

# 1

## The Intimate Screen

**A**T WHAT POINT does television drama become self-conscious? In 1938 BBC drama producer George More O'Ferrall complained to his superior that television drama was too slow, and that he was going to speed it up. In 1952 another drama producer, Rudolph Cartier, informed his superior that BBC drama needed 'updating' that it was too 'stagey'; a few years later Sydney Newman, working for ITV's 'Armchair Theatre' signalled his desire to liven-up television drama by 'moving the cameras' on air; in the 1960s Troy Kennedy Martin said television drama was too dependent on dialogue and needed to be faster and 'more visual'.<sup>1</sup>

This recurrent pattern of modernization is a testament to the up-to-the-minute sensitivity of television drama, and to the appetite for innovation and change that characterized the practices and thinking of drama producers, directors, and writers.<sup>2</sup> Innovation and modernization in television drama is not located somewhere in the mid-1960s, but is also a characteristic of early drama production.

This book examines the aesthetics and style of early television drama from 1936 to 1955, a period for which virtually no retrievable examples of drama productions exist. Television drama is the form that is typically foregrounded, rightly or wrongly, as emblematic of the aesthetic state of the medium as a whole. After 1955, the history of early television drama has been understood as a development from a static, theatrical, visual style to a mobile, cinematic one. The evaluation of the subsequent development of television drama after 1955—from the innovations of Sydney Newman and 'Armchair Theatre', to the 'Golden Age' of 'The Wednesday Play', and Dennis Potter—depends on this idea of 'liberation' from the early static theatre of television drama, and on the assertion that early television drama (emblematic of television in general) did not develop its own aesthetic.

<sup>1</sup> Newman: 'I insisted that the cameras definitely do move on the air'; in the documentary about 'Armchair Theatre', *And Now For Your Sunday Night Dramatic Entertainment* (Microcraze Productions/Channel Four, 8 February 1987). Troy Kennedy Martin, 'Nats Go Home: First Statement of a New Drama For Television', *Encore*, 48 (March–April 1964).

<sup>2</sup> There was no distinction between drama producer and director before 1955. Early drama producers 'directed' their productions.

The essay that establishes this critical map of TV drama history is Carl Gardner and John Wyver's 'The Single Play: From Reithian Reverence to Cost Accounting and Censorship', which investigates the development of television drama in Britain, and examines the reasons for its decline. Early drama production is described as part of the 'Reithian phase' which lasted until the late 1950s, and succeeded by:

the transitional phase dominated by Sydney Newman, from the late '50s until the beginning of the '70s; and the present phase currently dribbling to a conclusion, which one could dub the era of cost-effectiveness.<sup>3</sup>

In this reading, the influence of the first Director-General of the BBC, John Reith, was to set the moral and ideological parameters of early broadcasting, and this affected everything from organizational structure to the visual style of television drama (even though Reith did not like television). Reith is seen as the (controlling, restrictive) father of British broadcasting, and Sydney Newman as the (nurturing, permissive) father of British television drama. Newman had worked in Canada and the US during the late 1940s and 1950s, before his appointment as Head of Drama for one of the new ITV companies, ATV, in 1958. Newman's policy as Drama Head at the Canadian Broadcasting Company was to commission original plays by contemporary dramatists. It was the newness and innovation which Newman encouraged in his drama output that Gardner and Wyver find attractive, his concentration on 'television as television', for a mass popular audience, not one patronized by the middlebrow interests of the BBC elite.

It is true that the contrast between Reith and Newman is striking. Reith's photographs depict him as a sombre, austere minister, whereas Newman's show him as a white-suited blazing showbiz evangelist. In Gardner and Wyver's reading of history it is almost as if by some fantastic process of osmosis these personalities infect the stylistic dynamic of their drama productions: the early dramas of Reith's BBC become 'photographed stage plays', respectfully static and distant, whilst Newman's drama productions have an ingenious exhibitionistic mobility, with multiple cameras prodding their lenses into the action, and spiralling in and between the sets and actors, until their movement itself becomes the significant performance.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This first appeared in *Programme of the Edinburgh International Television Festival* in 1980, 47–52. The version referred to here is Carl Gardner and John Wyver, 'The Single Play from Reithian Reverence to Cost-Accounting and Censorship' and 'The Single Play: An Afterword.' *Screen*, 24/4–5 (1983), 115.

<sup>4</sup> Of course, Newman himself was only indirectly responsible for the style of his dramas: it was his directors who planned camera set-ups and movements. However, Newman has claimed that he always encouraged his directors to make the cameras mobile on air, as a contrast to what he claimed was the static nature of BBC drama production (*And Now For Your Sunday Night Dramatic Entertainment*).

For Gardner and Wyver, Newman refreshed the production of television drama by re-situating its mode of address and subject matter towards the majority working class, eschewing the West End middle-brow stage plays of the BBC for drama written for the medium. The Reithian era was a sterile ‘last gasp’:

The first phase, primarily under the aegis of the BBC, was one of the last sustained gasps of a paternalistic Reithian project to bring ‘the best of British culture’ to a grateful and eager audience—a mission of middle-class enlightenment. Thus in its early days TV drama picked up the predominant patterns, concerns and style of both repertory theatre and radio drama (as well as many of their personnel, and their distinct training and working practices) and consisted of televised stage plays, ‘faithfully’ and tediously broadcast from the theatre, or reconstructed in the studio, even down to intervals, prosceniums and curtains. Such an approach, which takes the television process itself as transparent, almost by definition, precluded any innovation of TV style or any attempt to develop a specifically televisual form for small-screen drama.<sup>5</sup>

In their conclusion Wyver and Gardner refer to Channel 4’s commitment (circa 1983) to a number of relay transmissions of dramas from the theatre (such as *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Kean*):

How ironic then that, in a sense, it represents a return to the theatre on television which dominated the small screen in the 1950s. And how sad that a service committed to ‘innovation and experiment’ has to rely on one of television drama’s oldest and least interesting forms.<sup>6</sup>

It is with these ‘least interesting forms’ that this book is concerned. It aims to revise significantly, rather than refute completely, the model of drama development asserted by Gardner and Wyver. Given the existence of considerable scholarship on early cinema, it seems no longer sufficient to offer a nebulous prehistory of television drama in terms of theatricality as a prerequisite to moving to the more exciting discussions of ‘Armchair Theatre’ and ‘The Wednesday Play’. If early drama forms were static, boring, theatrical then surely this is interesting in itself, particularly given its existence at a time when cinema was fluid, mobile, and layered. If early television drama was static and theatrical, then how and why was it static and theatrical? If it was produced in terms of a Reithian ethic, then how did this translate into shots, composition, and mode of address? If it was parasitic on British West End theatre, why? And how was this theatre presented as television? In other words what did early television drama *look like*? As Charles Barr argues:

5 Gardner and Wyver, ‘The Single Play’, 115.

6 Ibid. 129.

We need at least some tentative equivalents, in terms of TV history, for the authoritative analyses of the developing formal systems of early cinema that have been provided by writers like Barry Salt and the team of David Bordwell/Kristin Thompson/Janet Staiger . . . Between the blocks of 'dated' raw material and the institutional and technological histories, bridges need to be built.<sup>7</sup>

I planned and researched this book precisely as a 'tentative' and exploratory 'bridge', in order to outline possible ways of thinking and writing about early television which would genuinely 'open the (historical) box' for further work. Barr also identifies what would become almost a defining problematic for my research, the absence of audiovisual material from the earliest years of television. It is a somewhat awkward historical legacy for those scholars wanting to *see* precisely how television drama worked. John Caughie summarizes the problem:

While cinema historians have a continuous, though incomplete, history of films from the 1890s, television has a pre-history in which programmes themselves do not exist in recorded form. Transcription, or recording television on film, was not developed till 1947, and recording on tape was technologically possible first in the US in 1953, and was probably not readily available in Britain till around 1958. Neither was in routine use till the 1960s, and even when recording was possible there is a long chain of missing links which have been wiped from the record either to reuse the tapes or to save storage space . . . This makes the recovery of the early history of television form and style an archaeological, rather than a strictly historical procedure.<sup>8</sup>

These interrelated issues—the necessity to begin an analysis of the style and forms of early television drama, and the corresponding absence of audiovisual material—have shaped my subsequent research methodology and the structure of this book.

The bulk of the research presented here was conducted at the BBC Written Archives Centre, Caversham Park. This *written* archive provided programme and policy information—studio plans, camera scripts, memos, etc.—which was invaluable in the process of reconstructing the *visual* sense of early television drama. Other primary written sources included schedules, reviews, and criticism published

7 Charles Barr, 'Television on Television', *Sight and Sound*, 55/3 (1986), 159. He is referring to Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (London: Starword, 1983), and David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

8 John Caughie, 'Before the Golden Age: Early Television Drama', in John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain* (London: British Film Institute, 1991), 24–5.

in the *Radio Times*, *The Listener*, *New Statesman*, *BBC Quarterly*, and *Sight and Sound* from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. The use of still photographs of early television production was not satisfactory as a basis for analysis: the vast majority of them are production stills, presumably taken during camera rehearsals (one can often see the television cameras on the periphery of the photograph).<sup>9</sup>

I also draw on three other kinds of subsequently generated material. First, published anecdotal and interview-based writing provided some invaluable insights into the working practices of early television drama. Second, the ‘gap’ in academic scholarship in this area has been addressed more recently in some journals and books of collected essays, and this work provided me with some useful maps of hitherto unknown territory. Lastly, I conducted a number of interviews with production and engineering personnel who worked during the early period.

I consider ‘early television’ to mean programmes made up to 1955. It is important to separate the period of single-channel television broadcasting, within the public service epoch, as a discrete time in television history. As I note in Chapter 4, the introduction of a competing television service had a transformative effect on drama production and, whilst there was also some continuity with pre-1955 forms of drama, this is such an important moment in the history of British television that it is sensible to restrict my analysis to drama output before this date. The post-1955 period is also a transitional one, between a near total reliance on live studio drama productions, and the increasing use of pre-recorded material, on tape and film. This is reflected in the steep increase in the availability of visual archive material from 1955 onwards, a rich source for future research. The pre-1955 era also represents the most unexplored period of television drama production (and of television in general).

The aim of this analysis is not to pretend that early television drama was always mobile, never theatrical, and never dependent on some forms of radio drama. But restricting our understanding of early television drama to ‘photographed stage plays’ elides a great deal of stylistic and aesthetic development and debate, particularly as it is taken as the starting point for the transition of the medium as a whole from a literary to a cinematic mode. Robin Nelson has recently argued that:

The shift from the studio-based, literary/theatrical to the visual/cinematic product is most marked in the historically cherished, authored, single play slot. In a gradual process, one-off, authored TV drama has loosened its tap-root in theatre and gravitated towards the visuality of cinema.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See the stills in Tise Vahimagi (ed.), *British Television: An Illustrated Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> Robin Nelson, *TV Drama in Transition* (London: Macmillan, 1997), 19.

What is the ‘cinematic’ here—long shots? little dialogue? European art cinema? Hollywood high-concept? What counts as ‘visuality’ given that television is *always visual*, even when it transmits literary and theatrical subject matter? Is this a sensuous distinction between film and television images? I think that the distinction between visual styles is not reducible to a literary cinematic trope: sometimes the self-effacing television drama that relays performance and dialogue without drawing attention to its visual style might seem more ‘cinematic’ than the visually exhibitionistic television drama. As we shall see, even early television drama sometimes wanted to show off its visuals before its verbal.

Television was also more than radio that gained an eye and lost a voice: it had a visual imagination too. Stylistic change in television drama was often signalled by the claim not that it was ‘more realistic’ (as in film) but that it was ‘more visual’. In the 1960s Troy Kennedy Martin’s essay about alternative television drama, ‘Nats Go Home’ was written as a manifesto against the gravitational pull of dialogue on the style of television drama, arguing for the more visual appeal of collage and montage.<sup>11</sup> To assume that early television drama had limited visual imagination, and that a dependence on theatrical material entailed a ‘theatrical visual style’ of depiction, whereas writing for ‘television as television’ in the late 1950s and 1960s meant the liberation of cameras from their static theatrical chains, is to avoid confronting the reality of television history in preference for a neat metaphor.

The ability to choreograph multiple cameras through space in real-time is certainly indicative of a level of technological ability and also of the ambitions of drama producers: but it says little about the aesthetic value of the television drama (one could, for example, interpret a busy camera style as distracting). Where camera movement is a significant factor in the development of television drama is as part of a continuity of stylistic ambition whereby drama producers want to ‘get in closer’ to the dramatic action, to become intimate with it.

The desire to get in close to the dramatic action is not confined to drama production (it is clearly relevant to news and sports coverage—both in short supply during the early years of British television), but it is an appetite that provides a continuity between the early, pre-1955, television drama and later drama. Achieving ‘nearness’ to actors and moving a viewpoint with them through the diegetic spaces of the studio was a feature of early and later television drama. But where did this appetite for ‘getting closer’ originate?

<sup>11</sup> Troy Kennedy Martin, ‘Nats Go Home’. Kennedy Martin repeated his point thirty years later, ‘Television is all dialogue, or a lot of it is, and cinema is all images’, quoted in Sean Day-Lewis, *Talk of Drama: Views of the Television Dramatist Now and Then* (Luton: University of Luton Press/John Libbey Media, 1998), 210.

For Gardner and Wyver the development of indigenous television drama was blocked by a respect for theatre, and the push for dramatic freedom was personified by Sydney Newman. The arrival of Newman from North America to Britain in the mid-1950s, onto a psycho-social terrain apparently ripe for liberation has symbolic potential as Ted Willis demonstrates:

Along came this man with this dream of putting the story of ordinary people and of our times, the contemporary times, on the screen, and doing this with quality, and giving writers freedom to write . . . this natural force blew through the corridors of television and blew a lot of the cobwebs out. That man probably had a greater influence on the development of television than anyone else.<sup>12</sup>

Newman's arrival more or less coincides with the arrival of commercial television in Britain in 1955 which has also been seen as a liberating force for change in television. However, it is possible to see this development toward a newly socialized popular 'closeness'—in terms of its popular address and a stylistic freedom—as part of a longstanding broadcasting tradition whose ambition from the beginning was to establish more intimate forms of communication.

Broadcasting provided the regular delivery to the home of developing structures of 'dailiness' that Paddy Scannell has shown characterized early broadcast programming. For Scannell, the address of broadcast programmes was developed toward the 'more direct, intimate personal style of speech', so that broadcast talk was aligned with conversational forms.<sup>13</sup>

'Intimacy' for early television drama was understood by critics and producers in terms of the reception of television in the private 'intimate' sphere of the home, something shared by all television programmes. Some critics believed that the delivery of drama to the domestic sphere required a softer vocal register, and restrained performance style—the conversational, rather than the declarative. For other critics, television plays should tackle psychological and emotional issues, using the 'intimate' interior setting of one or two sets, rendered through a close-up style. For them, intimacy as a quality of television drama meant close familiarity between characters in interior settings, and this was clearly distinguished from the more macho observational knowledge of the public sphere that television's Outside Broadcast abilities could provide. Television critics argued that the proper *métier* for television drama's intimacy meant the limitation of ambition away from film's space-expanding possibilities,

<sup>12</sup> *And Now For Your Sunday Night Dramatic Entertainment.*

<sup>13</sup> Paddy Scannell, *Radio, Television and Modern Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 12–13.

and toward the enclosure of 'electronic theatre.' Intimacy meant the revelation and display of the character's inner feelings and emotions, effected by a close-up style of multi-camera studio production, rather than the exhibitionistic display of technological virtuosity that the 'come and see inside a submarine live' rhetoric of programmes like *Saturday Night Live!* offered the viewer. Early television drama's intimacy is then a very elastic idea that contains a variety of historical and aesthetic assumptions about early television.

The virtual absence of pre-1955 audio-visual material in the archives probably accounts for the bias of critical attention towards the post-1955 period, where viewing copies are available.<sup>14</sup> Although television studies scholarship still has not developed a well-defined and historically constituted sense of the medium and its apparatus, there is a growing body of work that considers television history in Britain and North America.<sup>15</sup> Previously, Asa Briggs's five-volume *History of Broadcasting in the UK* and Eric Barnouw's *Tube of Plenty* represented the most thorough social and institutional histories of broadcasting in Britain and the United States respectively.<sup>16</sup> One criticism of this kind of history was that it privileged the broadcasting institution's own self-definition at a management level, obscuring more local decisions and developments. The limitations of Briggs's monumental study is raised by Edward Buscombe in his review of Briggs's fourth volume:

there remains the question of whether the book is indeed what it claims to be, a history of broadcasting in the UK. There are reasons why I think it cannot quite be that. One has to do with what Briggs takes broadcasting to be. Broadcasting is what the BBC does, and what the BBC does is largely to be discovered through an examination of internal records. By far the greater part of Briggs's story is told through the evidence of BBC memoranda, published policy statements, letters, speeches and so on. His book is therefore the history of the BBC's internal workings at the level of policy formation.<sup>17</sup>

14 See Steve Bryant, *The Television Heritage* (London: British Film Institute, 1989) for a history of television programme archiving.

15 For example, two seminal essays on early television drama are, John Caughie, 'Before the Golden Age: Early Television Drama', in John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain* (London: British Film Institute, 1991), and Charles Barr, ' "They Think It's All Over": The Dramatic Legacy of Live Television', in John Hill and Martin McLoone (eds.), *Big Picture, Small Screen: The Relations Between Film and Television* (Luton: University of Luton Press/John Libbey, 1997).

16 Asa Briggs, *History of Broadcasting in the UK*, i. *The Birth of Broadcasting* (1961), ii. *The Golden Age of Wireless* (1965), iii. *The War of Words* (1970; vols. i–iii, London: Oxford University Press); iv. *Sound and Vision* (1979), v. *Competition* (1995; vols. iv and v, Oxford: Oxford University Press). Eric Barnouw, *A Tower in Babel* (1966), *The Golden Web* (1968), *Tube of Plenty* (1975; all pub. New York: Oxford University Press).

17 Ed Buscombe, 'Broadcasting From Above', *Screen Education*, 37 (1980–1), 75.

Buscombe notes that the dependence on internal memos for evidence tends to present the BBC as a purely self-generating organization, and this approach necessarily elides attention to the actual content of the programmes themselves:

it is obvious enough that a history of *broadcasting*, as opposed merely to a history of the internal workings of the BBC, ought surely to offer some analysis of the end product. What Briggs provides is for the most part merely a listing of the major shows the BBC put out between 1945 and 1955. One cannot understand the reasons why these programmes took the form they did simply by reference to the minutes of the BBC's Board of Governors.<sup>18</sup>

In recognition of the fact that official records are produced by 'those in charge', a more balanced history would reflect the thinking and practice of technicians, producers, and writers:

Such research among those lower down in the hierarchy, involved in programme production, might also complicate and therefore improve our understanding of the BBC's ideological function . . . There must always have been more or less of a struggle. Indeed the stream of memos and policy papers is at least a priori evidence of this. For if there was never any resistance to the line pursued by those at the top, never any questioning of the proper way of doing things, why would the BBC's position need to be spelt out in such detail?<sup>19</sup>

For Buscombe, writing in 1980, the 'complete' history of broadcasting remains to be written, and it would be one where the programmes and the programme-makers are privileged. Clearly, broadcasting history needs both the monumental ambition and coverage of Briggs's excellent history and the more local specific analysis of particular genres and their production practices. As the Head of BBC television drama during the 1950s, Michael Barry says of Briggs:

[His] History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom gives the overall view of the development of drama during the period [1936–55]; but, as one sub-division in a massive work, the view is limited, and one that, in the main, is seen from distant and senior corridors. [My] essentially personal account seeks to convey the impressions, listen to the sounds and feel the pulse of another corridor, the studio corridor at Alexandra Palace; along which for a number of years the life blood of television seemed to flow. It attempts to describe what it was like to work in that first corridor of television . . .<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 77.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Michael Barry, *From the Palace to the Grove* (London: Royal Television Society, 1992), p. xi.

The historical turn in television studies of the early 1990s combined both the macro-overview with more local analyses.<sup>21</sup> This history demonstrated that the absence of the programmes as ‘raw material’ was not necessarily a problem. The history of theatre has similar absences, many of which have been addressed using precisely the kind of written secondary material I intend to draw upon. Of course, what is written down is not necessarily the same thing as what happened on screen. There are many ways in which the live broadcast may differ from that which was planned in writing: actors and technicians may make mistakes, or a particular performance may differ in its emphasis, or quality, in ways that would be impossible to discern from the script alone. The absence of the epistemological guarantee of the audio-visual record *is* a limitation for any historical analysis that seeks to understand visual aesthetics and style. This absence is explained by a number of factors.

In the UK, by 1947 it was technically possible to record television on film so, theoretically, there should be a complete record of programmes from here onwards. Instead, for the pre-1955 period, we have two episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment*, the 1953 televising of the Coronation, an adaptation of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, a selection of children’s programmes from the early 1950s, and some sporting events (Test Match cricket, some football). Michael Barry noted that the fiftieth anniversary celebration of television that the BBC embarked on in November 1986 ‘revealed the lamentable poverty of a pictorial record of what is essentially a visual means of communication.’<sup>22</sup> There are three primary reasons for this, the limit of aesthetic horizons; copyright controls on recording material; talent unions’ agreements with the BBC.<sup>23</sup>

A year after telerecording (recording television images on 16mm or 35mm film) was introduced in the BBC, an article in *BBC Quarterly* explored its potential.<sup>24</sup> It noted that the recording of ‘important outside broadcasts of historic or sporting interest’ (the Olympic games, the Cenotaph Ceremony, the Royal Wedding, etc.) was valuable in itself both for the BBC archives and for sale abroad. Recording was also seen to address the needs of an expanding national audience:

21 See e.g. William Boddy, *Fifties Television* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1990); William Urrichio (guest editor), *Historical Journal of Film Radio and Television*: special issue, *The History of German Television, 1935–1944*, 10/2 (1990), which includes Knut Hackethler’s essay ‘The Television Play in the Third Reich’; Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff, *A Social History of Broadcasting*, i. 1922–1939 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain: Studies in Cultural History* (London: British Film Institute, 1991).

22 Barry, *From the Palace to the Grove*, p. xii. For details of the anniversary programming, see *Radio Times* 1 Nov. 1986.

23 See also Steve Bryant, *The Television Heritage* (London: British Film Institute, 1989).

24 H. W. Baker and W. D. Kemp, ‘The Recording of Television Programmes’, *BBC Quarterly*, 4/4 (1949–50), 236–50.

It is inevitable that the majority of important outside broadcasts take place during the day, with the result that the direct television broadcast is often missed by members of the family who are at work or at school. It is therefore very desirable to make a record of the event as televised . . . Little or no editing of the recording is required, since this has in effect been done at the time of the broadcast by the television producer.<sup>25</sup>

The existing Television Newsreel reports of such events were seen to be wasteful, taking on average twelve hours to add commentary and sound, compared to some four or five hours of processing of telerecorded film where editing and sound was already recorded. Telerecording would also allow technicians and producers for the first time to see the result of their electronic processing of the event, and it could be used for training purposes. The authors note that tele-recording would be invaluable for drama productions, particularly when studio space and rehearsal time was very limited:

Two studios are available at Alexandra Palace, which allows one day only for the camera rehearsal and transmission of each production, assuming that there are only two programmes a day. Any easement of the studio load that could be obtained by making a television recording of the original production, and would result in more camera rehearsal time being available for following productions, would be most welcome.<sup>26</sup>

Television programmes were not perceived as valuable in themselves, though some were thought to be worth preserving as historical records of national events (which had a resale value abroad). A television play was not recorded because it was seen as worthy of recall or archival storage, but because the process would free up studio space and time, or facilitate repeats without the costs of a live representation, and this practice did not become widespread until the start of ITV in 1955. Even when the recording of programmes was seen as a positive necessity this did not invalidate the conceptual and aesthetic horizons within which television was perceived: as strictly ephemeral. The dominance of such a standpoint can be seen (or, rather, it cannot) in the way videotaped material from the 1960s was routinely wiped by the BBC and ITV television companies, partly in order to re-use tapes and to save space, but crucially because tapes and space were more *valuable* than the preservation of *television* programmes. As a result, if television plays were telerecorded before 1955, very few were archived.

Copyright restrictions meant there was always a problem even when recording television on film was not a possibility: the BBC had

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 236.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 237.

to get permission to produce its own live production of the theatre play *Clive of India* in 1938, because it had been filmed by 20th Century Fox four years earlier. When a large studio production of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* was filmed with non-synchronized 'lines and all' in 1939 (the only attempt to do this) Alexander Korda who owned the rights ordered the recording to be burned, with the bonfire itself filmed as evidence. The BBC could get the stage rights for a television transmission—a one-off performance (this is television—transient—see it now or never)—but not the mechanical (recorded, stable, retrievable) rights.

For example, Royston Morley produced a studio version of *The Petrified Forest* in 1951, but Warner Brothers Picture Company had acquired the film and television rights to Robert E. Sherwood's stage play in 1935 for fifteen years, with first refusal on the television rights at the end of that period (the film was released in 1936). Morley assumed that the production could be telerecorded (he was Head of Staff Training at this point and an example of a studio play would have been valuable training material for new drama producers), but Warner were insistent that no recording should be made.<sup>27</sup>

One solution to the copyright problem was to commission original plays for television. The setting up of a script unit in early 1950, and the hiring of Nigel Kneale and Philip Mackie as staff scriptwriters, can be seen as an attempt to generate fresh drama, and drama which could be recorded and owned by the BBC. This would not have been an issue before telerecording when television programmes simply could not be thought of as *material* commodities. As John Caughie notes,

What recording did was to lift television out of ephemerality and give it a commodity form. The shift from direct transmission to recording turned television from use value to exchange value, re-forming even public service television as not only a cultural good but also a tradable good. Previously there had been some exchange of films of important events, but now what was conceived as cultural production entered the market place as commodity.<sup>28</sup>

In December 1952 the Television Transcription Unit was formed, its aim to 'distribute abroad films made by the BBC TV Service and telerecordings of BBC TV plays.'<sup>29</sup> Around the same time, Hugh Carleton Greene, later Director-General of the BBC (1960–9), wrote an article for the *BBC Quarterly* called, 'Television Transcriptions: The Economic Possibilities'. He defines 'transcription' as 'either a recording on film of a live television programme or a film specially

<sup>27</sup> See memo R. G. Walford to Royston Morley, 15 May 1951, BBC Written Archives Centre (WAC) Programme File T5/391.

<sup>28</sup> Caughie, 'Before the Golden Age', 39.

<sup>29</sup> *BBC Handbook* (1958).

produced, whether with ordinary film cameras or by electronic methods, for showing on television.<sup>30</sup> He makes the further distinction between telerecordings (recording a live television programme on film—called ‘kinescopes’ in the US) and television films (films specially made for television). It is a prophetic article, which notes that the expansion of television services internationally meant that there was a growing market for ready-made television packages. For the year ending 31 March 1956 the BBC had exported over 200 telerecordings and films to the Canadian Broadcasting Company and the Australian Film Commission. A year later this had risen to 550 (300 films, 200 telerecordings). By the next year (end March 1958) the proportions had changed somewhat with the sale of 200 films and 500 telerecordings, the vast majority of them drama serials. Despite the Transcription Unit’s formation in 1952, there is little evidence to suggest that much was transcribed before 1955. The significance of increased telerecording was that it undermined one of the central planks of the television’s ‘immediacy’ aesthetic: the simultaneous address of the actor to audience, the live relationship between drama production and reception in the home. With the use of ‘canned’ material, what was there to separate television from film?

The question of actors’ and musicians’ fees meant that there was also a certain resistance to using filmed material to replace live repeat performances. Although an actor’s repeat fees for the second live performance was slightly lower than for the first, the prospect of the BBC being able to produce only one performance of a show or play and film it for repeat showing, clearly meant a dire loss of revenue, unless an agreement could be reached over filmed repeat fees.

Equity later agreed with the BBC that telerecordings could be made of programmes, but only of the repeat performance. Actors and musicians’ repeat fees were guaranteed. Furthermore, the pre-1955 agreement stipulated that any telerecording made could only be viewed privately. The BBC’s production of Marcelle Maurette’s play *Anastasia* in 1953 provides a good example of the way the rules operated in this period. The play lasted nearly two hours, and won the Daily Mail ‘Best TV Play of the Year’ award for 1953–4. A telerecording of the programme was made, and sold to the Canadian Broadcasting Company. Eric von Stroheim wanted to view it but under the Equity agreement he could only do so in private, in a BBC building. In 1955 20th Century Fox acquired the mechanical rights (and subsequently made the 1956 film version) and the BBC’s *Anastasia* had to be destroyed.<sup>31</sup>

30 Hugh Carleton Greene, ‘Television Transcription: The Economic Possibilities’, *BBC Quarterly*, 7/4, (1952–3), 216.

31 *Anastasia*, BBC WAC T5/15.

Given this absence of primary material, the study of this period, particularly a study which endeavours to explore aesthetic and stylistic qualities of drama production, needs to reformulate traditional notions of textual analysis. These are texts that do not exist in their original audio-visual form but exist instead as shadows, dispersed and refracted amongst buried files, bad memories, a flotsam of fragments. For the BBC, the resting-place for such remains is the BBC Written Archives Centre, where the historian can find scripts, studio plans, policy memos, committee minutes, and so on. My intention is the reconstitution or reconstruction, using this written material, of 'ghost texts' (or ghost-television dramas), in order to approximate the visual constitution of early television drama.

I see the period 1936–55 as 'early television'. There are compelling reasons to isolate this period, with due regard for the continuities of programming and form and institution that followed. First, in Britain, the pre-1955 fact of a *single* television channel. This means that a non-competitive (or non-complementary) schedule was designed, and that 'keeping the audience's interest' had a slightly different inflection from post-1955 considerations. Secondly, the pre-1955 technological basis of television production and transmission was the *live broadcast*. True, this continued well into the 1970s, but I am thinking here of the manner in which television was *conceived* aesthetically and technologically, and the way that television after 1955 was no longer—technologically and in practice—necessarily or essentially 'live-only'. The possibility of scheduling based on pre-recorded 'canned' programmes was considered in Britain as far back as 1949, but as a practice and a competing conceptual standpoint this had no significant currency before 1955. Furthermore, as I have already indicated, the recoverable period of television history in terms of audio-visual archive material dates, with a handful of notable exceptions, from 1955.<sup>32</sup> The National Film and Television Archive's catalogue, shows that the majority of pre-1955 surviving television is US television (usually serials filmed for television).<sup>33</sup>

32 These are telerecordings of the 1953 television coverage of the Coronation, some children's programmes, the first two episodes of *The Quatermass Experiment* (BBC, 1953), some sporting events, and the only example of the single television play before 1955, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Dec. 1954).

33 For a list of copies held at the National Film and Television Archive (these are not necessarily available for viewing), see Simon Baker and Olwen Terris (eds.), *A For Andromeda to Zoo Time: The TV Holdings of the National Film and Television Archive* (London: British Film Institute, 1994). See also, Dan Einstein *et al.*, 'Source Guide to Family Comedy, Drama, and Serial Drama, 1946–1970', in Lynn Spigel and Denise Mann (eds.), *Private Screenings: Television and the Female Consumer* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1992)—this listing, and the Museum of Radio and Television (New York) catalogue of holdings, suggests that a continuous audio-visual record for US television begins around 1948–9, coinciding with the development of kinescope recording of television on film.

There is also a continuity between pre- and post-war television, as John Caughie explains:

television in the immediate post-war years was still driven by the enthusiasm of the amateur inherited from the pre-war pioneers. The whole discourse of production, the celebration of disaster, the informal working relations, the try-outs, carried something of the 'wizard prang' about it, an extension of church-hall dramatics. In many ways, this period parallels the experimentalism and lack of standardization characteristic of 'primitive cinema' as described by Bordwell and Burch. The significance of the 50s with the arrival of competition and the technology of recording, was to install professionalism in the place of the enthusiastic amateur . . .<sup>34</sup>

What is also apparent from producer's memos, studio plans and later retrospectives is the extent of *aesthetic appetite* within a culture of *professional excellence* during the pre-war and immediate post-war years. The reliance on anecdotal material, such as that found in Denis Norden's *Coming to You Live!* which stresses the accidents, the fluffs, the unusual and entertaining, should not be confused with the actual, if less dramatic, history of regular drama production within strictly managed parameters.

The pre-1955 period also has a unity in terms of the development of television drama's *aesthetics, technology, and style*.

Aesthetics refers to the historical characterization of television's essential qualities, by those chiefly involved in the production process. The aesthetics of early drama production are inseparable from its technology. As John Caughie argues,

the adaptation of theatre was not simply a question of reworking scripts, but rather of capturing on television something of the nature of theatrical performance. The absence of expressive *mise en scene* and editing—the absence, in other words, of 'style'—which comes to be confused with 'boring naturalism', was not simply a limitation borne out of technological constraint or imaginative failure; it was rather the logical aesthetic of a technology whose essence was conceived in term of immediacy, relay and the 'live'.<sup>35</sup>

In my discussion of technology I want to signal the importance of the technical developments which have influenced, in various ways, the nature and production of aesthetic discourses, and the stylistic features of television drama. Central to this aspect of the book is the

<sup>34</sup> Caughie, 'Before the Golden Age', 40.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 32.

status of a media service characterized by *live* production and the tension between this dominant characteristic and the availability of various recording technologies.

Bordwell and Thompson situate style within an overall context of form:

Every film develops specific techniques in patterned ways. This unified, developed, and significant use of particular technical choices we shall call *style*.<sup>36</sup>

Considering aesthetics, technology and style is a first step in identifying and exploring the development of specific textual patterns of television drama production. For example it is possible to extrapolate from early cinema history aspects of technical and stylistic change that have been seen to be indicative of its modernization. Noel Burch's definition of the 'primitive mode of representation' (PMR) is partly based on shot scale and the absence of an editing process:

The formal characteristics of Burch's 'primitive mode of representation' in their most abstract manifestations can . . . be briefly summarised: single shot scene, tableau composition, frontal staging; no scene dissection . . .<sup>37</sup>

Scene dissection is Barry Salt's useful term for cutting within a given space, rather than between different spaces.<sup>38</sup> Early television's 'photographed stage play' might at first seem to share certain characteristics with Burch's PMR, particularly in terms of the expected 'reverence' for the unity of the theatrical scene. Was the respect for theatre and the continuity of performance expressed by a refusal to change shots during the acting out of a theatrical 'scene'? How far did the 'dissection' of each scene in fact occur? This would be one way of estimating stylistic change during the early period. This is not to argue that a faster, more 'cinematic' cutting rate is necessarily equivalent to maturity or development. Thomas Elsaesser is cogent on this point as it applies to early cinema:

'Simultaneous playing areas' and 'editing within the frame' are features of early cinema that have increasingly become the object of attention. First, because they refer to and reformulate the

<sup>36</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 4th edn. (New York: McGraw-Hill Inc.: 1993), 144.

<sup>37</sup> Thomas Elsaesser, 'Introduction' in Elsaesser (ed.), *Early Cinema: space, frame, narrative* (London: BFI, 1990), 24.

<sup>38</sup> Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (London: Starword, 1983), 49–51.

oldest (and usually pejorative) distinction made between primitive and classical cinema: the charge that early films were 'theatrical'. . . . But . . . the formal features of early cinema cannot be equated with its presumed debts to the theatre. Second, tableau scenes and other forms of elaborate staging are not necessarily the sign of 'primitive' or 'retarded' practice. Rather, they are specific choices or strategies, available as alternatives to editing.<sup>39</sup>

As we shall see, one alternative to editing for live television drama was to use a continuous take with reframing to follow each actor's movements and to emphasize aspects of the performance. After all, it is the *static* nature of the photographed stage play which is attacked by Gardner and Wyver, and the mobility of the cameras for Newman's productions is one of the stylistic ways in which early drama is assumed to be separated from the more 'mature' styles of the late 1950s and the 'golden age' of the 1960s. As I will demonstrate, this kind of spatial mobility—achieved either by switching between studio cameras ('editing'), or by camera movement—was a characteristic of the earliest drama productions as well.

One concrete piece of evidence for this—like a mosquito preserved in fossilized amber—is an audio-visual fragment of television drama from the 1930s, a US television adaptation of Dion Boucicault's Victorian melodrama, *The Streets of New York* broadcast from a small studio on 31 August 1939. It was filmed off an early television tube using an experimental camera and is available for viewing at the Museum of Radio and Television in New York. Sadly, only six minutes of fragments remain, and there is no soundtrack. Initially, the fragments ooze precisely the kind of theatricality that Gardner and Wyver criticize: curtains, captions, an intermission, the respectful relay of a three-walled stage and some overblown acting. Yet a cursory glance shows that this is also a highly segmented presentation of that performance: three cameras cover the play, and there is often some very rapid cutting between close-up and medium shots, dialogue and reaction shots. There is also camera mobility—pans to follow characters across the stage, a track-in during a speech. Yes, this is a theatrical performance, but one mediated by a new means: live multi-camera studio television. We are given a *selection* of viewpoints, few of which could be equivalent to the position of a theatrical spectator.

In order to understand how the BBC television developed its own range of approaches to solving the problem of how to 'do' television drama it is necessary to situate the service within its institutional and technological context.

39 Elsaesser, *Early Cinema*, 13.

**A Guide to the  
Institutional and  
Technological  
History of British  
Television<sup>40</sup>**

On 2 November 1936 the first<sup>41</sup> BBC Television Service began regular, scheduled programme transmissions from Alexandra Palace, a dilapidated Victorian dance hall: by 1955 it had acquired seven more studios and was facing competition from two commercial television companies.<sup>42</sup> The history of television is therefore one of expansion and conflict.

The early and formative history of television is bound up with the history of radio. The process by which radio manufacturers developed national broadcasting networks and monopolies that replaced local and amateur broadcasting communities is well documented.<sup>43</sup> The transition from fragmented, local, home-made programming and equipment to national regulated systems of broadcasting allowed a rationalization of both product and audience. Television, as a broadcasting technology perceived by many as ‘radio with pictures’ was eventually developed and integrated within existing broadcasting institutions and industries (although it is important to note that television’s developmental possibilities were not yet restricted to broadcasting to the domestic sphere).<sup>44</sup>

The formation of the British Broadcasting Company in 1922 marks the beginning of institutional broadcasting in Britain. From this point the development of radio schedules, programmes, ideology, and address had a direct bearing on the first television service. To a certain extent, the logic of programme length, selection, theme, genre, and address are ‘pre-loaded’ for television by the BBC’s sound broadcasting rationale and tradition, one forged within particular circumstances of the 1920s.

If the institutional history of television begins with radio, the history of television in Britain begins with BBC radio, and the ideology of public service broadcasting first espoused by its first Director-General, John Reith:

<sup>40</sup> This section is intended to be a very selective guide to broad aspects of British television history as it pertains to the development of early television drama. For more detail and coverage see Andrew Crisell, *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> In fact the BBC had regular, if experimental, television broadcasts from Broadcasting House between 1932 and 1935, using Baird’s 30-line system.

<sup>42</sup> The Television Act, legislating for a commercial television channel, was passed on 30 July 1954. The first two commercial television companies awarded franchises to broadcast by the Independent Television Authority were Associated-Rediffusion and ATV who began transmission in September 1955.

<sup>43</sup> See William Boddy, ‘Archaeologies of Electronic Vision and the Gendered Spectator’, *Screen* 35/2 (1994), Eric Barnouw, *Tube of Plenty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), chapters 1–2; Briggs, *The Birth of Broadcasting*.

<sup>44</sup> See Ed Buscombe, ‘Thinking it Differently: Television and the Film Industry’, *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9/3 (Summer 1984), 196–203. For the history of the Scophony company which attempted to develop large screen public television in Britain during the 1930s, see, T. Singleton, *The Story of Scophony* (London: Royal Television Society, 1988).

His message for the infant medium of sound broadcasting was that it had to be as morally sound as a church bell. He wanted it to take the high cultural road and educate popular taste rather than merely pander to the lowest common denominator. There was thus a heavy stress on the best that had been thought, written, known and heard. Reith's book of prophecies, *Broadcast Over Britain* (1924), was a mixture of the theocratic ramblings of a Carlyle with the cultural poise of an Arnold.<sup>45</sup>

This squares somewhat uneasily with the BBC television's transmission of John Snuggs, the troubadour, 'demonstrating paper tearing with his partner accordionist' in December 1936: the 'vulgar visuality' of television was to trouble the moral unity of the BBC's self-definition.<sup>46</sup>

The Selsdon Committee was appointed by the Government in 1934 to consider the development of television and advise the Postmaster-General on the relative merit of competing systems of television transmission. Despite his reservations about television, Reith himself agreed when giving evidence to the Committee that, 'The relationship between sight and sound broadcasting is absolutely indissoluble.'<sup>47</sup>

The Committee reported in 1935, and gave the BBC responsibility for the production of television programmes using two television systems which would alternate weekly (Baird's mechanical system, and EMI-Marconi's electronic cathode-ray tube system). By 11 November 1936 the BBC Television Service began regular broadcasts across London (they had been broadcasting to the manufacturer's exhibition, RadiOlympia, during the summer), albeit only two hour's worth of programmes a day, between 3.00 and 4.00 p.m. and between 9.00 and 10.00 p.m.

The recommendation that rival television systems be used alternately until one or other proved compatible with the requirements of the new service at Alexandra Palace immediately prevented any standardization in terms of production practices. Baird's obsolete and cumbersome mechanical system was axed in February 1937, and the television service continued to broadcast until the beginning of the Second World War using the EMI-Marconi system.

The BBC Television Service at Alexandra Palace was both physically isolated from Broadcasting House, and organizationally isolated. Like the radio Empire Service, it was treated as a parallel service rather than an integrated one, and executive control was located with the

<sup>45</sup> Roger Sales, 'An Introduction to Broadcasting History', in David Punter (ed.), *Introduction to Contemporary Cultural Studies* (London: Longmans, 1986), 48.

<sup>46</sup> Part of an early series of 10-minute skits called 'London Characters', *Radio Times* 11 Dec. 1936 (Television Edition).

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Briggs, *The Golden Age of Wireless*, 585.

sound broadcasters. Hence the first Director of Television was responsible to the Controller of (all) Programmes, Cecil Graves, and throughout the late 1930s there was increasing frustration that BBC management refused to recognize the 'special needs' of television, and instead regarded it as a luxury or novelty service.<sup>48</sup> The service also proved to be far more expensive than was foreseen, so much so that, in March 1939, sponsored programmes were seriously considered as the only solution to the financial crisis. The Treasury was unwilling to release more cash, and both the Postmaster-General and the Television Advisory Committee wanted sponsored television so that the service could develop. As Asa Briggs argues, 'Had there been no war in 1939, it is conceivable that commercial television would have come to Britain fifteen years before it did.'<sup>49</sup>

What might have been a significant restructuring of the BBC's ideology was averted by the closedown of the Television Service in September 1939 on the eve of the war. The Hankey Report, published in March 1945, suggested the restoration of the pre-war television model rather than a revision of it. The example of the failure, in America, of sponsored commercial networks to develop television successfully, convinced the committee that the BBC should be entrusted with providing a public service television system at least for the immediate future.<sup>50</sup>

The Service was restored in 1946 as part of a changed BBC, one that had won considerable public and political kudos for its wartime broadcasting. One element of continuity remained: the isolation and implicit denigration of the restored Television Service by the rest of the Sound broadcasters. The BBC may have won the 'war of words', but it had yet to recognize the potential of sound *and* vision. During the late 1930s and the immediate post-war years, television was perceived by the BBC as something of a 'Cinderella' service, lacking the aesthetic kudos that German television producers had fostered before the war, or the publicity engendered by the competition between NBC and CBS systems in the US.<sup>51</sup> In a survey of BBC Sound personnel conducted in 1947, the majority of respondents considered the Television Service too similar to the Light Programme.<sup>52</sup> Television was also seen, correctly, as a luxury toy, which *ipso facto* prevented the

48 See Briggs, *The Golden Age of Wireless*, 570 and 602–3.

49 Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 181.

50 Although the Hankey Report did not question the logic of the Postmaster-General's suggestion that television frequencies could, in principle, be leased to any organization including cinema. Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 180.

51 See Knut Hackethler, 'The Television Play in the Third Reich', *Historical Journal of Film, Television and Radio*, 10/3 (1990).

52 Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 214.

wide democratic coverage that the principles of public service broadcasting demanded.

The continuing denial of organizational parity with Sound broadcasting can be seen as a consequence of this attitude, which lasted until well into the 1950s. As John Caughie notes:

Director-General Haley's cultural mission to use broadcasting as an institution of national improvement seems always to have had a slightly edgy relationship with television, preferring the known territory of radio to the *terra incognita* of television with its slightly heady entertainment potential. Asa Briggs points out that 'key figures in the BBC itself were more interested in 1946 in the starting of the Third Programme than in the resumption of television'<sup>53</sup>

Maurice Gorham was appointed Head of the Television Service in 1946 and he pressed for the expansion of the Service for the next 18 months. He resigned in 1947 in response to Haley's reorganization of the BBC which left the Television Service integrated as only one of six divisions within 'Home Output'. This meant that television still had no representation on the BBC Board of Management. He was replaced by Norman Collins who was also a television enthusiast. Financial conditions began to improve, and in June 1947, two years after Hankey's recommendations, plans for a new transmitter serving the Midlands area were announced. With his Programme Director, Cecil McGivern, Collins was able to carry out a rational restructuring of the television output into four 'Programme Groups': drama; light entertainment; talks and talk features; outside broadcasts and films. Using the threat that US television expansion was already ahead of British developments, Collins was further able to convince BBC management that the Service required new studios and equipment to maintain its prestige, so that by August 1948 BBC Governors approved an expansion programme for television. In March 1949 the BBC acquired a 13.5-acre site at the White City Exhibition where Television Centre was planned to open by 1960. In the meantime, the Rank Film Studios at Lime Grove were bought in November 1949 and the process of converting its five studios began.

This expansion needs to be contrasted with the relative political insignificance of television in the late 1940s. The Beveridge Committee, set up in 1949 to investigate the BBC monopoly, devoted only eighteen out of 325 pages of its 1951 Report to television, perceiving it as still in the experimental stage.<sup>54</sup> The publication of the Beveridge Report is significant chiefly for the Minority Report that it engendered, Selwyn Lloyd dissenting from the rest of the Committee by

<sup>53</sup> Caughie, 'Before the Golden Age', 26.

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of the Beveridge Report (1951) see Sales, 'An Introduction to Broadcasting History', 54–6.

arguing for the establishment of a commercial television network. Undoubtedly this threat to the BBC broadcasting monopoly via television raised the profile of television within the BBC.<sup>55</sup>

The rapidly increasing television audience also had an impact on the expansion of television in the early 1950s. The BBC consistently underestimated the growth of combined sound and television licences: its estimate for 1955 was 2 million, and the actual figure 4.5 million.<sup>56</sup> The televising of the 1953 Coronation is the best-known measure of television's increased visibility as a *national broadcasting* medium.

The debates leading up to the Television Act, legislating for commercial television and passed in July 1954, mark the point where political and institutional discussion of broadcasting refocuses on television over radio as the key medium.

The technological history of television has been dealt with exhaustively elsewhere, and the following is a brief sketch necessary for an understanding of the rest of the book.<sup>57</sup>

During the 1920s and 1930s television's status as a viable apparatus and the nature of its application were in continual debate. Here television, rather than what was broadcast, is the novelty, an attraction in itself. Television in the 1930s was necessarily live and ephemeral. It had a distinctive ability as a medium that could relay pictures over space but maintain a co-temporality between event and spectator. Hence the recording of programmes themselves was not seen as a priority. Given this conceptual and aesthetic orientation, recording a television programme would have seemed as pointless as recording a telephone conversation. Filmed material could be transmitted electronically through television, using a telecine machine. This process could be used to provide inserts, usually stock scenes (battle, landscapes, rain, fog, etc.) which were used within the live studio transmission. Feature films could also be transmitted on television,

55 For a thorough description of the genesis of commercial television in Britain see, H. H. Wilson, *Pressure Group* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1961), Peter Black, *The Mirror in the Corner* (London: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd, 1972), Bernard Sendall, *Independent Television in Britain*, i. *Origin and Foundation, 1946–62*, (London: Macmillan, 1982).

56 Quoted in Briggs, *Sound and Vision*, 241.

57 See: Albert Abramson, *The History of Television, 1880 to 1941* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1987); Briggs, *The Golden Age of Wireless*, 520–4; R. W. Burns, *British Television: The Formative Years* (London: Peregrius Press, 1986); Raymond Fielding (ed.), *A Technological History of Motion Pictures and Television* (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California, 1967); N. Goldstein, *The History of Television* (New York: Portland House, 1990); D. W. Kreuter, *British Radio and Television Pioneers: A Patent Bibliography* (London: Scarecrow Press, 1993); George Shiers (ed.), *Technical Development of Television* (New York: Arno Press, 1977); Brian Winston, *Misunderstanding Media* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

although film companies were reluctant to supply them.<sup>58</sup> During the pre-war and immediate post-war years the Television Service had little money to produce its own filmed material, let alone its own filmed dramas. In January 1948 the BBC begins to produce its own films regularly, in the form of the *BBC Television Newsreel* (BBC, 1948–54). Filming inserts for live drama and light entertainment (rather than using stock library film) was rare until the early 1950s.

The BBC *did* produce several ‘Demonstration films’ advertising its television service: *Television Comes to London* (1936)<sup>59</sup> and the *TV Demonstration Film* (1937) were broadcast in the morning during the pre-war years so that retailers would have something to show prospective buyers during the day (this was also a factor in the afternoon schedule where large drama productions would take place between 3 and 4 p.m.). Both films contain illustrative material, which attempted to re-create for the film camera something of the flavour of television for prospective buyers of sets.

Given the scarcity of studio space and rehearsal time at Alexandra Palace during the 1930s, the filming of programmes, had it been technically possible, would seem to offer an immediate solution: canned programmes would free-up both studio time and space, and allow producers to assess their own work. This did not happen until after the war. Instead, the impetus to record the television signal on film came from the US Navy and Air Force.<sup>60</sup> Not until 1947 was a means devised to record television pictures on film which minimized synchronization problems.<sup>61</sup> The result was called a *kinescope* or, in the UK, a telerecording.

Recording on film had huge advantages. Television programmes no longer had to be live one-off transmissions disappearing into the ether. Theoretically, the day’s viewing could be recorded weeks before it was transmitted. Recording on film in the US was particularly useful as the differing state time zones meant that television programmes produced in New York and Hollywood could be filmed and sent (or ‘bicycled’) to distant syndicated stations. As Brian Winston notes:

Without a national system of coaxial cables, programmes had to be . . . ‘bicycled’ to stations outside the . . . network. As the net was built, another problem arose—time differences between the two coasts. This led to the era of ‘hot’ or ‘quick’ *kines*, requiring

58 For more detail see, Edward Buscombe, ‘All Bark and No Bite: The Film Industry’s Response to Television’, in Corner, *Popular Television*, 197–207.

59 Its post-war successor was *Television is Here Again* (1946).

60 Albert Abramson, ‘A Short History of Television Recording’, in Fielding, *A Technological History of Motion Pictures and Television*, 251. Abramson provides an excellent technical history of the development of television recording technologies in the US and Britain.

61 See Abramson, ‘Short History of Television Recording’, 252.

that the telerecording be produced in under three hours to enable the other coast to see it, via coaxial cable, at the same point in the evening schedule. The growing industry insisted on a national audience; it promised the delivery of no less to its sponsors and advertisers.<sup>62</sup>

One of the reasons a far greater proportion of American television from the late 1940s and 1950s has survived when compared to Britain is precisely the institutional and commercial necessity of networking a national schedule over different time zones.

The ability to record a television signal *electronically* rather than photographically was demonstrated in 1951 in the US, when the Electronic Division of Bing Crosby Enterprises developed a black and white video recorder. Recording electronically had huge advantages over recording on film. The optical and photographic developing losses of film recording were eliminated; as videotape recorded electronic signals rather than visible images, there were no optical distortions at all. It could be replayed instantly; and it could also be recorded over and used again.

The BBC did not use videotape until 1958.<sup>63</sup> At first, the recordings were of complete programmes, without edits: the recordings were, like the telerecordings, of entire live performances, film inserts and all. Methods of editing videotape were at first unavailable and then cost too much to implement (cutting a tape made it unusable; an uncut tape could be wiped and used again).<sup>64</sup> Videotape was a cheaper alternative to telerecording programmes, a way of taking television out of the control of the schedule, allowing programmes to be made and stockpiled, before transmission. The 'videotape age' reformulates the aesthetics of drama and the organization of production in various ways, but even so, segments of drama lasting up to thirty minutes continued to be recorded on videotape in continuous time 'as if live' until the introduction of time-coded signals on the tape in the mid-1970s, which allowed faster and more accurate post-production editing.<sup>65</sup> In this way some of the style and aesthetics of early pre-1955 television had considerable longevity in the modern period of television.

62 Brian Winston, *Misunderstanding Media* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 88.

63 They initially used an experimental prototype, VERA (Vision Electronic Recording Apparatus) where the tape itself was very quickly passed over a static pickup head. The Ampex Corporation in the US had already set an industry standard (using a spinning head) by 1956, and the BBC subsequently adopted this. See Winston, *Misunderstanding Media*, 90.

64 The post-1955 history of videotape editing offers a fascinating insight into gradual decline of the 'live and continuous' aesthetic which had so far dominated television production. Future research in this area is essential for an understanding of television drama's alternation between 'live' and pre-recorded styles.

65 Barry Salt describes this development, *Film Style and Technology*, 282–3.