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Visual Style in the "Golden Age" Anthology Drama: The Case of CBS
Les séries anthologiques durant l'âge d'or de la télévision américaine : le style visuel de la CBS

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Article abstract

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ABSTRACT

Despite the centrality of a "Golden Age" of live anthology drama to most histories of American television, the aesthetics of this format are widely misunderstood. The anthology drama has been assumed by scholars to be consonant with a critical discourse that valued realism, intimacy and an unremarkable, self-effacing, functional style—or perhaps even an "anti-style." A close analysis of non-canonical episodes of anthology drama, however, reveals a distinctive style based on long takes, mobile framing and staging in depth. One variation of this style, associated with the CBS network, flaunted a virtuosic use of ensemble staging, moving camera and attention-grabbing pictorial effects. The author examines several episodes in detail, demonstrating how the techniques associated with the CBS style can serve expressive and decorative functions. The sources of this style include the technological limitations of live-television production, networks' broader aesthetic goals, the seminal producer Worthington Miner and contemporaneous American cinematic styles.

This article seeks to describe and explain a certain stylistic tendency of anthology drama, a format of American live television of the 1940s and 1950s synonymous in popular and many scholarly accounts with a so-called "Golden Age."[2] I will call this tendency the "CBS style," because it was—to a great extent—fostered and refined by producers, directors and technicians at that network. CBS anthology series shared with those on other networks a visual style built upon camera movement, long takes and staging in depth, but many episodes of *Studio One* (1948-1958), *Danger* (1950-1955), *Climax!* (1954-1958) and other CBS shows exhibited a variation on this period style, one characterized by stylistic bravura, heightened visual expressivity and

even a strain of formalism.[3] In addition to characterizing the CBS style, I will offer some hypotheses concerning its origins in the aesthetic goals of network managers and producers, in the contingencies of live television production and in contemporaneous cinematic style. To make these arguments, I will rely on close analysis of several episodes of anthology drama originally broadcast on NBC and CBS along with articles from period popular and industry publications and published interviews with producers and directors of anthology drama.

In describing postwar American anthology drama as having a distinctive style, even a sophisticated and occasionally flashy one, I am challenging some conventional scholarly wisdom of long standing. In studies spanning several decades, television scholars have described the "Golden Age" style as austere, self-effacing, functional—or as no style at all (e.g. Hey 1983, Barnouw 1990, Boddy 1993, Caldwell 1995). In such studies, anthology drama style is said—or assumed—to be consonant with a critical discourse of the 1940s and 1950s that valued intimacy, realism and story over technique. As evidence, many scholars of television history, who otherwise hold very different attitudes towards the cultural functions and value of the live anthology drama, have offered the example of *Marty* (NBC, *Television Playhouse* [1948-1957], 24 May 1953).[4] As I will demonstrate below, *Marty* may be somewhat typical of one strain of live anthology drama, but *not* of the format in its entirety. Simply put, few if any scholars have made any systematic attempt to venture beyond a half-dozen canonical episodes to ascertain the character, stylistic or otherwise, of "Golden Age" drama. Thus, to make a claim about the CBS style, I am necessarily making claims about "Golden Age" anthology drama style in general: that it is distinctive, boasts conventions and variations, and is worthy of our attention.

Of course, one reason television historians have generally avoided testing or challenging conventional wisdom about anthology drama style is that until fairly recently, television studies have not emphasized questions of form and style. As Sarah Cardwell (2006, p. 75) has described, the past decade has seen a change, and "developing a more comprehensive and astute awareness of television programmes' aesthetic qualities"

has become a priority for many scholars. I seek in this paper to contribute to this "aesthetic turn" in television studies, which so far has largely avoided the subject of the anthology drama. I believe that it is important for those interested in the aesthetics of American television to turn their attention to the live drama of the 1950s. It is not simply that these shows are novel objects of close analysis. As an early instance not just of "quality" television drama but of television as a mass art, "Golden Age" anthology drama is at or near the foundation of television's representational and formal conventions.[5]

The Question of Style in the "Golden Age" Drama

I noted that television scholars have provided an inadequate or inaccurate account of style in the American anthology drama. This historiographic problem dates to the mid-1950s, and emerged just as live anthology drama series were giving way on network schedules to serialized, genre-based series. Television critics, and not a few television producers, felt betrayed by this shift away from the supposed seriousness and artistic aspirations of live drama. As William Boddy (1993, p. 76) has explained, anthology drama was an important term in a series of mutually reinforcing dichotomies: anthology format/serial format, live/canned, New York theatre/Hollywood cinema, realism/spectacle, character/plot and independence/subservience of the "playwright"/screenwriter. The concept of a "Golden Age" thus registered a dismay at the direction television appeared to be headed, and an instant nostalgia for what it was leaving behind. Underpinning this canonization of the live anthology drama was a view of television that saw the medium as distinct from film by virtue of its capacity for live broadcast. The television set's presence in the home was also thought to demand intimacy, modesty and realism as dramatic and stylistic values. This best-practice discourse was echoed by the first generations of postwar television historians, who were typically among those who lamented the anthology drama's decline. Erik Barnouw (1990, pp. 160-61) is a good example. He trumpeted live television's ability to provide "a sense of the rediscovery of reality" and valorized a dramaturgy of intimacy: "compact" and "psychological"

stories of ordinary lives. Such stories, according to Barnouw and others, were best placed in modest sets and relayed by a simple, unobtrusive camera style. As noted, the exemplary episode was *Marty*. The anecdotal quality of Paddy Chayefsky's teleplay and the subdued pathos of its characterizations were understood to find their stylistic match in the episode's limpid style: static long takes that preserved a sense of real time, sparse decor, unfussy staging. Barnouw's writing leaves the impression that the anthology drama was a vehicle for social criticism and comment, but *not* a format distinguished by stylistic experimentation (Barnouw 1990, pp. 160-65).

Later historians drew attention to the ideologically prescribed "ordinariness" of the realist approach as symptomatic of television's Cold War conservatism (e.g. Hey 1983) and challenged the consensus view of a "Golden Age," labelling them part of an "ideology of liveness" (Feuer 1983) fraught with poorly argued essentialist claims that served primarily to support the networks' pleas for television's cultural legitimacy—which in turn were intended to appease regulators and deflect criticism of anti-competitive corporate practices (e.g. Boddy 1986 and 1993). Focusing on critical and industrial discourse, these later historians left unchallenged earlier accounts of anthology drama style. For example, Boddy (1993, p. 82) reports on critical claims for the superiority and ubiquity of the close-up as a privileged device for transmitting the live drama's vaunted intimacy, but he does not challenge their accuracy as descriptions of what anthology episodes looked like. Similarly, Kenneth Hey (1983, p. 121) uses *Marty* (again) to reveal the ideological limitations of 1950s television drama, but he describes its style in familiar terms: as embodying a "practical storytelling aesthetic" that carefully avoided "attention-getting media techniques" (which he sees as typical of the anthology format). More recently, John Thornton Caldwell (1995, pp. 48-49) draws a contrast between the hyper-stylized approach of contemporary television and the "explicit... antistyle airs" and lack of "pictorial refinement" of the "Golden Age" drama. Caldwell (1995, p. 77) groups together Delbert Mann (an NBC-trained director) and John Frankenheimer (who worked largely at CBS) as live-television practitioners who, typical of their cohort,

privileged script and performance over technical and pictorial matters (as we will see, this far from being the case).

In sum, television historians of several generations have found little occasion to revise longstanding accounts of anthology drama style. The prescriptive discourse of the "Golden Age" has thus quietly guided scholarly and popular understandings of the format. But what, exactly, is the trouble with such understandings?

Marty and the NBC Style

I suggested that the CBS style was flashy compared to live anthology drama on other networks. What characterized this "other" visual style and to what extent do the conventional descriptions adequately summarize it? Because it appears so often in writing about 1950s anthology drama a look at *Marty* ought to serve well to test the generalizations made about the format. A 49-minute drama in an hour-long programming block—the broadcast featured several commercial interruptions and was introduced by a host—*Marty* features ten scenes in five sets, and just over 100 shots. The episode is largely constructed around long takes, with the average shot length (ASL) about 28 seconds. This distinguishes *Marty* from contemporaneous American feature films, all but the most stylistically adventurous of which display ASLs of well under 15 seconds.[6] The long takes in *Marty* do not generally boast extensive or complex camera movement. A great deal of the drama is captured with an immobile camera. Very often, a camera will move at the beginning or end of a shot, but will remain static for most of its duration. An example occurs at the beginning of the episode's second scene. The camera begins on a television set showing a baseball game, placed high on the wall of a bar. It then glides across the set until it fixes on a medium two-shot of Marty (Rod Steiger) and his friend sitting at a table. For another three minutes, the camera and the characters sit, as they recite Chayefsky's distinctive vernacular, culminating in the famous "I dunno, what do *you* want to do tonight?" exchange. The initial framing of the television has at least two functions: it gives Steiger time to move from the set featured in the previous scene, and it helps to establish the location. In other shots, a camera will track to follow a

character, as to a dining-room table, but then settle down once the actors have taken their places. This subdued use of the long take, with minimally expressive camera movement, is the baseline style of *Marty*. But the staging in *Marty* occasionally points to a distinct feature of anthology drama style. The shot at the bar features simple, shallow staging: two men sit at a table, facing the camera. But several other scenes, notably those set at the Waverly Ballroom, demonstrate a purposeful use of staging in depth. The first shot of the ballroom set features dancers arrayed in depth; the camera dollies forward past several couples and past a row of bachelors waiting for a dance, eventually arriving at Marty. The busy staging generates a sense of bustle, but also creates a sense of dynamic depth in what was in reality just a small corner of the NBC studio (Mann 1998, p. 62). Later in the scene, a more expressive use of depth features Marty, in the left foreground, watching as a man tries to pawn off his blind date, Clara, on another patron in the centre background (Fig. 1).

Figure 1: *Television Playhouse*, *Marty* (NBC, 24 May 1953) © NBC.

The framing displays two dramas at once: in the foreground, Marty's curiosity alternates with his embarrassment, while in the background, the two men get into a row as Clara's face gradually

reveals her grasp of what is happening. At the end of the shot, the camera penetrates the profilmic space with a dolly into a medium shot of Clara nervously kneading her napkin and looking as if she is about to cry.

Marty is actually quite subdued in its use of ensemble staging in depth; other episodes of NBC's *Television Playhouse* feature somewhat more elaborate instances of this technique. *The Joker* (NBC, *Television Playhouse*, 2 May 1954) is similar to *Marty* in its reliance on long takes (ASL 32 seconds), but many of those feature more reframing to follow the central couple as they fight, make up and beseech one another. A single shot of nearly five minutes in length features at least fifteen different framings. The camera movement is delicate, deliberate, but not flagrant. It reflects a careful choreography of actors and camera developed in rehearsals. Other NBC anthology series, particularly those produced, like *Television Playhouse*, by Fred Coe, refine this even further. *The Heart's a Forgotten Motel* (NBC, *Playwrights '56* [1955-1956], 25 October 1955; ASL 20 seconds), like *The Joker* directed by Arthur Penn, includes several minutes-long shots that move a half-dozen characters around a motel lobby set, with the camera judiciously tracking and panning to anticipate and follow their shifting exits, entrances and interactions.

It could be argued that this NBC style is unobtrusive and self-effacing, as Barnouw and others insisted, since it seems designed to place the viewer's attention squarely on the characters and almost never to show off feats of technical or stylistic prowess. Certainly it is characterized by a deliberate *economy* of technique. This owes much to Coe, who directed many of the earliest NBC anthology drama episodes and trained many of the directors who would become associated with the "Golden Age." As his protégé Delbert Mann, the director of *Marty*, explained, as a producer Coe insisted that cuts, close-ups and camera movements needed to be fully motivated by the needs of the drama (Kindem 1994, p. 105). Despite—or indeed because of—this quality of reserve, the NBC approach remains a *style*, one built around the repetition of distinct techniques—long takes, camera movement and staging in depth—and capable of

considerable suppleness and precision. Although descriptions of *Marty* and other NBC anthology drama as embodying a "practical storytelling aesthetic" (Hey 1983, p. 117) capture some of the *effects* of this style, they tell us little about its characteristic techniques and moment-to-moment texture. And they tell us very little indeed about other stylistic approaches, including the one much in evidence at NBC's rival network, CBS.

Characteristics of the CBS Style

Although critics and historians have paid scant attention to the stylistic differences among series and networks, they *were* noticed by producers and directors of live television drama. In comparing his approach to that of CBS's flagship anthology drama, Mann (1998, p. 22) reflected that "*Studio One* used a constantly moving camera technique that we felt was often unmotivated and distracting, but it did provide a visual energy and excitement that we [at NBC] were denied." Frankenheimer,[7] a CBS director, boasted that "we were just better with the camera on CBS shows." Both were right to highlight a more virtuosic use of the mobile camera as one of the things that distinguished the CBS style. More precisely, many shows at CBS built upon the rudiments of the anthology drama style evident at NBC— long takes, the mobile camera, staging in depth—to forge a more aggressive, attention-getting aesthetic. In addition, CBS shows often experimented with complex set design and low-key lighting effects. Before I enumerate the techniques associated with the CBS style and speculate on its origins, I will illustrate its customary texture with an extended example.

Written by Rod Serling and directed by Franklin Schaffner, *The Strike* (CBS, *Studio One*, 7 June 1954) relates the story of a Korean War army major who must choose between sacrificing a small patrol trapped behind enemy lines and endangering the larger operation. A drama of group tension and internal conflict, nearly the entire episode is staged in one large set, which is made to represent both the interior of a bunker and the battle-scarred trench just outside. In its observance of the Aristotelian unities, *The Strike* is the sort of teleplay "Golden Age" critics might have praised, but the situation it limns is hardly ordinary.

The first shot of *The Strike* lasts nearly six minutes. It begins on a wide view of a seemingly cavernous bunker set, in which characters are tucked into discrete pockets of space spread across the frame and in numerous layers of depth. In the right foreground, two soldiers attempt to reach the lost patrol on a combat radio. At left middle-ground, another soldier shivers in the cold, his rifle placed across his lap. Through a small aperture (apparently a blasted-out wall), another soldier is just visible in the right background. Large portions of the frame are bathed in darkness. Strong fill and key lights emphasize the men in the foreground, while other figures are modeled in chiaroscuro by spotlights (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: *Studio One*, *The Strike* (CBS, 7 June 1954) © CBS.

As two soldiers enter through a door in the left middle-ground and cross the set, the camera traces an arc right and forward, past the two men working the radio, to reveal the other side of the wall. It momentarily pauses on a soldier who is attempting to heat up a cup of coffee with a bunsen burner, then pans right to capture a previously unrevealed space. Several soldiers who had been inspecting a map in the background walk forward to take places around a small table. The camera then tracks forward for a closer view of one of the seated men—the major—as he begins to speak, quickly passes over their heads to obtain a

medium shot of another soldier who responds while pacing behind the table, then pedestals downward to frame the major in medium close-up (Fig. 3).

Figure 3: *Studio One*, *The Strike* (CBS, 7 June 1954) © CBS.

The shot continues in this peripatetic fashion, with grand but precise movements of the camera carefully choreographed with the movement of numerous actors around the complex set and attentive to the shifting interactions described in Serling's teleplay. Sometimes the camera's crawl is motivated by a particular character's movement, but rather than simply serve to "track" that character, the shifting camera positions always serve to reveal or revisit a new slice of space with a set of characters who become engaged or re-engaged in the ongoing conversation. But the camera will also move entirely independent of character movement, dollying across the set in a sweeping fashion, pausing on a variety of framings: close-ups of individual characters as they deliver a significant line, "two-shots" that depict intimate conversations and wider views that show several clusters of soldiers arrayed in depth.

This elaborate opening shot serves several functions. First, it serves as a kind of mobile establishing shot, gradually revealing to us nearly the entire expanse of the single set, establishing by means of camera movement and staging in depth the spatial

relationships not just among the characters but among numerous "landmarks": the radio, a small table, what passes for a canteen, a rocky outcropping near the door, and so on. Second, the camera mobility is functionally (if not expressively) equivalent to a conventional scene dissection: by moving from wider to closer views and back, it carves up the set into discrete chunks of dramatic salience. Later in the episode, the set will often be "analyzed" by cutting rather than traversed by the moving camera, but the opening shot, and others like it, will have made sure that the audience is familiar with the various portions of the set that appear in closer framings. Third, by emphasizing sheer duration, especially through the deliberateness of the movements from one portion of the set to another, the opening shot announces the episode's emphasis on waiting in "real time;" although it allows for commercial breaks, Serling's script compresses a single night into the length of a fifty-minute drama, with few obvious narrative ellipses. Similarly, the opening shot demonstrates to the audience how most of the episode will proceed visually, in long takes marked by frequent camera movements and bold depth compositions. Finally, the opening shot is an instance of stylistic bravado. It flaunts the hive-like complexity of the set, the ubiquity and dexterity of the camera, the precision of the staging, even the delicacy of the low-key lighting effects; in general, the ability of the director and camera operator to maintain exacting compositional control despite a *mise en scène* defined by near-constant flux. As David Bordwell (1985, pp. 160 and 198) has pointed out, openings and closings of films have traditionally been privileged moments of overt style and narrative self-consciousness. In episodes of anthology drama on all networks, this convention commonly translates to lengthy opening shots, which have the added benefit of flaunting the perilous nature of live broadcast, generating a kind of extra-diegetic suspense to hook the viewer at home. But *The Strike* includes similarly elaborate long takes throughout. As the tension ratchets upward towards the story's climax, powerful movements of thought are communicated in telephoto close-ups and explosive confrontations in rapid-fire bursts of shot/reverse shot—both of which punctuate the deliberately paced mobile

long takes and mark the style not as one of uniform slowness but as founded on a dynamic contrast between long takes and quick editing. Still, the ASL of *The Strike* is nearly 30 seconds, far higher than nearly any contemporaneous Hollywood feature film. *The Strike* displays all the characteristics of the *Studio One* house style in its maturity: elaborate depth staging, a televisual *entfesselte Kamera* (unchained camera), a clash of lengthy takes and rapid editing, and high-contrast lighting. The consistent, tandem use of such techniques set CBS's anthology series apart from those of other networks.

Staging in depth was a standard technique across live television drama of the "Golden Age," for all networks and series. I have discussed examples of expressive depth staging in particular scenes of NBC and CBS dramas, but the technique was used across episodes as a whole. For instance, shots depicting conversations between two characters were routinely—even obsessively—staged with both actors facing the camera, one in the foreground, another in a more distant plane. For instance, in *Two Sharp Knives* (CBS, *Studio One*, 14 November 1949) a discussion between a police detective and his lieutenants is staged with all three actors facing the camera (Fig. 4).

Figure 4: *Studio One*, *Two Sharp Knives* (CBS, 14 November 1949) © CBS.

Often, such staging was motivated by a bit of business, such as one character applying makeup in front of a mirror. Other times, character psychology provides the motivation: perhaps a character is dissimulating and turns her face away to conceal her true feelings. But often enough, this standard composition appears without obvious motivation; it is simply a pictorial convention of the anthology drama. Frankenheimer and other CBS directors pushed this convention to extremes: bringing the camera closer to the actors, they exagerrated the size diminution and therefore the impression of recessional depth. One actor hulks in the foreground; another, much diminished, appears in the background, as in a shot from *Bail Out at 53,000* (CBS, *Climax!*, 29 December 1955 [Fig. 5]).

Figure 5: *Climax!, Bail Out at 53,000* (CBS, 29 December 1955) © CBS.

The convention could be adjusted to situate objects, not actors, close to the camera. Also in *Bail Out*, a drama about men who undertake the dangerous duty of testing the Air Force's new pilot ejection seats, one such seat in a classroom set is forever stuck in the immediate foreground, often while agonized officers brood in the distant background (Fig. 6).

Figure 6: *Climax!*, *Bail Out at 53,000* (CBS, 29 December 1955) © CBS.

In other episodes of CBS series, directors place lampshades, columns, stained glass and much else in the immediate foreground to impart an impression of depth, often more for decorative than expressive effect. In other words, even without ensemble staging in depth, compositions emphasizing recessive depth—rendered all the more striking by the use of wide-angle lenses—became a key part of the basic "look" of the CBS anthology drama.

The same is true of the mobile camera. As early as *Away from It All* (CBS, *Studio One*, 25 September 1950), we find near-constant, unmotivated camera movement in many scenes. In one such, a man and woman discuss the strange mountaintop mansion they have found themselves in. Even when the actors are sitting or standing still, the camera continually arcs around them, raises and lowers, sneaks forward and back. In other early episodes of *Studio One* and *Danger*, the television camera seems intent on exploring the set regardless of the actors' movements. A particularly baroque instance occurs in *Deal a Blow* (CBS, *Climax!*, 25 August 1955). A detective wanders around a table, where he is interrogating two teenagers who caused an altercation at a movie theatre. The camera tracks, pans and tilts to fol-

low his path, but it also moves independently of the actors to provide a series of bold graphic effects. Frankenheimer's camera shoots through the detective's arms as they are perched on the table, raises up to show the hulking detective bearing down on a puny teen, and cranes further upward to view the entire scene from a Langian high angle. Only a few of the reframings have an evident narrative or expressive function. For much of the six-minute shot, the constantly moving camera serves, as in *Away from It All*, to keep the screen continually refreshed with, as Frankenheimer put it, "visually interesting" compositions. In *Dino* (CBS, *Studio One*, 2 January 1956), director Paul Nickell turns this foundational CBS technique to expressive advantage. In a climactic scene, Dino—a troubled teenager recently released from a stint in a reformatory—reluctantly meets with a social worker. At the beginning of a six-minute take, Dino (Sal Mineo) snarls in medium close-up, expressing his machismo (Fig. 7).

Figure 7: *Studio One*, *Dino* (CBS, 2 January 1956) © CBS.

As the camera arcs left and closes in on his face, he begins to recall a childhood suffered under an inattentive, abusive father. In tight close-up, Dino's lip quivers; his eyes widen; his brow furrows in pain; his speech slows, each word more difficult to speak than the last (Fig. 8).

Figure 8: *Studio One*, *Dino* (CBS, 2 January 1956) © CBS.

He begins to hunch over. Just as he collapses onto the psychologist's desk, the camera pulls back rapidly to frame him in long shot. His face is buried in the desk, a sheet of inky black carved out of the lower left portion of the frame. We see the pathetic slump of Dino's back, his feet dragging on the floor (Fig. 9).

Figure 9: *Studio One*, *Dino* (CBS, 2 January 1956) © CBS.

As he starts to pick his head up from the desk, the camera arcs in again, framing the young man and the psychologist in a medium two-shot. The young man has turned away from the psychologist, so both are facing the camera. Dino, ashamed of his vulnerability, looks downward, his chest resting against the back of the chair, gasping and breathing heavily (Fig. 10).

Figure 10: *Studio One*, *Dino* (CBS, 2 January 1956) © CBS.

The psychologist gives him gentle counsel, but Dino slowly begins to gather his bravado again—now exposed as a desperate defence mechanism. The camera arcs backward and pans right, circling around Dino in anticipation of his decision to haltingly stand up and walk to the doorway. He is now framed in the distance, pausing at the door as the psychologist is seated in the left foreground (Fig. 11).

Figure 11: *Studio One*, *Dino* (CBS, 2 January 1956) © CBS.

Finally, a cut frames the psychologist in medium close-up as he reacts, with infinite patience and regret, as an offscreen Dino yells, "I'm never coming back!" and slams the door shut behind him. In contrast to the more discreet use of the mobile camera in NBC dramas, here the camera does not simply track the movement of the characters, but continually reframes characters who remain in largely fixed positions. The reframing serves to punctuate Dino's shifting moods and to lend them expressive weight.[8]

The ASLs of CBS anthology drama began to drop in the second half of the 1950s, until they approached the feature-film mean of about eight to eleven seconds. This occurred less because editing rhythms were regularized than because of directors' increased interest in mixing rapid cutting and long takes.[9] This tendency accelerated in 1958 with the introduction of video tape, which enabled a limited amount of true splicing of shots to permit a greater variety of camera positions and thus compositions. Frankenheimer, in particular, made sure to include at least one sequence featuring remarkably rapid editing in his late anthology drama episodes—often as quick as a few frames per shot. In *A Town Has Turned to Dust* (CBS, *Playhouse 90* [1956-1961], 19 June 1958), the moment of a lynching is high-

lighted by a burst of very brief reaction shots of members of the mob, following an extended tracking shot in which the victim is carried through town towards the makeshift gallows. The arresting quality of this technique is heightened by the rhythmic nature of the cutting: each shot is given precisely one beat, a rhythm that is broken by a 70-second close-up of the town's cowardly sheriff witnessing the event in obvious agony. The alternation of rapid cutting and long takes makes both techniques more salient. In fact, in some episodes of *Studio One* and other CBS anthology series, directors appear to establish large-scale patterns of shot length and camera movement. Episodes may begin with elaborate mobile long takes, switch for several scenes to a rapid editing pace, then conclude with a return to long takes, often tracing out movements that precisely mimic (or reverse) those in the first part of the episode. Or long takes and rapid-fire close-ups may alternate in a regular pattern, the apprehension and expectation of which becomes a basic part of a viewer's engagement with the text. More close analysis of individual shows will be necessary to fully substantiate this hunch, but I hypothesize that live-television directors were sometimes "mapping out" their technique for individual episodes in the way we might expect of a director of art cinema. In addition to stylistic brio, the CBS style contains elements of a formalist approach.

Sources of the CBS Style

As my examples have illustrated, the CBS style scarcely resembles the "functional" approach that scholars cite in characterizing the "Golden Age" drama. Its more sedate alternative, characteristic of NBC productions, is itself richer than conventional accounts would admit. But episodes of CBS anthology drama such as *The Strike* and *Deal a Blow* exhibit an unmistakable concern for pictorial effect and a flair for camera mobility and depth staging. Sometimes, as in certain of Frankenheimer's episodes of *Playhouse 90*, the style can come across as showboating (and indeed, the director received more laurels from the press than his peers). But elsewhere it can be deeply expressive and visually striking. The distinctiveness of the CBS style may have provided a selling point for audiences, even if viewers'

apprehension of this is scarcely in the historical record. But it does not explain much to say that the CBS style emerged because it provided a means of product differentiation. The question of the style's origins remains. While I cannot provide an ultimate cause for the emergence of the CBS style, I argue that there are four likely causes: the exigencies of producing live dramatic television; the striving of networks to achieve "production value;" the aesthetic precepts of key producers, notably Worthington Miner; and the influence of cinema.

Some key aspects of "Golden Age" style in general, and the CBS variant in particular, probably arose from the technological conditions of live television production in the postwar era. For most of the period under discussion, network studios featured but three cameras, one of which might need to be freed up at the beginning and end of a scene in order to shoot the host or commercials—what producers of live television called "format." Whereas the production of film or telefilm can in principle permit camera ubiquity, in live television a director switching frequently among cameras will "run out of shots too fast," as television engineer and theorist Rudy Bretz (1950, p. 257) put it. Notably, this places constraints on the use of analytical editing. Say a scene begins with a distant establishing shot taken from camera one. The next shot, a medium long shot of two conversing actors, is taken from camera two. Camera three captures a close-up of one actor via a telephoto lens. Unless each shot endures long enough for another camera to move to an entirely new framing (and possibly switch from one lens to another) the scene would be limited to rotating through these three compositions—an option, to be sure, that television shows take even today, but one that severely limits the denotational and expressive possibilities of *découpage* and figure movement. The obvious solutions are mutually reinforcing: to make individual shots last longer, and to move the camera so that multiple framings can be obtained in a single shot. Similarly, depth staging permits each shot to potentially carry more narrative information: for example, capturing action and reaction in the same frame obviates the need to use another camera to snatch a reaction shot. Thus, several foundational elements of the anthology drama style

were, among other things, logical solutions to the restrictions of live television production.[10] This observation, however, does not explain the differences among the networks' styles.[11]

The prominence of depth staging and camera movement in "Golden Age" style may also be explained by reference to broader network priorities. In her recent book *TV by Design*, Lynn Spigel (2008, p. 112) devotes a chapter to the "problem of studio space" as it figured in network discourse and policy during the era of live anthology drama. She explains that networks were keenly aware of the limitations of the refurbished New York radio studios, legitimate theatres and warehouses where early television studios were often situated. Cramped sets limited the possibilities of set design, staging, camera mobility and microphone mobility. They also lacked the elusive quality of "production value," which is to say they were not felt to resemble larger sets typical of both theatre and the legitimate stage. Spigel's research did not include a study of television episodes, but the industry discourse she recreates corroborates several of my claims about "Golden Age" style. Producers recommended deep staging, deep focus via wide-angle lenses and cameras slicing through the sets to create an "illusion of spaciousness" (Spigel 2008, pp. 114-15). Spigel argues that networks' desires for spaciousness and mobility governed the development and adaptation of technologies, from lighting scaffolds that would stay out of the way of moving cameras to the purchase of Houston cranes originally designed for film production. Ultimately, the desire to achieve such spaciousness and the attendant quality of production led the major networks to construct enormous, state-of-the-art studio facilities on the West Coast, where real estate was at less of a premium than in New York—and where anthology series could have more ready access to movie stars to headline their casts.[12] Spigel's analysis does not resolve the chicken-or-egg question of whether spacious sets were desired because, as she writes, "anthology dramas often required rapid transitions, camera mobility, intricate blocking, and numerous sets" (Spigel 2008, p. 116) or whether such traits were encouraged in order to maximize "production value"—an important part of which were spacious sets. Nevertheless, *TV by Design*

reveals that anthology drama style was of concern not only to directors and craftspeople, but reflected the aesthetic goals of network decision-makers as well. When Frankenheimer spoke of striving to make use of the CBS Television City studios in order to maximize "production value," he was seeking to make a name for himself based on his especially thoroughgoing realization of widely shared industrial goals.

An even more proximate source for the CBS style was the producer Worthington Miner. Miner is significant for several reasons. As a producer and director of experimental CBS broadcasts in the early 1940s, his adventurous approach presaged the formalist strain within the CBS style. At the same time, he developed the division of labour and production processes that would obtain at the network until well after his departure in 1952. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, he was the first producer of *Studio One* and mentored the first generation of CBS directors, including George Roy Hill, Paul Nickell and Franklin Schaffner. Above all, Miner articulated in low-theoretical form a philosophy of directing live television drama that emphasized precisely those techniques that would become the key components of the CBS style.

The programs that Miner directed for CBS just before and during World War II were experimental not just in the sense that all broadcast television of the era was "experimental," but in their probing style as well. Miner (1985, p. 159) described having directed a program in which he stayed on one moving camera for twelve minutes, and another in which he cut quickly between shots that all featured left-to-right pans, in an attempt to explore the possibilities of televisual rhythm. Miner set himself formal challenges which, if his reflections decades later are to be trusted, engaged him more than the nominal "content" of the shows. This attention to form led him to create what his protégés called "Miner's Laws:" a series of heuristics and guidelines for producing live television drama. Foremost among them was the concept of "vertical composition," or staging in depth.[13] Miner, who had a background in both theatre and film, explained that while the theatre called for "lateral" staging, with actors arrayed across the width of the proscenium, the optics of

television demanded a more cramped *mise en scène*. Actors ought to be stacked in depth, tapering from the camera axis. Miner argued that this was even more true of television than film, even though both share the reliance on a single optical perspective, that of the camera. The small size of the television screen demanded vertical composition because it allowed the audience to see multiple actors' faces in the same frame while retaining shot scales close enough to render those faces legible (Miner 1985, pp. 160-1). According to Hill, Miner also recommended staging in depth because it highlighted the depth of the studio sets and the resulting compositions generated pictorial interest (Skutch 1998, p. 50). Miner (1985, p. 167) also encouraged directors to utilize the moving camera. His rationale for this technique was idiosyncratic but suggestive. He argued that in film, "actors for the most part moved in and out of a static frame," while in television "actors often remained still, while the frame around them moved." Miner attributed this to the fact that in film a camera operator could end a shot, change to a different lens and capture the same scene in a different scale, but in television the camera would simply have to "close in" on the subject by dollying towards it. This is all highly debatable as a description of either film or live television production in general, but it anticipates with remarkable precision the dynamics of camera movement that distinguished the CBS style, as shown by my description of the scenes from *The Strike* and *Dino*.

In addition to these specific recommendations, Miner (1985, p. 163) declared himself an enemy of "visual monotony." In contrast to Fred Coe at NBC, he encouraged directors to use not just camera movement but frequent close-ups—to make things look "interesting." In short, his attitude seems to have been that of a stylist. That said, Miner (1985, p. 164) also subscribed to the notion that "good direction attracts the least attention." This should not surprise us. The necessity of what Bordwell (1997) has called an "invisible style" was and remains a reigning assumption among makers of mainstream American film and television. Indeed, it is fundamental to the ideology of classicism. While it is true that the idea of an "invisible style" cannot accommodate every formal gesture— the shows Miner

produced seldom if ever featured overt authorial intrusions, direct address or editing patterns that flouted the spatiotemporal continuity of classical style in the fashion of modernist art cinema—it is also true that it can be used to justify all manner of techniques. More to the point, references to "style serving the story" or audiences not being "aware of the style" have little power to explain the divergent styles of anthology drama. I believe it is equally if not more significant that the shows Miner produced or influenced via their directors often display a degree of filigree and stylistic autonomy atypical of anthology series on other networks. In reading the statements of artists, we should be attuned not just to the broad statements of principle but to the seemingly minor differences of emphasis. I do not wish to argue that Miner was the "ultimate cause" of the CBS style. His "Laws" are sufficiently similar to the networks' aesthetic goals as described by Spigel to suggest that he was above all an unusually articulate explainer of widely shared views. But the fact that Miner's advice offers such a clear rationale for the CBS style—itself forged and refined in part by directors and crew that he trained—should permit us to appreciate him as one among several significant causal agents.

Finally, we cannot discount the influence of cinema on anthology drama style and the CBS style in particular. There is little in the way of a "smoking gun," or an acknowledgment by television producers and directors of the influence of a particular film or filmmaker. With some exceptions, notably Sidney Lumet,[14] most of the live television directors were not cinephiles. Unlike the "film brats" who emerged at the end of the 1960s, their work was not filled with citations, visual or otherwise, of favoured films. When questioned about influence, their most common reply was to refer to the difficulties of live-television production as playing the central role in determining their approach to staging, camerawork and lighting.[15] Mann (1998, p. 19) noted that dramatic and stylistic values were always "submerged" by technical problems, and that the biggest goal was simply to make sure actors and cameras were "hitting the marks." But as even Miner acknowledged, live television drama drew extensively from the model of the classical cinema.

For example, live television *découpage* proceeds from, and seldom disrupts, the principles of continuity editing that are at the root of classical film style. Indeed, as Charles Barr (1996, pp. 58-59) has pointed out, the prototypical shooting situation of live television—several cameras arranged on one side of a playing space—nearly guarantees the adherence to continuity principles such as consistent screen direction and matches on action. Distinctive features of "Golden Age" style, from ensemble staging to camera movement, were scarcely foreign to cinema. In its plainer and more attention-grabbing variants, that style might best be thought of as a selective adaptation of a classical cinematic approach. From the large variety of stylistic options possible in the classical system, live television excludes some, such as location shooting and camera ubiquity, and returns continually to others, such as long takes or a conversation staged with both characters' faces to the camera.

But can we do more than acknowledge the truism that television owes a great deal to the movies? In fact, the correspondences between anthology drama style and contemporaneous American cinema are more precise than the concept of selective adaptation would necessarily imply. Bordwell (2011) has noted that what I have described as the CBS style "fitted fairly snugly into 1950s Hollywood black-and-white style." The looming foregrounds and busy arrangements of characters in depth resemble the "post-Welles" look of 1950s films by Anthony Mann, Robert Aldrich and Samuel Fuller. Frankenheimer's work, in particular, recalls not just Orson Welles but the work of the Mexican cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa. His crisp, almost enamel-like depth compositions verge on the grotesque in the way they underline stylized displays of emotion and monumentalize characters with low angles. In addition, television drama's emphasis on staging for the long take puts it in line with a broader tendency in postwar American cinema. Just as Bordwell likens the television work of Frankenheimer and Lumet to the films of Mann and Fuller, his summary of the single long take of Otto Preminger's *Fallen Angel* (1945) could serve as an accurate description of many shots from Coe-produced anthology series: "close foregrounds and subtle camera

movements simplified or elaborated long-standing strategies of balance and decentering and recentering, blocking and revealing, aperture framing and diagonal thrusts to the foreground" (Bordwell 1997, pp. 235-7). It is tempting to continue aligning different anthology series, producers and directors with their equivalents in the American cinema. But my point is not that live-television creators adopted cinematic styles wholesale. As described above, numerous factors guided them towards a series of techniques that converged with contemporaneous developments in filmmaking. Without the guide of cinematic references tucked into television episodes or prolix interviews filled with the names of directors, films and studios, it is difficult to distinguish convergence and direct influence. This is often the case when researching the history of style.

Conclusion

Seventeen years ago, Barr (1996, p. 54) called for research into the aesthetics of early British and American television drama. Comparing television scholars' hazy accounts of the first decades of television programs to film historians' ignorance of early cinema before the first Brighton Conference,[16] he suggested that analysis of a body of live television drama might have a similarly transformative effect. My major goals in this article have been comparably modest: to clear away the cobwebs that have clung to scholarly descriptions of postwar anthology drama, and to provide a more nuanced account of its visual style than has been available previously. If that account holds up, it will largely be because I cast my net wider than previous scholars by looking at numerous episodes beyond the endlessly recycled canon of anthology drama, which has gone largely unchanged in 30 or more years.

Many facets of the aesthetics of the "Golden Age" remain to be explored, and many longstanding assumptions remain to be challenged. I have left out of this article any discussion of patterns of influence and aesthetic interaction between live television, radio and theatre. And the relationship of anthology drama visual style to the styles of other genres of 1950s live television (serial dramas and comedies, variety shows, game

shows, sports and news) is a topic that ought to be taken up. I can only hope that this article sparks some interest in such research among scholars sympathetic to television studies' aesthetic turn.

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<div align="center">NOTES</div>

1. My great thanks to Andrea Comiskey for discussing this article and its ideas with me. I also thank one of my anonymous readers whose thorough and pointed comments were of immeasurable help.

2. The continued currency of the "Golden Age" label is evident, to pick two examples, in the title of a DVD collection of anthology drama episodes (The Criterion Collection, *The Golden Age of Television* DVD set, New York, 2009), and in a recent American broadcasting history textbook (Hilmes 2007). In this essay, I often use "live anthology drama," "anthology drama," and "Golden Age drama" interchangeably. This is not because I am taking a position for or against the appropriateness of the "Golden Age" label. I am aware that filmed anthology series existed alongside those that were broadcast live, and that telefilm anthologies such as *The Twilight Zone* (Rod Serling, 1959-1964) and *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* (CBS and NBC, 1955-1962) were produced to considerable acclaim years after the live anthology drama disappeared from network prime-time schedules. I mix up the various terms simply to avoid monotony, and I hope readers will not find this distracting or confusing.

3. After the first mention of an anthology series title, I have placed the series's year span in parentheses. This task is complicated by the fact that some anthology series either alternated titles during their run (for example, NBC's *Philco Television Playhouse* and *Goodyear Television Playhouse* are essentially the same show with alternating sponsors) or simply changed titles altogether, but without substantial changes to the behind-the-scenes personnel or production processes. I have chosen to interpret the term "series" broadly, meaning I have identified the years that a show persisted even under a variety of titles. To avoid a slew of additional clarifying endnotes, I have simplified the titles of anthology series as much as possible, rendering both *Philco Television Playhouse* and *Goodyear Television Playhouse* as simply *Television Playhouse*, and *Westinghouse Studio One* (and several minor variants) as *Studio One*.

I have avoided placing the names of directors or producers of anthology series in parentheses, for fear that their inclusion would mislead the reader. Few long-lasting anthology series had a single producer over the course of their network runs, and all of them utilized the services of several directors. Identifying the "creator" of an anthology series is not often an edifying task. Some series (such as *Studio One*) were originally designed as televised companions to existing radio series. Several series had a few producers at once. Other series (such as *Climax!*) were given a behind-the-scenes "makeover," meaning the original producer and directors were replaced between seasons—or even partway through a single season. What is more, the anthology format—which, by definition, does not boast recurring characters and settings—mitigates against the identification of a "creator" in a way that serial television arguably does not. Finally, throughout the 1950s, a critical commonplace described the anthology drama as a "writer's medium," and indeed the author of a teleplay tended to get more publicity (and more prominent title cards) than the director or producer who brought it to the

small screen. In short, the anthology drama, even more than other television formats, defies the clear assignment of a single, defining artistic personality (or even several such personalities) to a single series.

4. After the first mention of a single episode of an anthology series, I have indicated in parentheses the network on which the episode was broadcast, followed by the date of its original live broadcast.

5. I should note that unlike many historians who have participated in television studies' "aesthetic turn," I will not be highlighting the issue of evaluation. Although I make an evaluative gesture in arguing that anthology drama style is more interesting and varied than previous accounts have held, I am not seeking here to decide that the format, certain series or individual episodes are good or bad, better or worse.

6. Barry Salt (1992, pp. 249-50) discusses average shot lengths in *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*; based on his data, the mode for American feature films of the 1950s appears to be nine seconds. More data on shot length in the 1950s can be found at the Cinemetrics website, www.cinemetrics.lv. A note of caution: the data on this website is user-generated and varies in accuracy. Intriguingly, the Cinemetrics entry on the film adaptation of *Marty* (directed, like the original television episode, by Delbert Mann [1955]) shows that it has the same ASL as the television episode.

7. Video interview with John Frankenheimer, conducted in 2000 for the *Archive of American Television* Website. http://www.emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/john-frankenheimer.

8. The 1957 feature film adaptation of *Dino* constructs the same scene in a more conventional manner, with shallower compositions and frequent shot/reverse shot cutting, including a considerable number of reaction shots. Its effect is to defuse the intensity of the scene, turning Dino's outbursts into more predictable responses to the beseeching of the social worker.

9. I should note that the references to "cutting" in this essay misrepresent the actual means by which edits were achieved in live TV drama. A more exact term would be "switching" (as in, switching among cameras), but I have used the more familiar "cutting" so as not to cause unnecessary confusion.

10. By the time CBS and NBC had outfitted their West Coast studios with five, six, even seven cameras, the rudiments of the style were already comfortably in place.

11. Network and craft union policies concerning camera technology may have played a small role in differentiating the CBS and NBC styles. At NBC, cameras on pedestals were not allowed to move horizontally until March 1950. The reason given was that a camera operator would find it difficult to move the camera, pedestal up and down and keep focus all at once (Mann 1998, p. 22). CBS camera operators had no such restrictions. This is borne out by comparing episodes from the first years of *Television Playhouse* and *Studio One*; episodes of the latter feature a great deal more camera movement than those of the former. Other factors, however—which I will describe soon—contributed to this disparity, and had NBC directors felt truly constrained by the restrictions on camera movement, they had ample time to catch up once the policy was lifted. Instead, NBC productions seem to have fewer, and less flamboyant, camera movements throughout the era.

12. The particular focus of Spigel's chapter is CBS's Television City, built in Burbank in 1952 and gradually expanded across the remainder of the 1950s.

13. Miner's "vertical composition" shoud not be confused with Sergei M. Eisenstein's more well-known concept of "vertical montage."

14. Video interview with Sidney Lumet, conducted 1999. *Archive of American Television* Website. http://www.emmytvlegends.org/interviews/people/sidney-lumet.

15. Only after their work in live television came to a close, and after their exposure to the films of the French *Nouvelle vague*, would figures like Frankenheimer, Lumet and Arthur Penn discuss their cinematic influences in any detail. The rupture between the pre- and post-*Nouvelle vague* styles of their films is striking. Penn, in particular, demonstrated from *Mickey One* (1965) forward an elliptical, purposefully coarse style that strikes me as the antithesis of the delicacy and modesty of his *Television Playhouse* episodes.

16. Barr is referring to the 1978 conference of the International Federation of Film Archives, in which numerous films from the pre-1908 period were screened and discussed by archivists and scholars. This conference is commonly credited with kicking off a major revival of interest in "early cinema," which has in turn transformed scholarly understandings of film history and aesthetics.

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RÉSUMÉ

Les séries anthologiques durant l'âge d'or de la télévision américaine : le style visuel de la CBS
Jonah Horwitz

Si la plupart des histoires de la télévision américaine ne manquent pas d'évoquer « l'âge d'or » de la série anthologique en direct, l'esthétique de ce genre singulier a souvent été mal interprétée. Les spécialistes avancent que la série anthologique privilégie le réalisme, l'intimité, ainsi qu'un style sans éclat, effacé, usuel, voire même un « anti-style ». Une analyse attentive d'épisodes méconnus de ces séries anthologiques révèle pourtant un style distinct, reposant sur de longues prises de vue, une caméra mobile et une mise en scène en profondeur. Une déclinaison de ce style développée au réseau CBS utilise même avec virtuosité cette « mise en scène d'ensemble », usant d'habiles mouvements de caméra et d'effets visuels visant à diriger l'attention du téléspectateur. L'auteur examine plusieurs épisodes en détail afin de montrer comment les techniques propres au style de la CBS sont employées à des fins expressives et décoratives. Ce style trouve son origine à la fois dans les limites technologiques de la télévision en direct, les visées esthétiques plus larges des réseaux, l'influence de l'important producteur Worthington Miner et les styles cinématographiques américains de l'époque.