic advantage. (Powell 2009, personal communication)

Further perceived disadvantages of OB included its depth of field, which militated against film's more painterly composition, filling the screen with distracting detail; also, sound could be compromised by location, lacking the clarity of studio acoustics and with less potential for re-dubbing than film (Smart 2015).

In terms of the creative capital of 'invisible performers', OB was problematic. Within the heavily unionised system of the time, crews could work only within their own area; this article has mentioned, above, the clear distinction between film crews and studio video camera operators. Within the BBC's allocations system, producers and directors often had little choice over the crews allocated to productions:

it was just like an absolutely rigid machine. And your facilities were given to you by rote ... you were allocated people and there were terrible fights sometimes. There'd be thirty film cameramen and you'd want Ken Macmillan and they'd say he's doing something else, and they'd give you Joe Bloggs and you'd say but I don't want Joe Bloggs and they'd say tough shit. (Powell 2009)

Productions were therefore potentially hampered by OB crews' inexperience in drama, thanks to the original function of the OB units. OB was developed 'principally

for live transmission of current affairs and sport' (Millington and Nelson, 1986: 111) and this was reflected in the skills brought by the operators. Producer Margaret Matheson recalls using location OB on a David Mercer play, *Shooting the Chandelier* (BBC 1977):

I mean absolutely straightforwardly these were a crew who normally worked on football, or other sport. So their total kind of experience and training was to do with [...] following the ball, the golf ball, whatever. I mean, that doesn't mean they weren't brilliant cameraman [...] but they didn't have experience of shooting drama. So that was, you know – the piece stood up, it was a fine piece of work, but it was not straightforward from a technical point of view (Matheson 2010, personal communication).

Shaun Sutton notes the tendency of OB productions toward wide shots, in contradiction of television drama's conventional tendency towards a focus on facial performance, spoken dialogue and the 'intimate screen' (Jacobs 2000):

The new mode produced surprising mistakes. Experienced directors who, in film or studio, would have shot tight on their actors and groups, became strangely obsessed with long views of geography and architecture. The early tape-on-location productions are rich in rolling moorland, sweeping panoramas, with the actors inch high, trying to get in an audible word against the roar of the nearby waterfall. (Sutton, 1982: 103-104)

OB crews' disinclination to use the tight framing of television drama's 'intimate screen' and tendency toward loose framing might well be a residual heritage from their training in covering news or sports events, keeping shots wide in order to respond to unexpected moves from the participants. The interaction of their



performances with those of the onscreen participants is therefore a factor in the visual idiom of OB drama.

This is not necessarily to place OB and film crews at opposite ends of the artistic spectrum. Director Mike Leigh makes a similar point about regional BBC film crews working out of Pebble Mill studios in Birmingham:

the guys... from Pebble Mill, they were working on *Farming Today* for most of the year... and they just spent the whole year shooting nodding heads... and out they'd come to shoot a *Play for Today* film and they'd gradually get more artistic as the days went by, but it was pointing a camera at things, throwing light at it and shooting. (quoted in Cooke, 2012: 148)

One of the earliest major applications of OB drama was the BBC's *Survivors* (1975-1977) which began production as the then-standard mix of 16mm location filming, followed by extensive rehearsal at the BBC's purpose-built Acton rehearsal building (Hewett 2014), then multi-camera video recording in studio. From its seventh episode, *Survivors* shifted to a location OB production. Hewett (2013) argues that this shift in production model had a measurable effect on screen performance:

The fact that much of the performance preparation was now taking place on location, rather than being marked out and perfected beforehand in a separate rehearsal space, had significant implications for acting style. (Hewett 2013: 323)

Hewett distinguishes between 'studio realism' and 'location realism' and identifies a model for the two paradigms. Studio realism is thoroughly rehearsed, with technical detail and blocking fixed before recording. It features sustained continuity of

performance; anti-naturalistic clarity to delivery of extensive expository dialogue; and bodily movement is designed to provide visual interest more than to respond to the situation (Hewett 2013: 331). Location realism involves less rehearsal, and so actors respond 'on site' to the environments within which they are working. Voice clarity and projection are less heightened than in studio; movement derives from the situation and character objectives (Hewett 2013: 337).

Actors therefore respond to the conditions of production, from the artificial sets of the studio to the 'real' settings of indoor or outdoor locations, and modulate their performances accordingly. Hewett admits that his binary runs the risk of reductionism:

location is one of a number of determinants of the type of acting seen on television drama. However ... production environment – in particular, taking performers out of an established performance space such as the studio – can produce intimacies or intensities of performance particular to the physical site in which they are located. (Hewett 2013: 338)

Site of production then may induce actors to deliver what is arguably a less stylised and more naturalistic performance on location. It is not only space of production which affects television acting, but other performative elements including design, lighting, sound equipment, and the 'performances' of other personnel including camera operators. The BBC's *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1978) also made ambitious use of Outside Broadcast technology, being the BBC's first all-location classic serial made entirely on video, using the two-camera LMCR OB unit discussed above. It is

therefore a useful case study for considering the development of performance within a shifting television drama production ecology.

### **Spaces of Performance**

*The Mayor of Casterbridge* (BBC 1978) is an adaptation of Thomas Hardy's 1886 novel. It tells the story of Michael Henchard (Alan Bates) who sells his wife at auction, but rises to become mayor of the town of Casterbridge. After his wife returns, and dies, Henchard competes with rival Donald Farfrae (Jack Galloway) for the attentions of Henchard's lover Lucetta (Anna Massey). Henchard's obsessive nature ultimately leads to his financial and social ruin.

Rehearsals for *The Mayor of Casterbridge* began on 8 August 1977, while OB recording ran over ten weeks from 4 September until 18 November (BBC WAC T5/2, 590/1). The production employed a range of Dorset locations including Corfe Castle village, Creech Grange near Wareham, and Lulworth army range (BBC WAC T5/2, 590/1). Although the LMCR was equipped with two video cameras which could be operated as multi-camera, the production also used long continuous single-camera takes with reverses inserted in post-production. The long take, and therefore continuous performance, is a stylistic trope of this production. A theatre background, and extensive experience on largely studio-made dramas such as *The Forsyte Saga* (BBC 1967), might inform the creative choices made by director David Giles, described by Shaun Sutton as 'a perfect lanaguage (sic) director but not for 'once

more unto the breach' ... David admits himself that he doesn't like big action scenes' (Maher, 1984: p.43).

Jack Galloway, who played Farfrae, remembers 'with *Casterbridge* we did about two weeks, rehearsal at Acton, that's before we went off to do any filming. I'm not sure we rehearsed the whole lot, but we rehearsed major scenes and we blocked it' (Galloway 2011, personal communication). The focus for these rehearsals appears to have been 'television acting' rather than 'television performance':

we didn't have the crew until the very last day [of rehearsals], we'd do a sort of run through of scenes, and then normally ... it would be with David and his PA, or his assistant, and he would talk us through the scenes blocking them. And then he would sort of talk a bit, about motivation, and passion, about how this scene, what is happening in this scene, and it was all very light and easygoing. But near the end of it, more people would turn up, like maybe a cameraman, or a sound man. You know technical people would come in to the rehearsal room and sort of look around, and they would all chat. And we would have no idea what they were chatting about. (Galloway 2011, personal communication)

Hewett (2013) notes the slightly bizarre way in which the conventional BBC schedule of location filming/Acton rehearsal/studio recording meant that actors set their characterisation during brief location filming and then had to match extended rehearsal and studio work to it. Galloway comments that 'David Giles who was the director of it, was a very very good director and he was a theatre director ... so the rehearsals were very much like rehearsing a play' (Galloway, 2011). Possibly as a consequence of Giles' theatre experience, the use of OB for the entire production involves a different and perhaps more logical model in which key scenes were rehearsed and characterisations set before any recording took place.

Cross and Priestner (2005) explain that *Survivors* initially rehearsed at the Acton rehearsal rooms, but due to time pressures shifted to rehearsing *in situ* on location. Director Pennant Roberts noted how ‘[t]he actors were able to take the real surroundings into consideration and make constructive suggestions, and it gave the production team an opportunity to work out the mechanics beforehand’ (cited in Cross and Priestner, 2005: 31). A similar process seems to have been at work in *The Mayor Casterbridge* in terms of blocking rehearsed moves before arriving at location. According to Jack Galloway, the production team had already recce’d the shooting location of Corfe Castle village and the surrounding locale, ‘so when we came to the location ... if it was an interior they were well aware of how they were going to shoot that’ (Galloway, 2011). On occasion, adjustments to performance had to be made due to the constraints of location at short notice. Galloway remembers:

If you were rehearsing a scene say you were inside a house and you blocked it and so on, and then you got there, you would be told very early on while you were in makeup or costume, you would be told that it’s going to be a little different. We can’t get the camera to, you know we want to do a certain shot and ... there’s too much light coming through the window or something, the stairs are in the way, so those kind of things. They’re very minor, they just alter it slightly. (Galloway, 2011)

In this account, ‘television acting’ – characterisation, motivation, preparation – is a process arrived at in rehearsals, while ‘television performance’ – the synthesis of acting with the technical aspects of production – develops through interaction with technical crews and equipment, as well as the empirical experience of arriving on location and adjusting performance details to performance space.

### **‘Location community’ and performance**

Hewett (2013: 326) notes the ‘location community’ of units working outside the studio, and the greater chance of camaraderie with the smaller film crew than with larger studio crews. This would seem to be confirmed by Galloway’s account of shooting in Dorset, where rehearsal enabled the cast and director to form a cohesive unit in advance of shooting. Furthermore, Galloway suggests that Alan Bates’ experience of making cinema films on location was a contributory factor to the ‘location community’ of *Casterbridge*:

when you go on location, if you get a very good leading actor, he will really help the thing roll along, because of his attitude. And Alan was perfect for that. And it makes a big difference because we all stayed in Swanage in a hotel, and in the evening we would all eat together and then after a while we would do our own thing, have a day off and go to the beach or something, so you had this sort of glorious vacation in a way. (Galloway, 2011)

The model of Acton rehearsal and studio recording meant that actors returned every day to their domestic lives, potentially disrupting the process of staying in character. Here, shooting entirely on location allows a sustained process of development of characterisation and of co-operative team spirit among the cast and crew.

In this account, however, the immersive nature of location shooting can be problematic. On occasion, ‘television acting’ is disrupted by the demands of ‘television performance’:

like makeup will come and start doing a check, about three seconds before you do a scene, same with wardrobe, and it can throw you completely ... if they come in and say, look, there's not enough room in this room, we're going to have to shoot it the opposite way and we're going to have to bring in different lamps ... Sometimes the cameraman's not happy and it's taking a long time. It's hot, there are cables everywhere, you have to sometimes stand and turn your head in the most unnatural way because that's the only way you can shoot the reaction you're supposed to give, and you just have to rise above any of these things that seem to get in your way. (Galloway, 2011)

The setting for performance is also an issue due to the less controlled nature of location, compared with studio. Galloway remembers the hot summer of 1977 on location in Dorset:

I get hay fever. So you had to be very careful outside in the long grass you know, wandering around, and you got stiflingly hot in those costumes ... to go back to rehearsing in Acton, if I was to say to you we rehearsed this scene, Anna Massey and myself and there we are now in Corfe in this room, and the difference is, it's blisteringly hot, they can't set the cameras up the way they want, there's no air in the room, costume's very uncomfortable ... all the sound people are wearing shorts [*laughs*] you're in some sort of very unusual costume that's rather warm. (Galloway, 2011)

There are therefore tensions around 'television performance' within the matrix of other elements of 'television performance'. In general however, Galloway's memories of working on location for Casterbridge are mostly positive: 'everyone was very happy because it was an extremely hot, and nice summer, and we were on a beautiful location'. The environment for acting then may itself influence onscreen performance.

If performance is the product of an interaction of acting, space, and screen, then settings also require consideration. Hewett (2013) notes the importance of performing environs in an anecdote by drama theoretician Constantin Stanislavski, who found that the performance from *A Month in the Country* which won him acclaim in the theatre fell flat when delivered in real countryside. As discussed above, Hewett uses the terms ‘studio realism’ and ‘location realism’ to characterise the acting modes used in different settings. Not only the ‘location community’, but the village setting and indigenous locals in Dorset helped actors as part of the process of creating the performance:

we turned the whole village of Corfe into Casterbridge, so ... they would have a marketplace and there would be real horses, and dogs, and cattle and the local people would be extras, so you couldn't help but, your performance rose up to a better state ... when you're outside and you're sort of soaking up the atmosphere ... you would feel that you were able to give your best or find the centre of the scene because you were very relaxed with your fellow actor and you were surrounded by nature and things that you can focus on (Galloway, 2011).

This account suggests the inverse of Hewett's Stanislavsky anecdote – here, the setting seems to enhance the performance. It is unclear how the performance ‘rose up to a better state’, however, in terms of ‘television performance’ rather than the more subjective ‘television acting’. It is not only ‘television acting’ which is affected by shooting on location. The ‘invisible performance’ of camera operators was also influenced by setting, as this article now considers.



## Television Performance and Creative Capital

While Hewett's (2013) account of acting on OB in *Survivors* suggested mostly continuous performance vision mixed on two cameras, *Casterbridge* adopted a hybrid single camera/multicamera approach. While conventional OB shooting was largely static – pans and zooms to follow sporting events – the OB crew brought film camera fittings in order to extend this normative visual rhetoric for the purposes of capturing dramatic performance. In an interview conducted just after shooting, *Casterbridge* cameraman Simon Fone explained the single-camera mode sometimes deployed in the production, for example the fairground scene in episode one which used

a ‘Scorpion’ dolly with tracks employed for a 9 minute tracking-shot through the fairground in episode 1. This shot provided the ‘master’ for the scene and the camera was then mounted on a tripod to record two or three ‘cut-ins.’ (Fone, 1978: 70)

A continuous tracking shot follows Henchard's wife and daughter as they walk round the fairground, with close-ups edited in for significant dialogue or reaction shots. The scene therefore offers a combination of ‘filmic’ spectacle, in the scale and detail of the fairground, and conventional ‘intimate screen’ close-ups and dialogue driving the narrative. According to *Casterbridge* lighting director Hu Cartwright:

David Giles largely did his master shot and then cut in those people who had their backs to the camera. Well, that may sound very crude, but it worked very well – and it was very easy to light. It was a charmed production. (Cartwright in Winser, 1981: 40)

Bazin (1971) argued that the long take is both more ‘cinematic’ than montage editing but also, in its exploration of temporal and spatial unities within a scene, underlines

the perceived realism of a narrative. *Casterbridge* uses long continuous takes, and lengthy tracking shots ending on static intercutting for dialogue, and may have been influenced by OB crews' experience in using zooms and pans, 'following the ball' from fixed cameras with static tripods.

Although single-camera is associated with a much slower production process than multi-camera, the production used two methods by which the twin cameras were deployed for efficiency: single-camera recording in exteriors, and multi-camera vision mixing for interiors. Jack Galloway remembers 'we always started with a very long master shot ... then they would put the camera on Alan [Bates], and he would do the whole scene again, and it would just be on Alan and maybe on me' (Galloway, 2011). Two-camera OB units offer less choice of shots than the studio's multiple cameras, and it is unclear from these accounts whether the master shot was single-camera or multi-camera vision-mixed. However, textual analysis of many of the interior dialogue scenes reveals at least three camera setups, suggesting that master takes were vision-mixed on two cameras, or recorded as two-shots, and scenes or lines were repeated for reaction shots or close-ups to be inserted in post-production. Alternatively, cameras were moved midway through recording a scene, expanding the range of setups in a single scene, and approximating studio's visual rhythms and choice of angles.

Performance spaces were also deployed efficiently in the country manor used for the interiors of Henchard's house. This worked as a studio equivalent, with rooms acting as sets, and scenes performed and recorded continuously with vision-mixing between cameras.

In the fortnight that the production spent at Winterbourne Kingston, an average of 10 minutes per day was recorded, the best day being over 18 minutes... Two downstairs rooms, the stairs and one upstairs room meant that moves were small, and as a result of the large amount of finished programme ‘canned’ it was possible to devote longer to later complex scenes or difficult outside situations. (Fone, 1978: 70)

In this period, drama production using 16mm film aimed to produce two and a half minutes per day of screen material *versus* six minutes on OB (Sutton, 1982: 99), while the target for *Survivors* was eleven minutes of usable material per day (Cross and Priestner, 2005). *Boys from the Blackstuff* (BBC 1982) had the target of twelve minutes on OB per day (Millington and Nelson, 1986). *Casterbridge*’s hybrid two-camera OB production mode, recording up to 18 minutes per day, therefore had clear advantages over film in terms of shooting ratio. The demands on OB crews, unaccustomed to drama, meant the need to develop creative capital and performative strategies to complement the ambitious nature of the production.

### **Creative capital and ‘invisible performance’**

Lengthy tracking shots are deployed at various points in the serial but perhaps the most ambitious camerawork comes in episode four where Henchard importunes Lucetta about their engagement, unaware that she is already married to Farfrae. A hand-held reverse track frames the pair in medium long shot as they walk towards the camera, with several pauses by both performers and camera, in an unbroken take lasting 6’18”. Despite the ‘lightweight’ cameras, this was a challenging sequence, involving the cameraman walking forwards with the camera, on his shoulder, pointing

backwards (see below). As the OB cameras were cabled to the scanner van, this shot would have involved not only choreography between actors and camera operator, but also between camera operator and assistant(s) manipulating camera cables. A boom operator may also be involved, although OB sometimes involved actors wearing radio microphones (Smart, 2015). Camera operator Simon Fone highlighted this sequence in a contemporaneous article:

In episode 4, there is a 6 minute hand-held shot which in my opinion is the best piece of work achieved by a BBC OB cameraman. Alan Bates and Anna Massey walk up a country path and pause at a tree. Preceding them with the camera back to front on his left shoulder, Dave Gautier manages a steadiness difficult to believe, as after 4 minutes or so of walking there is a tighten to a close 2-shot at the tree. Tricky when you are back to front, even though he had swivelled the V/F [viewfinder] round. (Fone, 1978: 70)

Although lacking the fluidity of studio pedestal cameras, this is ‘embodied’ camera performance relying on careful choreography between place and performers. Before the invention of Steadicam harnesses, handheld video cameras were highly unusual in drama and this Bazinian (1971) sequence offers an exploration of space and performance. Without edits, the actors control the pacing of the scene, building its emotional intensity and immediacy, and the viewer chooses where to direct the gaze without the implicit direction of multi-camera vision mixing. The shot’s embodied unsteadiness signifies technology and embodied creative capital pushed to their limits.

The innovative production mode described here was not without its issues. Critical evaluations have not been kind to *Casterbridge*, criticising its ‘plodding narrative and... technical flaws’ (Giddings and Selby, 2001: 33). BBC video

cameraman Mike Winser considered it ‘loosely shot ... with ... uncommitted framing, leaving margins for error’ (Winser and Fone 1980, 37), while *Casterbridge* cameraman Simon Fone retrospectively assessed the camerawork as ‘tatty at the edges’ (Winser and Fone, 1980: 37). Hewett (2013) suggests that OB owed more to the studio process – where scenes could be performed in their entirety – than the film process, i.e. single-camera with post-production editing. In television drama’s shift from studio to location shooting, *Casterbridge* was a transitional production adopting a hybrid production mode, but its use of OB had far-reaching consequences. As a training ground for staff and a demonstration of OB drama’s potential, its significance lies perhaps in the productions which followed. Cameraman Simon Fone considered that ‘it took that serial to give the guys on the unit, and the programme making departments, confidence in the LPU’s ability to produce a quality product’ (Fone, 1978: 37). Offering a means to produce drama cost-effectively entirely on location, the performance expected of camera crews developed through time to meet rising expectations. *A Question of Guilt: Constance Kent* (BBC 1980), according to cameraman Mike Winser, involved a more filmic production paradigm:

thirty shooting days making a three and a half hour movie on a budget that approached the million pound mark. At that level every shot had to be as near perfect as we could make it – precisely framed group shots containing movement with no wasted air around the important elements, using tracks rather than zooms – which of course takes longer to set up. (Winser and Fone, 1980: 37)

The BBC *Casterbridge*, then, constitutes a hybrid production, comprising the televisual (multi-camera vision mixing, continuous performance of scenes) and filmic

(single-camera location production) which requires OB operators to adapt their ‘invisible’ performance to meet new levels of quality.

Hewett (2013) notes that the OB production paradigm for drama was an atypical one and employed for logistical rather than creative reasons, and this is confirmed by *Casterbridge* producer Jonathan Powell: ‘there was no aesthetic drive at all. It was just get out of those studios’ (2009). As OB crews tried to adjust to working in drama, their skills had to develop, as Mike Winser observed:

a lot of *Casterbridge* was shot with a master wide probably off the top of a tripod and loosely covered, whereas when we got to *Constance Kent* with director Paul Annett, he wanted every shot much tighter cropped, less margin for error. The actual demands on the cameraman now are greater than they were at the time of *Casterbridge*. (Winser, 1981: 40)

While to some extent aesthetically compromised by technology and schedule, *Casterbridge* remains a groundbreaking production which paved the way for future OB drama productions such as *The Nightmare Man* (BBC 1981), *Boys from the Blackstuff* (BBC 1982) *The Old Men at the Zoo* (BBC 1983) and *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil* (BBC 1986). This chapter now considers the increasing demands on OB units and crews as demonstrated by the hybrid production practices used on *Boys from the Blackstuff*.

### **Location realism and invisible performance in *Boys from the Blackstuff***

*Boys from the Blackstuff* was made largely on OB video and explored the social and personal consequences of mass unemployment in post-industrial Liverpool. Millington and Nelson's invaluable ethnography of the production (1986) stresses the collaborative nature of the serial, suggesting that the cast's familiarity with the working-class Liverpool milieu meant that director Philip Saville was more than usually influenced by the input of his actors. Millington and Nelson explain multi-camera's reliance on naturalism, exacerbated by the limited choices available through the two-camera, single-output vision-mixing system offered by OB, and suggest that *Blackstuff* was planned to 'test out techniques to *overcome* the conventional limitations of OB recording' (Millington and Nelson 1986: 113, emphasis in original). For *Blackstuff*, Saville bypassed the vision mixer, and each of the two cameras output to its own video recorder. Scenes were recorded in continuous takes, but the two resulting recordings, showing different angles, could be edited and dubbed later. This 'filmic' approach resulted in a 'video movie' (Millington and Nelson 1986: 123) and furnishes further examples of how the OB camera operator's 'television performance' complements the 'television acting' on screen.

Millington and Nelson argue that *Blackstuff* 'achieved a greater authenticity than is possible in the studio by setting the action in an actual environment ... a mobile camera seems able to 'explore' an environment whereas the fixed studio method can only 'reproduce' reality' (Millington and Nelson 1986: 112). By this, they mean the potential of location shooting to depict images of industrial and social decay enabled by visiting storied locations such as Liverpool's derelict docks and warehouses. But in addition, performative camera mobility allows a more phenomenological engagement with the dramatic world and the performances within

it. In episode three, for example, a continuous, hand-held tracking shot follows characters through the rambling Department of Employment building, immersing the viewers' point-of-view within the story world and the labyrinthine bureaucracy of the social security system. Setting, framing, and 'visible' and 'invisible' performances interact to convey the serial's central theme, the struggles of individuals to maintain their dignity within overwhelming social, economic and political forces. The immersiveness of the scene endows it with 'embodied expressionism' (Jacobs, 2003: 38), intersecting narrative and aesthetic through visual mobility and framing provided by 'invisible performance'.

In a different way, the characters' personal problems are conveyed through interaction between 'visible' and 'invisible' performance – sometimes choreographed and sometimes spontaneous. In episode three's domestic confrontation between Angie (Julie Walters) and Chrissie (Michael Angelis), an unbroken single-camera take 'adds immediacy and authenticity to the presentation of the actors in their world' (Millington and Nelson, 1986: 116). The use of a single camera operator is perhaps as much a function of shooting on location in cramped houses as any artistic impulse. For Millington and Nelson, the mobile camera is used to 'actively explore, rather than merely reproduce, aspects of the relationship' (Millington and Nelson 1986: 116) but they also note the significance of performance in this method:

the shooting of scenes in a single shot is essentially an actor-centred production strategy. The deliberate avoidance of internal edits in post-production ensures that it is the actors' performance which is dictating the pace and rhythm of the scene... the actors are put in control of the size and impact of their image in the camera frame (Millington and Nelson 1986: 116-117).



It would be more accurate to say ‘single take’ rather than ‘single shot’ here. However, it is the case that continuous recording – whether in one take, or vision mixed on two cameras – allows more performative spontaneity, and highlights actors’ control of pacing and emotion within the scene.

Fife Donaldson (2013) describes the interplay of actors and camera operators in 21<sup>st</sup> century US television police drama and suggests that the resultant partial, unpredictable interplay adds immediacy and intimacy. This effect can also be seen in the very different production paradigm of British 1980s OB drama. While Millington and Nelson assume that ‘[t]he video cameraman normally reacts to a specific performance within a fairly prescribed range of possibilities’ (Millington and Nelson 1986: 124) they do acknowledge the potential for occasional creative agency.

*Blackstuff* camera operator Keith Salmon notes the spontaneous reaction sometimes required of camera operators’ embodied skills, saying ‘if you get a superb piece of acting you react to it’ (Millington and Nelson, 1986: 124-5). Discussing the fight scene described above, he comments

You never really knew what was going to happen with that. Because it depended on the way they were going to fall in the chair. That really depended on my reaction to what they were doing. When they come in close and you tighten in for the slapping and struggling on the chair there was camera movement around which actually added to the whole scene (Millington and Nelson 1986: 125)

As in Fife Donaldson’s much later example of US police drama, the tension between rehearsed acting and reactive camerawork results in ‘the seeming absence of a choreographed unity, opening up a pattern of tensions between the degrees of control

over events for camera and performer' (Fife Donaldson 2013: 216) which adds much to the performed scene's dynamic. The close engagement of the cameraman within the proxemics of the scene is shown by the way in which the frame is disrupted by the acting – the camera operator gets involved in the confrontation between Chrissie and Angie and 'the violence of the images is further enhanced by the inevitable camera-shake created as the cameraman disentangles himself from the scuffle and follows the action at close quarters' (Millington and Nelson 1986: 117). The onscreen diegetic violence between the characters, affecting the co-present camera operator, in turn destabilises the ontological stability of the frame, a visual disruption which complements the intensity of the performed emotions being displayed by the actors. While the 'cinema verité' visual rhetoric here complements *Blackstuff*'s social realist ambitions, it also demonstrates the contribution of camera operators to the scene's overall effect. 'Visible' performance therefore interacts with 'invisible' performance in sometimes unpredictable ways, inflected by the specific creative capital of the camera operator's ability to react to and interact with actors' performances.

## **Conclusions**

This article has explored ways in which performance in television drama functions as interaction between actors doing 'television acting', and the 'television performance' of other mediating elements. Not only does site of production affect actors' preparation and modulate delivery of their performances (Hewett's [2013]'location realism'), but the work of camera operators generates the frame within which that performance is delivered. The work of camera operators comprises a hierarchy of

embodied creative capital within which individual operators contribute to the actors' performances being given in front of the camera through framing and camera mobility. Within the OB production paradigm of the 1970s/1980s, 'invisible performance' can be seen aspiring to adapt to the demands of a new production mode and rising expectations of televisual style.

The shift from the basic fixed cameras of sports relay to 'film' mounts and increasingly elaborate camera moves, placed greater pressures on the creative capital of OB camera operators. Not only did this mean developing greater artistry in shot composition and framing, but also in the physical effort of embodied performance such as the sustained hand-held tracking shots described above in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *Boys from the Blackstuff*. With further technological development, including the development of Steadicam mounts, this kind of performative camerawork stabilised as a more normative element of television's visual style. However, the importance of changing modes of creative capital on the part of OB crews is clear. Further research into this subject could apply 'invisible performance' to the career paths of particular OB camera operators, attempting to identify specific visual idiolects based around embodied performative skills, and considering how individual 'invisible performers' developed over time.

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