# AUDIOVISUAL ESSAYS

Dance, Camera, Dance:
Directorial choreography in the live anthology drama

Martin Scorsese famously described cinema as a matter of what is inside and outside the frame. For those who directed live television in the 1950s, what was outside mattered a lot.

Since the emergence of television studies as a distinct subfield, critics and scholars have made concerted efforts to dissect the medium's formal strategies. With the rise of 'Peak TV', American scholars have particularly centered contemporary programs (Butler 2010; Mittell 2015). Meanwhile, broadcast historians often highlight the live dramatic anthology programs that dominated American airwaves throughout the 1950s, but their focus shifts to its emergence as a writers' medium or even as an actor's showcase (Boddy 1993; Becker 2008; Kraszewski 2011; Schneider, 2015). However, critics and trade papers of the time equally heralded the directors – including Sidney Lumet, Delbert Mann, and Robert Mulligan – as innovators. Hollywood producers later recruited them throughout the 1960s to direct feature films.

What made live dramatic anthology programs a space for visual creativity and ingenuity? John Frankenheimer offered a possible explanation: 'Everything had to be pre-cut, pre-arranged, cut on paper, so that we knew every shot, and how cameras were going to be released. Timing, pacing, actual experience' (1993: 30). Live television directing required more than organising a shot; it required choreography.
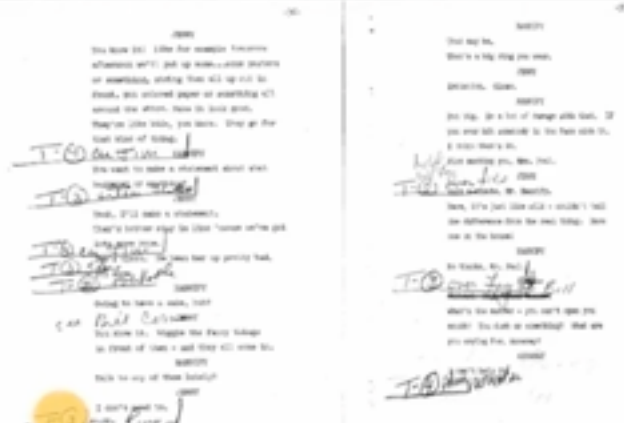
This video essay examines the production methods of 1950s live television and the director's role in shaping visual style. The work reveals the choreographic element of the medium by visualising the arrangement of physical space between sets, actors, and cameras during broadcasts. While critics often describe moving images as seeing through the director's eyes, live television directing required looking beyond the frame.

Many television directors opted to restrain camera movement, but CBS encouraged dramatic anthology programs to create a visually appealing style to lure audiences into appointment viewing (Horowitz 2013). Once Frankenheimer became a regular director on the network's biggest and most prestigious program, *Playhouse 90* (CBS, 1956-60), he developed a shorthand for visual innovation that worked within the limitations of the live broadcast.

Using Adobe Flash Professional and primary source documents located at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Television Research, I demonstrate how these directors balanced three different sights at once: the live broadcast image, an annotated screenplay with marked directorial cues, and a view of the physical stage. Certain stylistic camera movements became prevalent in the medium as a response to these technological limitations. The choices made on screen not only relied on the rules of classical continuity, but also organized for physical movement invisible to the audience. Live television directors

had to think not just about how to convey narrative through *mise-en-scène* but also about how actors *and* cameras all moved in relation to each other. While Hollywood directors had to think about continuity editing when planning their next shot, live television directors planned each edit through movement and proximity within the limitations of who and what was physically present at each moment. This video essay (literally) sketches this production culture and examines the adjustments to classical continuity live television necessitated alongside the new creative opportunities available in this medium.

Watch the audiovisual essay here:
https://vimeo.com/598583550

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