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## Introduction: Dare We Look Closely at Television?

Television is a relative of motorcar and airplane: it is a means of cultural transportation. To be sure, it is a mere instrument of transmission, which does not offer new means for the artistic interpretation of reality—as radio and film did.<sup>1</sup>

—Rudolf Arnheim, 1935

Many factors have militated against the study of style in television. Rudolf Arnheim dismissed the artistic potential of television a good ten years before it existed as a viable mass medium. Implicit within his dismissal is a denial of television style. For Arnheim and others of the first wave of film theorists—notably, Lev Kuleshov and Sergei Eisenstein—it was through a patterned implementation of a medium’s techniques that true artists interpreted reality. Film-as-art was thus established in terms of how film artists *transformed* reality through style, how film images *differed* from reality. Style was paramount; it made film into art. These theorists felt this transformation was essential to elevate a mechanical recording device to what Alexandre Astruc later called “*la caméra stylo*,” the camera as stylus, a device capable of rendering reality into aesthetic form. The film camera was not an artistic implement until it was elevated beyond its base recording function. Similarly, the television camera could never be an artistic implement because, to Arnheim, it was impossible for it to get beyond its transmission function. It would be impossible for him to conceive of a book devoted to television style.

We might today scoff at Arnheim’s short-sighted presumption that television could never become the artistic equal of film (or radio!), but his characterization of television-as-transmission persists in contemporary television studies and has contributed to the dearth of television stylistic analyses. When authors discuss the essential “liveness” or immediacy of television and its lack of Roland Barthes’s “photo effect,” they rely on the same presumption as Arnheim, that television is defined fundamentally by its ability to transmit events that occur simultaneous to the time of viewing.<sup>2</sup> This same presumption feeds into early journalistic criticism of television in the 1950s, where the pinnacle of television art is seen to be the live transmission of well-respected plays. The “art” of these productions is not in the television medium itself, but, rather, in the play that is being transmitted. The only notice paid to television style is negative—attributes of the small, high-contrast, black-and-white image and the primitive, monaural

sound. In classical film theory, the differences between human perception of reality and reality's representation on screen are interpreted as artistic opportunities. For instance, black-and-white cinematography is said to allow the film artist to emphasize compositional elements by eliminating color tonality. Similar claims were not made for television's limitations in the 1950s.

The television-as-transmission concept has had other impacts on the study of style. In fact, it shapes many empirical approaches to the medium. Cultural-studies ethnographers prefer to examine the recipient of the transmission and not the transmission itself. I am over-simplifying here, but the empirical emphasis on the recipient and not the text means that the text's stylistic aspects are of less interest than the recipient's use of the text's signifieds. Cultural-studies scholars, for example, have examined viewers' responses to television soap opera by talking to the genre's fans and by examining materials they (the viewers) have written about the programs. What interests the scholars most is how viewers understand the characters and relate them to their own lives and not how the viewers feel about stylistic attributes like shot-counter shot editing or a zoom-in to conclude a scene.

However, not all impediments to stylistic analysis can be blamed on television's roots in sound-image transmission. Auteurism, shot through with romantic notions of the artist, views style as a manifestation of the individual's unique "vision." When François Truffaut and his colleagues at *Cahiers du Cinéma* launched the auteur theory in the mid-1950s, they never thought to unearth auteurs within the television industry, because the medium was seen to be aesthetically stunted and an industrial product—even more so than the Hollywood film studio system's products. In 1953, the year before Truffaut issued auteurism's manifesto, André Bazin predicted, "...the television picture will always retain its mediocre legibility."<sup>3</sup> How could it possibly aspire to the art of the cinema? Moreover, Truffaut, et al., were aspiring directors themselves and so they looked for the auteur's signature in a cinematic aspect that directors control: principally, elements of visual style. In television, then as now, a single director seldom controls the visual style of a program. Over the course of a program's season, ten or twenty directors might be called upon. The auteur of a television program is most likely to be the producer and the producer is more likely to be a screenwriter than a director. Thus, auteurists have been frustrated in their limited attempts to find auteurs in television and, in their view, there can be no style without an auteur.

Taken together, these factors explain why there has been no comprehensive television stylistics or poetics on a par with David Bordwell's

*Poetics of Cinema* and no historical poetics of the same scope as Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*.<sup>4</sup> These factors also suggest why the recent crop of television studies anthologies and introductory texts give style short shrift.<sup>5</sup> The present volume contributes to a poetics of television, although on a much more modest level than Bordwell's work. It brings together essays that contribute to a critical tendency within television studies that has been largely overlooked. I do not, however, intend to overstate their uniqueness. Despite the longstanding bias against television style, despite some quarters which deny that it exists or believe that its analysis is frivolous, there have been some substantive analyses of television style upon which this book heavily relies. Some of the most useful have also been influenced by pertinent work in film studies, such as Bordwell's. To begin a consideration of television stylistics, therefore, we must first survey some prominent antecedent efforts.

### **Style and Media Studies**

“Film style matters because what people call content comes to us in and through the patterned use of the medium's techniques.... Style is the tangible texture of a film, the perceptual surface we encounter as we watch and listen, and that surface is our point of departure in moving to plot, theme, feeling—everything else that matters to us.”<sup>6</sup>  
—David Bordwell

Certain elements are common to all stylistic work in media studies. All media-studies stylisticians must develop a method for describing, in Bordwell's terms, the “perceptual surface” of a television program or film. They must also make a case for why the phenomenon they have described is significant, which results in some form of analysis, interpretation and/or evaluation of that which they have described. A final step may be to describe how style has changed over time and also to suggest causes for that change, although some stylisticians favor a synchronic approach over such a diachronic one. In my review of work in this area—limiting myself predominantly to studies of television and film—I have found that media stylistics can be divided into four strains:

- Descriptive stylistics
- Analytic stylistics (interpretation)
- Evaluative stylistics (aesthetics)
- Historical stylistics

Most commonly, analytic and evaluative stylistics build upon descriptive stylistics and historical stylistics may engage the other three strains, but I have found it methodologically illuminating to separate these four aspects in order to examine their fundamental assumptions about television style and its functioning. I also believe strongly in grounding all theory in its practical application to specific texts and to that end I have selected a fairly random shot from *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*—a program known for its sound-image flair—and will discuss how descriptive, analytic and evaluative stylistic methods would approach it. Since a historical stylistic analysis would extend well beyond the province of this individual program, I have left that for another occasion.

*Descriptive Stylistics.* To discuss style, one must first be able to describe it. This would seem to be an obvious first step, but it is one that has caused much analytical and theoretical stumbling. Describing style requires the analyst to hew to a well-defined understanding of what style is and how it functions in television. Semiotics offers the most comprehensive set of tools for accomplishing the detailed description of television style. The initial formal implementation of semiotics in media studies, in the 1960s, was concerned with the larger questions of narrative form than the enunciation of that form in sound and image—as can be seen in Christian Metz’s categorization of film scenes, or syntagms, into “*la grande syntagmatique*” and his syntagm-by-syntagm analysis of the film, *Adieu Philippine*.<sup>7</sup> However, film semioticians soon zeroed in on the organization of individual shots within syntagms.<sup>8</sup> These close readings were often accomplished by putting a film print on an editor to facilitate frame-by-frame analysis and they commonly included frame enlargements when they were published in journals such as *Screen*. Raymond Bellour and Stephen Heath further illustrated their descriptions of style with tables and diagrams of camera angles and shot scales. Thus, the close semiotic analysis of film in the 1970s incorporated verbal descriptions of individual series of shots, tables that arrayed the shots into columns and rows, diagrams of camera positions and blocking, and visual “descriptions” of the shots’ composition (i.e., still frames representing the moving image).

The semiotic description of television found early application in John Fiske and John Hartley’s slim volume, *Reading Television*, in 1978.<sup>9</sup> They engage in a brief “analysis of a TV syntagm”—a five-shot segment of the documentary, *Cathy Come Home* (1966).<sup>10</sup> Without diagrams or still-image illustrations, they rely on a verbal shot list. Clearly influenced by Metz, they articulate the syntagmatic and paradigmatic structure of the program’s sign system, and attempt

to account for its “aesthetic codes”—that is, its set of conventionalized stylistic elements.<sup>11</sup> Fiske continued this work nine years later in *Television Culture*.<sup>12</sup> His detailed analyses of television texts such as Madonna’s music videos and *Miami Vice* (1984-89) do not include frame captures, but they do describe framing, camera movement, editing, and so on, in detail. As before, Fiske promotes the studying of these techniques within specific codes, which he defines as “a rule-governed system of signs, whose rules and conventions are shared amongst members of a culture, and which is used to generate and circulate meanings in and for that culture.”<sup>13</sup> Stylistic description, thus, is not just a description of techniques in individual shots. Rather, it is always a matter of placing those techniques in broader contexts. To do so, Fiske divides television’s stylistic codes into “technical codes” governing television’s image and sound techniques and “social codes,” sets of conventions of dress, hair style and the like that belong to the host culture.<sup>14</sup> Fiske does not want to be associated with an empty formalism that ignores cultural values and when he describes stylistic codes he is always alert to their cultural significance. He contends, “A textual study of television, then, involves three foci: the formal qualities of television programs [that is, their style] and their flow; the intertextual relations of television within itself, with other media, and with conversation; and the study of socially situated readers and the process of reading.”<sup>15</sup> Fiske’s last focus clearly bears the influence of cultural studies, but the first two are more comfortable within the province of semiotics.

Originally published in 1987, the same year as *Television Culture*, the *Channels of Discourse* anthology was an important milestone in television studies’ development as a discipline of critical studies—sharply distinguishing itself from quantitative, “mass-communication,” empirical approaches to the medium.<sup>16</sup> Each chapter summarizes a critical method or theory and explicates its approach to television. In Ellen Seiter’s contribution to that volume, she articulates how semiotics might benefit television studies and she does so through a close analysis of a cartoon program’s titles sequence and television coverage of the Space Shuttle *Challenger* disaster, among other examples.<sup>17</sup> Her analyses begin with a shot-by-shot description and then seek to describe the television text’s syntagmatic and paradigmatic structures, and the codes that govern them. Seiter relies upon Fiske and Hartley’s method and she draws heavily on another study that was also inspired by Fisk and Hartley: Robert Hodge and David Tripp’s *Children and Television: A Semiotic Approach*, published the year before the first edition of *Channels of Discourse*.<sup>18</sup> Hodge and Tripp “solve” the description problem with numerous shot lists and transcriptions of dialogue from *Fangface*, the children’s program they analyze in depth. They include just two, low-quality

frame captures in the book, but one senses they would have had many more had the video technology and copyright law of mid-1980s publishing supported it. In Seiter's discussion of *Children and Television*, she comments on Hodge and Tripp's analysis of *Fangface*'s first nine shots, "...it is the typical founding gesture of the semiotician to gather a small, manageable, and synchronic (contemporaneous) text or set of texts for analysis and, using the text as a basis, try to establish the conventions governing the larger system (in this case the series *Fangface* and the larger system of children's animated television)."<sup>19</sup>

Semiotics aspires to an objective system of description (and interpretation) of sign systems, although it seldom entirely achieves that goal. The desire for precision, if not necessarily objectivity, has led some media stylisticians to employ quantitative methods. Antecedents to this approach include stylometry in quantitative linguistics and literary criticism. In those fields, according to Katie Wales, "Stylometry uses statistical analyses to investigate *stylistic* patterns in order to determine authorship of texts... Linguistic features commonly examined in stylometry include word length; sentence length, connectives; collocations" (emphasis added).<sup>20</sup> Stylometry may be traced to logician Augustus de Morgan's work in 1851, but as a method of television and film analysis it has only recently become viable.<sup>21</sup> Barry Salt pioneered a statistical method and has been a (sometimes contentious) advocate for it under the banner of "practical film theory."<sup>22</sup> The work he has done attempts to measure cinematic stylistic elements by counting them and then analyzing them through statistical tests.<sup>23</sup> This process builds upon "descriptive statistics," where the measuring of a phenomenon is said to describe that phenomenon. Salt, for example, has noted the following parameters in hundreds of films and a few dozen television programs: average shot length (ASL), reverse angles, point-of-view shots, inserts, shot scale, and camera movement.<sup>24</sup> And he has done so through the painstakingly slow process of watching the films and programs on an editing machine and recording these parameters. More recent work in stylometry relies upon computer software to generate these descriptive statistics.<sup>25</sup> In screen studies this effort has been facilitated by CineMetrics and Shot Logger. In the former, Yuri Tsivian and Gunars Civjans have built a data-entry and data-display system containing shot-length and shot-scale data on hundreds of films and a few television programs.<sup>26</sup> In the latter, I have constructed data-entry software that uses video time code embedded in frame captures to automatically measure shot length and then perform some rudimentary statistical analyses (average shot length, minimum/maximum shot length, range between minimum and maximum shot lengths, and standard deviation).<sup>27</sup> Both CineMetrics and Shot Logger are online

efforts that enlist the help of volunteer stylisticians to amass a large body of data.

The following chapters frequently engage television texts in the manner of a semiotician—seeking to find the essence of style in television’s sound-image details. It is, of course, possible to get lost in television’s minutiae in this manner, but I agree with authors such as Bordwell, Thompson and Salt who contend that one must “reverse engineer” media texts in order to fully understand their style.<sup>28</sup> Thus the same attention to detail that scriptwriters, directors, cinematographers, editors, and so on, put into the *construction* of a television text must be employed in the *deconstruction* of that text. This is a lesson of film and television analysis that I learned long ago when, as an undergraduate, I was forced to perform shot-by-shot scene *découpages* in a French cinema class. Initially, I hated the assignment, but those weekly encounters with the cinema’s building blocks soon taught me a new way of seeing film, an understanding how it functions as a sign system, and an appreciation of the skills of Jean Renoir, René Clair, François Truffaut and many others. I regularly “inflict” (as I thought of it then) that assignment on my own television-studies students now. And it seldom fails to provide them with moments of insight when they suddenly realize that television is a constructed medium, right down to the smallest minutiae of its mise-en-scene.

Pedagogical exercises often demand precise descriptions of television and in television and film textbooks one finds useful attention to the details of sound-image style. Bordwell and Thompson led the way with the 1979 publication of the first edition of *Film Art: An Introduction*, which has had enormous impact on media-studies curricula and is currently in its eighth edition. A virtual manifesto for the study of style in visual media, it inspired my own more modest introduction to television studies, *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*, which was first published in 1994.<sup>29</sup> From the perspective of television stylistics, it is disappointing that the number of well-illustrated television textbooks released since the mid-1990s remains relatively small, especially when contrasted with the numerous film studies textbooks. However, it is not clear whether this is due to inherent difficulties in television stylistic pedagogy, or the simple fact that the market for television-studies books is much smaller than that for film studies. One exception to the general paucity of visually sophisticated television textbooks is Herbert Zettl’s *Sight Sound Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics*, which has been published since 1973.<sup>30</sup> Zettl has been taken to task for his sometimes idiosyncratic terminology, but there is no denying the precision with which he describes sound-image style and the pedagogical efficacy of the hundreds of illustrations in *Sight Sound Motion*.

Descriptive stylistics, in one form or another, is often the first step in an

analysis of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*. In fact, several of the essays in *Reading CSI: Crime TV Under the Microscope* do just that.<sup>31</sup> The program is commonly presumed to be highly “stylized,” to eschew classical film’s transparent style in favor of an aggressive articulation of sound and image that confronts the viewer. But how would my own brand of semiotics-inflected stylistics describe a shot selected virtually at random from the Nathan Hope-directed *CSI* episode, “Kill Me If You Can” (26 February 2009)? The first step is to “describe” the television text with a series of silent, still images (Figures 0.1-0.8). It may be tempting to claim that since video is made of 30 *still* frames per second (in the US broadcast system), that a single one of those frames accurately describes the shot, but the obvious truth is that we experience television as images *in motion*, over time, and a still image, a television *fragment*, is always going to be an approximation of that. In metonymic fashion, we are describing a phenomenon with an element of that phenomenon itself, but the fragment (a frame) and the whole (a moving-image shot, with sound) offer two very different experiences. For television scholars of the 1970s, before the advent of video on personal computers and even before the existence of consumer-grade VCRs, this visual description was arduously difficult to obtain. As Penelope Houston, a film critic from a previous generation, admitted, “The unattractive truth, of course, is...that the film, because it cannot be taken home and studied like a novel or a play, invites reactions and impressions rather than sustained analysis...”<sup>32</sup> Up until the 1990s, television stylisticians had to rely on photographs of the video image to create still frames—resulting in visual distortions, evident scan lines, and low-resolution images that did not reproduce well in print publications.<sup>33</sup> The introduction of DVD drives into personal computers—and the release of hundreds of television programs in that format—has facilitated “sustained analysis” of television and has made the acquisition of television frames quite trivial, the result of just a few key strokes. The captured image is still rather low resolution by the standards of print publications, but high-definition video is improving on that. Figures 0.1-0.8 were captured at 1280x720 pixels from an HD video of a *CSI* episode, purchased through iTunes, viewed on my computer, and captured by pressing the “PrtScn” (“print screen”) key.

**[INSERT FIGURES 0.1-0.8 HERE]**

The logistics of image capture were not the only impediment to the publication of frame captures in the 1970s and ‘80s. In the United States and other countries with restrictive intellectual property laws, the publication of frame captures was in a legal grey area. Was this copyright infringement or was it “fair use”? Once again, it was Thompson who took a leadership role that went beyond

*Film Art's* bold use of film frame enlargements. In 1993, she chaired a committee of the Society for Cinema Studies (since renamed the Society for Cinema and Media Studies) that studied the "Fair Usage Publication of Film Stills" and published a report in *Cinema Journal* that advocated for authors to claim fair use of stills in books, and, moreover, to not even request permission from copyright holders.<sup>34</sup> Her report emboldened many authors and publishers to rely on fair use in their publication of stylistic analyses of television and film. Any author who has published television stylistic analyses before the 1990s has his or her own copyright horror story and there are still occasional problems that arise, but fair use and its advocates have largely eliminated them, thus paving the way for visual stylistic descriptions.<sup>35</sup> Obviously, *Television Style* benefits from the frequent use of frame captures.

If I were doing a stylistic analysis of *CSI*, my description of this shot would depend upon the context of my analysis and the interpretation I was pursuing. I could describe the shot's short depth of field and the five rack focuses. Or I might emphasize Hope's use of a mobile frame and off/on-screen space in Figure 0.4, which conceals the entrance of Dr. Raymond Langston (Laurence Fishburne), just as his entrance is initially unnoticed by lab technician Wendy Glenn (Darcy Farrell). In regards to mise-en-scene, I could remark on the crime lab's relatively low-key lighting, which seems unusual for a setting in which small pieces of evidence are being visually examined. Shot length is also an aspect of style, of the program's visual rhythm, and I could rely on statistical data to contextualize the shot's 24-second length. Table 0.1 arrays data on the average shot length of nine *CSI* episodes. The main, post-credits segment of "Kill Me If You Can" clocks in at a 3.3 ASL. The other eight episodes in Table 0.1 are from the first season of the show and none of them contain ASLs under 3.5. The longest shot in this episode is 39 seconds and the longest of all the episodes is 44 seconds. The length of shots may be graphed through Cinematics' system, which in the case of this *CSI* episode results in the graph found in Figure 0.9. In the graph, each shot is represented by a vertical line. The x-axis legend displays the time at which the shot begins and the y-axis indicates the length of each shot, with zero at the top and 20 seconds at the bottom (allowing some longer shots to extend beyond this limit). The shot analyzed here occurs between 5:19 and 7:24 on the x axis. It stands out because it is the only shot longer than 20 seconds in the first 28 minutes of the episode. A trend line is automatically drawn horizontally across the graph, bumping downward toward the end of the episode as the shots get longer. The graph thus visually describes the episodes editing rhythms, allowing the researcher to note editing patterns. Of course, descriptive stylistics

must not limit itself to the visuals components. It must also account for sound design. In this shot (and most of this scene), the sound is relatively barren—only sync dialogue and no music, diegetic or non-diegetic. Such quiet scenes contrast with the distinctive sound effect that signals *CSI*'s ratiocinative flashbacks.

**[INSERT TABLE 0.1 HERE] [INSERT FIGURE 0.9 HERE]**

My description of this shot's style engages terms borrowed from television production practices. Depth of field, rack focus, and low-key lighting were not invented by semioticians to describe stylistic features—as the term “syntagm,” for instance, was coined to refer to the smallest narrative unit. Rather, they are terms that depend upon knowledge of how those shots were created. It is here that the reverse engineering aspect of stylistic analysis becomes obvious. The stylistician must tap into the production culture of a particular time in order to understand stylistic conventions and thus it is reasonable that we, as stylisticians, employ terms rooted in that culture. However, we should not allow production culture to dictate our vocabulary either. Just because most television producers do not use the term, “mise-en-scene,” does not mean that it is an unproductive analytical concept. Stylistic description incorporates a hybrid terminology, part industry jargon and part scholarly neologisms.

As should be obvious from my attempt to limit myself to descriptive stylistics, I cannot truly do so without straying into interpretation. Formal features become salient based on the end goal of an analysis. Description initiates interpretation. If not, then descriptions would have to account for every pixel of every frame—clearly an impossible task and one which would generate unreadable exegeses. A description of a television show should not replicate that show. It should, obviously enough, only serve to further the analysis.

*Analytic Stylistics.* Analyses of style in television depend upon explicit or implicit assumptions about style's purpose and function in the text. The stylistician's job then becomes deconstructing how style fulfills that function. To do so, the stylistician examines the workings of style within the textual system—seeking patterns of stylistic elements and, on a higher level, the relationships among those patterns themselves. The overall form of a television program depends on how shots relate to one another, on how the lighting style of shot A relates to that of shot B, on the juxtaposition of a musical theme with a particular image, on short shots being contrasted with long shots, and on and on. In my emphasis on function, am echoing Noël Carroll's “functional theory of style” in the cinema. Using “style” and “form” interchangeably, he contends,

According to the functional account of film form, *the form* [or style] *of an*

*individual film is the ensemble of choices intended to realize the point or the purpose of the film.* This approach to film form is different from the descriptive account. The descriptive account says that the form of the film is the sum total of *all* the relations between the elements of the film. The functional account says that film form comprises *only* the elements and relations intended to serve as the means to the end of the film.<sup>36</sup>

Carroll here helpfully distinguishes his approach from descriptive stylistics and identifies a useful way for thinking about television stylistics. Most analytical stylistics of television presume style serves one or more functions (“means”) to the end of a television program. Certainly, all of the essays in this volume do. Thus, to best understand analytic stylistics we must define style’s functions in television.

In *Figures Traced in Light*, Bordwell outlines film style’s “four broad functions.”<sup>37</sup> I will begin with his four functions, but television style has additional functions unique to the medium that must be addressed. Television stylisticians have contended that style can:

1. Denote
2. Express
3. Symbolize
4. Decorate
5. Persuade
6. Hail or interpellate
7. Differentiate
8. Signify liveness

Each chapter in *Television Style* investigates aspects of style’s function in more detail, but a few summary comments are in order here.

First, Bordwell suggests that the denotative function of film style controls “the description of settings and characters, the account given of their motives, the presentation of dialogue and movement.”<sup>38</sup> This is style at its most fundamental, the level at which semiotic analysis begins. If I discuss how my sample *CSI* shot uses rack focuses to reveal and conceal narratively significant objects, then I am breaking down a stylistic element’s denotative function. Textbooks such as *Sight Sound Motion* often stress this basic function of style.

Bordwell’s second style function, its expressive quality, refers to the emotions that a film’s style displays and those that it elicits in the viewer: “We can distinguish between style *presenting* feelingful qualities (‘The shot exudes sadness’) and *causing* feelings in the perceiver (‘The shot makes me sad’).”<sup>39</sup> The former, to which he limits himself in most of his work, “can be carried by light,

color, performances, music, and certain camera movements...”<sup>40</sup> Television stylisticians might occasionally discuss “feelingful qualities,” but the more systematic interpretation of this sense of expression is to be found in *quantitative* empirical research into the feelings caused by television’s “formal features,” as style is commonly referred to in this context. Numerous empirical studies of style view it principally as a stimulus, as a factor that provokes emotions or actions, heightens/decreases attention, has an impact on cognition or otherwise affects its “subjects.”<sup>41</sup> One empirical study, for example, examines the effect that voiceover narration has on viewer comprehension of television news.<sup>42</sup> A group of subjects was shown a news story with narration that redundantly explained the images. Another group was shown a story where the sound was kept the same, but the shots were reordered—thus eliminating redundancy of sound and image and altering the style or formal features of the video. Then both groups were given some tests to gauge their recall of audio information and other factors and the results were then quantified. This study’s hypotheses revolve around the effect of this stylistic change on the subjects’ cognitive processing. Other research in this same vein finds psychophysiological methods for quantifying the emotional impact of formal features—tracking heart rate, skin conductance, facial electromyography (EMG), and so on.<sup>43</sup>

The third function of style Bordwell explicates is its ability to “yield more abstract, conceptual meanings.”<sup>44</sup> The set design of our *CSI* shot is typical of the program: the technician works in a room surrounded by glass, revealing other offices surrounding her. In Karen Lury’s *CSI* study, she makes a case for specific themes associated with this mise-en-scene: “This sense of both depth and transparency at a visual level neatly echoes the push towards ‘transparency’ and truth in the crime-solving narrative.”<sup>45</sup> Visual transparency in the style thus becomes a metaphor for ratiocinative clarity.

Bordwell’s final style function, decoration, deserves a bit more extensive exploration than the first three, because, in television stylistics, some grand claims have been made for decorative style. “Decoration,” Bordwell writes, “Asks us to apprehend the sheer pattern-making possibilities of the medium.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, this is style for style’s sake. It does not denote, express, or symbolize anything other than style itself. The decorative function of style has gone by many names: parametric narration, mannerism, the picture effect, excessive style, and so on. Television stylisticians have often asserted the radical or postmodern effect of television style such as this that does not labor on behalf of the narrative or theme. In the picture effect, John Caldwell finds the essential basis of “televisuality” in 1980s television. He declares, in enthusiastic italics, “*The new television does not*

*depend upon the reality effect or the fiction effect, but upon the picture effect.*"<sup>47</sup>

In similarly fervent prose, Fiske proclaims, "Images are neither the bearers of ideology, nor the representations of the real, but what [Jean] Baudrillard calls 'the hyperreal': the television image, the advertisement, the pop song becomes more 'real' than 'reality,' their sensuous imperative is so strong that they *are* our experience, they are our pleasure."<sup>48</sup> He makes this claim in a chapter on *Miami Vice* and has even stronger words for style in Madonna's music videos: "Style is a recycling of images that wrenches them out of the original context that enabled them to make sense and reduces them to free-floating signifiers whose only signification is that they are free, outside the control of the normal sense and sense-making, and thus able to enter the world of pleasure where their materiality can work directly on the sensual eye, running the boundary between culture and nature, between ideology and its absence."<sup>49</sup> Fiske's approach to style draws upon Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of carnival: "In the postmodern world, style performs many of the functions of carnival. It is essentially liberating, acting as an empowering language for the subordinate."<sup>50</sup> Viewing *Miami Vice* and Madonna's 1980s video work today, it may be difficult to see their liberating, empowering, free-floating signifiers. Those television texts have been rendered virtually quaint in contrast to the stylistic exhibitionism of programs such as *CSI* whose "sensuous imperative" is far more extreme. Still, Caldwell's and Fiske's efforts were some of the very few to address television style at a time (the 1980s) when the medium was presumed to have none. They cleared the way for studies of programs with very distinctive styles. Indeed, it's quite easy to get lost in the visual and sound "ornamentation" that *CSI* offers and which is evident even in Figures 0.1-0.8.

Bordwell's four functions of style are well suited to much of television analysis, but his focus on narrative cinema means that he is less interested in documentary or propaganda film. Television, however, is laced with propaganda, with persuasive material in the form of editorials, sports commentaries, and, of course, commercials. Style is an essential part of commercials' persuasive efforts and commercials have, due to their short length, more carefully crafted sound-image style than any 30- or 60-minute program. Surprisingly little has been invested in the analysis of the persuasive function of style in television commercials—if you discount the massive amount of proprietary marketing research (focus groups and the like) done by advertisers regarding their own products. Chapter 3, on style and the television commercial, attempts to redress this neglect with a consideration of how television style persuades. In this effort, I draw upon an account of visual style in print advertising by Paul Messaris who identifies many of the stylistic methods that an image may use to convince us to

buy a product.<sup>51</sup>

Also discussed in Chapter 3 is television style's hailing function, but this function underpins virtually all of the chapters. The larger concept of hailing finds its genesis in Louis Althusser's theory of ideology and the subject: "[A]ll ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects...."<sup>52</sup> Hailing is the process by which a society's ideology calls out, "Hey, you!," and encourages you to become one of its subjects. Television during the network era was clearly an hegemonic instrument of dominant ideology, interpellating television's subjects—although cracks and fissures were always possible in that edifice.<sup>53</sup> Style participated in this interpellation as the device through which the hailing was accomplished, but it also hailed viewers in a narrower sense—calling to them to watch the television flow (stopping other household activities) and entreating them not to interrupt the flow by changing to one of the three or four other channels. This specific hailing function is moot in the cinema, where spectators have purchased a ticket and already decided to devote their attention to the illuminated screen displayed in the darkened theater. Further, even though television is no longer dominated by three networks, it still relies heavily on hailing, particularly since viewers' attention is being pulled in so many more directions. The age of convergence is also one of divergence and distraction. Distinctive style is a significant weapon used by television practitioners to combat the distraction factor of the modern mediascape.

Sound style, in particular, is an invaluable stimulus for pulling viewers to the television flow.<sup>54</sup> *CSI*, for instance, uses a distinctive sound cue to signal a flashback when the investigators theorize about how a crime happened. The shot I selected above is relatively quiet (dialogue only, no nondiegetic music), as is typical of much of the program. The visual style of this shot—with its complicated camera movement and rack focuses—serves a subtle hailing function, too. It demands a sustained gaze at the image. The narrative information of that shot (a missing pottery piece) is conveyed through this articulation of the visuals. To get that information, you *must* be paying attention—not looking at email or playing *World of Warcraft* while you are watching *CSI*. The program rewards the sustained gaze, as do visually sophisticated programs such as *Miami Vice*, *ER*, and single-camera sitcoms—the subjects of Chapters 2, 4, and 5, respectively.

Once a viewer has been hailed, been enticed to view a particular program, style is then used to help differentiate brand identities. As discussed in Chapter 4, when *ER* debuted, it needed a way to distinguish itself from other hospital dramas, particularly *Chicago Hope*, which debuted in the same season and was

programmed in the same time slot. *ER*'s solution for brand differentiation was part narrative form and actor performance, of course, but it also depended upon an aggressive use of the Steadicam (one of the first television programs to do so) and four-walled sets to achieve a swirling, dizzying style of camera movement that effectively echoed the hectic life in the emergency room. Thus, the same premise necessary to differentiate Coke from Pepsi also obtains in television programs. *CSI* clearly illustrates the power of branding as its producer, Jerry Bruckheimer, has been able to use the program's style to stand out from other contemporary crime dramas and to develop a profitable *CSI* franchise: three television programs (*CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* [2000–], *CSI: Miami* [2002–], and *CSI: NY* [2004–]), graphic novels, and several video games, among other merchandise.

The final function of style, to signify liveness, returns us to the beginning of this introduction. If we accept Stephen Heath, Gillian Skirrow, and others' contention that viewers perceive television as live, then we must look to television style for the signifiers of that liveness. Aside from the occasional declaration of liveness ("Live, from New York! It's Saturday Night!"), it is stylistic elements such as haphazard framing and "bad" audio recording that convey a strong sense of liveness. This can be observed most clearly in genres that were once live and could be again, such as the case study of the soap opera in Chapter 1. As I note at this essay's beginning, some critics interpret this "clumsy" articulation of sound-image techniques as emblematic of a *lack* of "style," or as zero-degree style. I prefer to think of it as a set or code of conventionalized techniques that have come to represent liveness, but could be used in broadcasts that are not actually live. Soap operas are recorded "live-on-tape" and come by this code "naturally," but mockumentaries such as *The Office* can be coded as "spontaneous" without actually employing modes of production that are "live" or "live-on-tape." The stylistic signifiers of spontaneity and liveness have become so familiar to viewers that they read the text as live even when it is not. This code of liveness is as significant a style as Nathan Hope's rendering of a *CSI* script. Throughout *Television Style*, I advocate for an understanding of style as *any* patterning of sound-image technique that serves a function within the television text. I thereby reject the definition of style as the mark of the individual genius on a text (although certainly geniuses create elements of television) or as a flourish somehow layered on top of the narrative (although some style is decorative). A program does not need geniuses or flourishes in order to possess style. Axiomatic to every essay in this book is that *all television texts contain style*. Style is their texture, their surface, the web that holds together their signifiers and through which their signifieds are communicated.

*Evaluative Stylistics.* As may be gleaned from my passion for zero-degree style, I am more eager to describe and analyze style than I am to evaluate it. And television studies, in general, has not developed a coherent method for evaluating TV as a medium or style as a portion of it. What efforts there have been in this area have engaged with an evaluative aesthetics, with aesthetic *judgment*. Of course, “aesthetics” has a very long and complicated history within various philosophical and art historical traditions. One must consequently be very clear about its meaning. Within television studies the term can be used in a nonjudgmental manner, as we have already seen with Fiske and Hartley’s investigation of “aesthetic codes.” In this sense, “aesthetic” means elements of image-sound style and “codes” refers to sets of image-sound conventions. Fiske and Hartley are not evaluating or judging those codes. They are only describing and analyzing them. More recently, however, a strain of television studies has evolved that does propose aesthetic evaluation of the medium. Christine Geraghty is one television scholar who advocates for the aesthetic judgment of television, but she acknowledges that this will be an uphill battle. She neatly summarizes several reasons for the neglect of aesthetic judgment within television studies:

...the impact of semiotics on the genesis of media studies with its pseudo-scientific claims about objectivity; the impact of postmodernism with its emphasis on diversity, decentering and play; the need to establish popular culture and television, in particular, as worthy of study that involved refusing the traditional modes of judgment; the impact of feminist work, with its demand that certain kinds of denigrated fictions should be treated seriously; the notion, coming rather differently from [Michel] Foucault and [Pierre] Bourdieu, that to make aesthetic judgments was to impose the cultural norms of the powerful.<sup>55</sup>

To these reasons, we might add Jason Jacobs’s observation regarding an unwarranted prejudice against television style: “The continued sense that the television text is mostly inferior to the film text and cannot withstand concentrated critical pressure because it lacks ‘symbolic density’, rich mise-en-scene, and the promotion of identification as a means of securing audience proximity, has to be revised in the light of contemporary television.”<sup>56</sup> Jacobs clarifies that television might indeed have been “textually anaemic” in the decades before the 1980s, but that stylistically lavish, even excessive, programs have been developing since then.<sup>57</sup> He contends such programs reward close textual analysis. I would certainly agree and argue in Chapter 2 that *Miami Vice* led the charge toward lavish style that was followed across several genres and networks by programs such as *Homicide: Life on the Street* (1993-9), *Ally McBeal*

(1997-2002), *The Sopranos* (1999-2007), *Arrested Development* (2003-6), *Deadwood* (2004-6), and, of course, the test case for this introduction, *CSI* (2000-). Another voice within television studies that has called for aesthetic evaluation is Greg Smith. In *Beautiful TV: The Art and Argument of Ally McBeal* he ponders why “it is acceptable to do a book-length aesthetic analysis of a film, but to analyze a television series on primarily aesthetic and narrative terms is a radical notion.”<sup>58</sup>

These authors make persuasive cases for the aesthetic judgment of television, but they are less persuasive about how such judgment would proceed. Smith states the aesthetic principle underpinning his analysis: “The concept of beauty that emerges from this book is a fairly old-fashioned one: a cohesive system in which elegant, innovative formal technique serves to convey a unified, complex argument suitable for moral and ethical insight.”<sup>59</sup> And *Beautiful TV* does engage intelligently with *Ally McBeal*’s complex narrative system and its moral/ethical thematic structure, describing how ground-breaking stylistic techniques convey them.<sup>60</sup> However, the bulk of his book’s exegesis is *descriptive* and *analytical*, not *evaluative* or *judgmental*. Further, Smith recognizes that his intentionally provocative, “old-fashioned” aesthetic can be a worrisome one: “By calling this show ‘beautiful,’ I am not saying that elegance and complexity are the only qualities that can constitute beauty, world without end, amen. I am saying that at a moment when television is widely frowned upon as a denigrated object, using these old-fashioned words can help us to see television more clearly.... In arguing for the art and argument of a quite silly (and often annoying) television series, I want to reclaim our ability to talk openly, unashamedly, unironically, and rigorously about television as a beautiful object.”<sup>61</sup> In sum, Smith is using aesthetic judgment as a justification for his chosen object of study, but aside from using some descriptive words with evaluative connotations—such as “elegant,” “complex,” and “innovative”—he does not focus on the beauty of *Ally McBeal* in the main part of his analysis.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Geraghty’s and Jacobs’s analyses fall predominantly into the descriptive and analytic stylistics categories I have discussed above. Geraghty summarizes her approach thus: “I am not suggesting that aesthetic or quality norms should be imposed without discussion of their provenance but that textual work provides the possibility of engagement with such issues through an approach that emphasizes *analytic description* and evaluative discussion across a range of programmes”<sup>63</sup> (emphasis added). To date, television aestheticians have not systematically defined the medium’s aesthetic norms of evaluation. Rather, those norms have been composed of problematic, ideologically loaded terms such as “elegance,” “complexity,” “organic unity,”

“expressiveness,” “uniqueness,” “artistic vision,” and so on. If television studies is to develop a method of aesthetic judgment, then it will need to be one quite distinct from antecedent norms found in art history, literature, music, and even the cinema.

The search for beauty in television has led some scholars to import the debunked auteur theory into television studies from film studies. *CSI* receives this treatment in Sue Turnbull’s essay on “The Hook and the Look: *CSI* and the Aesthetics of the Television Crime Series.”<sup>64</sup> For her, what makes *CSI* a good program is its auteurist lineage from director Danny Cannon to Michael Mann. *CSI* creator/producer Bruckheimer had worked with Mann on the feature films, *Thief* (1981) and *Manhunter* (1986), during the time of *Miami Vice* (1984-1990). Bruckheimer hired Cannon and instructed him to get that “cinematic look,” in general, and to emulate Mann’s style, in particular.<sup>65</sup> Turnbull thus relies on the unexamined evaluative criteria that, first, cinematic style is superior to television style and, second, that style is good when it is the expression of the auteur’s vision. Chapter 2 of this volume devotes much of its discussion of *Miami Vice* to identifying cinematic style and examining its crossover into television. However, I do not share Turnbull’s aesthetic hierarchy or her emphasis on the auteur. Auteurs do exist in television—Paul Henning and Joss Whedon come to mind—but their “vision” is not necessary to make a program good. Much like a medieval cathedral, beautiful television may be the product of dozens of workers’ efforts. A Byronic auteur need not be at the helm. One final reason to avoid auteurist aesthetics is that auteurism has an amorphous sense of the beautiful. Individual authors more often describe or point to a beautiful moment instead of explaining why it is beautiful. The result is mysticism.<sup>66</sup> Andrew Sarris, in the 1962 essay largely responsible for importing the auteur theory to U.S. film criticism, argues that the marks of true auteurs are in their aesthetic implementations of style—“close to what Astruc defines as *mise-en-scène*, but not quite.”<sup>67</sup> Sarris avers that Jean Renoir qualifies as an auteur and, as proof, refers the reader to a tiny moment from *Rules of the Game*:

...Renoir gallops up the stairs, turns to his right with a lurching movement, stops in hop-like uncertainty when his name is called by a coquettish maid [Figure 0.10], and, then, with marvelous postreflex continuity, resumes his bearishly shambling journey to the heroine’s boudoir. If I could describe the musical grace note of that momentary suspension, *and I can’t*, I might be able to provide a more precise definition of the auteur theory. As it is, all I can do is point at *the specific beauties* of interior meaning on the screen and, later, *catalogue the moments of recognition* (emphasis

added).<sup>68</sup>

Much auteurist writing on film and television presumes this “you recognize it or you don’t” attitude toward beauty and style. It is less aesthetic analysis than it is elitism.

**[INSERT FIGURE 0.10 HERE]**

Aesthetic evaluation of *CSI* could point to the elaborate camera movement that Nathan Hope staged in our test-case shot and demand the reader accept the labeling of it as television beauty and Hope as an auteur even though he has mostly worked as a cinematographer, with very few directing credits aside from *CSI*. The aesthetician could also argue for this shot’s elegance and complexity, as Smith does for style in *Ally McBeal*. But, to some, camera movement is overused in “beautiful” programs such as *CSI*, *ER* and *The West Wing*. For such a critic, this moment is anything but beautiful.

Until television studies develops an aesthetic system that goes beyond taste and dominant culture norms, we must admit that semiotics, postmodernism, cultural studies, feminism, Foucault and Bourdieu (remembering Geraghty’s list) are correct to caution us about the hazards of television evaluation, especially if it portends a return to auteurism. “Can we have a television aesthetic, and do we want one?” asks Charlotte Brunson pointedly.<sup>69</sup> Her answer is mostly negative: “An aesthetic of television would thus, in some ways, have to be an anti-aesthetic to be adequate to its object and the practices constituting it. Engaging with the popular, the domestic, and the functional, it [television] undercuts the very constitution of classical aesthetic judgment.”<sup>70</sup>

*Historical Stylistics.* Several chapters in this book place individual programs into larger contexts of television-style history. Most notably, Chapter 4 unpacks the layers of media texts that converged on *ER* in the mid-1990s and Chapter 5 discusses the resurrection, through stylistic innovation, of the sitcom in the 2000s. My fundamental approach to television-style history is that style exists at the intersection of economics, technology, industry standards, and semiotic/aesthetic codes; and each of these elements has their own, semi-independent history. To pick an illustrative example: the technology for the zoom shot was introduced to the cinema in the 1930s. Early television cameras, however, had turret lens, not zooms, although zoom lenses became standard in TV studios in the 1960s. Consequently, studio-based programs of the 1940s and ‘50s have few zoom shots. The TV industry of the late 1960s and ‘70s, however, came to rely on zoom lenses for efficient, inexpensive shooting of soap operas, game shows, talk shows, sports programs, and the like—an economic decision. But the choice of ending a soap

opera scene with a zoom-in on a character has no economic, technological or industrial imperative. It draws purely on semiotic codes of narrative signification.

In media studies, the most methodical historical stylistician is doubtless David Bordwell. *Poetics of Cinema* (2008) is the result of his most recent labor in the cinepoetics vineyards, but twenty years earlier, in *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (1988), Bordwell establishes that “‘Poetics’ refers to the study of how films are put together and how, in determinate contexts, they elicit particular effects.”<sup>71</sup> He later clarifies that poetics extends beyond stylistics to include “thematics” and “large-scale form” and that stylistics, in particular, “deals with the materials and patterning of the medium as components of the constructive process.”<sup>72</sup> Poetics is thus no “mere” formalism. Rather, it approaches style as the physical manifestation of theme and narrative, in the case of fiction film. And these elements are always culturally situated. In Bordwell’s words, “A narrative film exhibits a total form consisting of materials—subject matter, themes—shaped and transformed by overall composition (e.g., narrative structure, narrational logic) and stylistic patterning.”<sup>73</sup> Also, Bordwell brings to the analytical table a knowledge of cognitive psychology, which undergirds his understanding of style’s effects on viewers.

To comprehend how Bordwell’s poetics approaches the history of style, it is worth quoting *Figures Traced in Light* at some length:

I propose that we can fruitfully analyze and explain the historical dynamic of film style by inferring, *on the basis of the films and what we know about their making*, some pertinent craft traditions. The *traditions preserve favored practices*, practices that are the result of choices among alternatives. In choosing, filmmakers exercise their skill and judgment, thereby replicating, revising, or rejecting options supplied by their predecessors and peers (emphasis added).<sup>74</sup>

Bordwell conceptualizes craft practices as standardized routines that guide practitioners as they make films. He gathers these routines together into sets or schemas, a concept he appropriates from the work of art historian E. H. Gombrich.<sup>75</sup> Bordwell explains, “Schemas are bare-bone, routinized devices that solve perennial problems.”<sup>76</sup> Individual practitioners can follow, modify or reject these routines, but these routines remain “favored” or, shall we say, generally dominant within specific film cultures at specific times, or within specific genres or movements or modes of production. The schemas comprise the flexible rules of filmmaking, the ever-changing grammar of image-sound signification. On his understanding of the function of schemas—as providing solutions to problems—Bordwell builds his theory of the history of film style, which he refers

to as the “problem/solution model.”<sup>77</sup> Film practitioners are faced with common problems—for example, how to position actors on a stage to best communicate narrative information.<sup>78</sup> During certain time periods, in certain countries using certain modes of production, this problem *tends to be* solved in specific ways by certain practitioners—e.g., having the actors stand in a line perpendicular to the camera, as was often done in the early 1900s. But that solution to the problem is no longer the norm and so the cinepoetician must ask, “How have the norms altered or maintained across history? What factors have promoted stability as well as change?”<sup>79</sup> Colin Burnett accurately sums Bordwell’s model: “Problem-solving is cast as a motor of short- and long-term historical development—a logic that describes the nature of practical filmic creativity, links the problems faced by filmmakers working in different contexts, and ultimately drives the history of the art.”<sup>80</sup>

I have gone into Bordwell’s historical cinepoetics in significant detail because the overarching project of *Television Style* is to begin the process of building a television poetics, a telepoetics, if you will. The reader will note traces of Bordwell’s approach throughout the following chapters. Particularly fruitful to the study of television style is the notion of schemas, which enable the researcher to characterize accurately the stylistic traits of certain modes of production (e.g., in-studio multiple-camera production of situation comedies) and discuss their functions and significance. Bordwell’s problem/solution model of stylistic history also underpins certain *Television Style* analyses—such as my consideration of how single-camera situation comedies found different solutions to the problems of narrative and humor presentation than those of the multiple-camera norm. Moreover, I am not alone in my incorporation of Bordwell’s methods in the analysis of television. Jason Mittell decries the fact that “the formal attributes of television texts have been given little scholarly attention.”<sup>81</sup> He advocates Bordwell’s approach and contends, “By looking at *Dragnet* via a historical poetic analysis to examine how cultural meanings and assumptions were encoded in the program, we can see how these textual elements fit into larger cultural and generic categories.”<sup>82</sup>

### Articles of Faith

“Style is not simply window-dressing draped over a script; it is the very flesh of the work.”<sup>83</sup>

—David Bordwell

The chapters that follow are built on two axioms, two virtual articles of faith:

Television style exists.

Television style is significant.

I begin *Television Style* by making the case for style's existence in a television genre often presumed to have none, the lowly soap opera. In Chapter 1 "Television and Zero-Degree Style," the schema governing the soap opera is articulated and its signification of liveness, among other meanings, is explicated. Chapter 2 "Stylistic Crossover in the Network Era: From Film to Television" continues the consideration of stylistic genre schemas in television by examining the impact of an aggressively stylized film genre, the film noir, upon a television program, *Miami Vice*. It is here that we will first encounter Caldwell's notion of the "televisual," of the medium's "visual exhibitionism," which also twines through Chapter 3 "The Persuasive Power of Style."<sup>84</sup> The televisual is a significant stylistic device used by advertisers to convince us to consume conspicuously, but it is not the only one. This chapter documents seven other stylistic techniques in their arsenal, all of which serve the stylistic function of interpellation.

To my axiom, "television style exists," I should add a short corollary: *Television* exists. As I write this introduction in spring 2009, there are signs too numerous to discuss that the network-television era is coming to a close. For some, this signals an end to television itself, but the reality of the matter is complex. Television will continue to exist in some form or another for the foreseeable future. Chapter 4 "Style in an Age of Media Convergence" tries to make some sense of the collision of old media and new media—both with their own stylistic schemas—by examining an example of failed convergence. The online efforts of *ER* in the 1990s illustrate how *not* to leverage an old-media property into the new media, but they also provide an illuminating example of how television style must adapt to new-media exigencies. *Television Style*'s final chapter, "Televisuality and the Resurrection of the Sitcom in the 2000s" is yet another genre study, the mirror image of the first chapter on the soap opera. However, where the soap opera has been denigrated as being bereft of style, the single-camera sitcom of the early 2000s was often chided for having "too much" style, for using style as a gimmick or unnecessary visual flourish. It seems fitting, therefore, to close on a genre on the opposite end of the stylistic hierarchy.

From the style-less to the style-full, from attenuated style to the televisual, these essays weave together the core issues in television stylistics. They incorporate a method that blends close semiotic description with articulations of

stylistic schemas that are the result of problem-solving by television practitioners whose craft practices are governed by technological, economic, and aesthetic/cultural systems. My project in each chapter is to understand how style functions in a specific television text—a genre, a program, an online version of a show, a commercial, a particular practitioner’s work, and so on. My larger goal is to begin the work of a television poetics and to advocate for greater attention to style in future television studies. We can no longer use Penelope Houston’s excuse that our texts cannot be examined as closely as a novel or a play because we cannot take them home to study. Not only can we study, in extremely detailed fashion, the television text from the comfort of our computer screens, but we can visually “describe” that text with frames easily captured from the flow of images. The digital age has provided all the necessary tools for a renaissance in image-sound analysis. We need only dare to look closely at television.

### Endnotes

1. Rudolf Arnheim, “A Forecast of Television,” in *Film as Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 194.
2. One early television-studies essay that emphasizes television’s immediacy is Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow, “Television, a World in Action,” *Screen* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1977): 7-59.
3. André Bazin, “Will CinemaScope Save the Film Industry?,” in *Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Reviews from the Forties and Fifties*, trans. Alain Piette and Bert Cardullo, ed. Bert Cardullo (New York: Routledge, 1997), 80.
4. David Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008); David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
5. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill, eds., *The Television Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004) runs 629 pages, but does not include a single essay on style or a single image to illustrate stylistic analysis.
6. David Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 32.

7. Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Among the essays in this collection is “The Cinema: Language or Language System,” originally published as “*Le cinéma: langue ou langage?*” in *Communications* 4 (1964) and commonly regarded as the first major article about film semiotics.

8. Several of Bellour’s essays have been compiled in *The Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000). One of Heath’s earliest close readings is “Film and System: Terms of Analysis, Part I” *Screen* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1975), 7-77; and “Film and System: Terms of Analysis, Part II” *Screen* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1975), 91-113.

9. John Fiske and John Hartley, *Reading Television* (New York: Methuen, 1978). The authors provide an annotated bibliography of “semiotic/textual analyses of television,” 205-8.

10. *Ibid.*, 55-58.

11. *Ibid.*, 61-3.

12. John Fiske, *Television Culture* (New York: Methuen, 1987).

13. *Ibid.*, 4.

14. *Ibid.*, 5.

15. *Ibid.*, 16.

16. Robert C. Allen, ed., *Channels of Discourse: Television and Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Routledge, 1987). A second edition, *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, was released five years later, but there have been no further editions. Consequently, its claim to “contemporary” criticism is becoming increasingly dated.

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19. Seiter, 50-51.
20. Katie Wales, *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (New York: Longman, 1989), 439.
21. David I. Holmes, "The Evolution of Stylometry in Humanities Scholarship," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 13, no. 3 (1998): 112.
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23. Thomas Elsaesser and Warren Buckland gloss the statistical style analysis of the cinema in *Studying Contemporary American Film: A Guide to Movie Analysis* (London: Arnold, 2002), 102-16.
24. A sample of these data is displayed on the CineMetrics Website. "Barry Salt's Database," CineMetrics, <http://www.cinemetrics.lv/saltdb.php> (accessed 31 March 2009).
25. According to Holmes, "The growing power of the computer and the ready availability of machine-readable texts are now transforming modern stylometry..." in humanities scholarship. Holmes, 111.
26. "CineMetrics Database," CineMetrics, <http://www.cinemetrics.lv/database.php> (accessed 8 March 2009).
27. Jeremy Butler, "Shot Logger," <http://www.shotlogger.org/> (accessed 12 March 2008).
28. The phrase is used in Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light*, 250; but the general concept underpins other stylisticians' approaches. There may be concerns that reverse engineering risks returning to the intentional fallacy. Bordwell responds, "This framework does not claim access to intentions as mental episodes, only to intentions as posited sources of patterns of action. Again, we reverse-engineer" (257).
29. Jeremy G. Butler, *Television: Critical Methods and Applications*, 3rd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007).
30. Herbert Zettl, *Sight Sound Motion: Applied Media Aesthetics* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1973). Now in its fifth edition.

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32. Penelope Houston, "The Critical Question," *Sight and Sound* 29, no. 4 (Autumn 1960): 164.
33. *Channels of Discourse* suffers from this problem. See, e.g., p. 227.
34. Kristin Thompson, "Report of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Society For Cinema Studies, 'Fair Usage Publication of Film Stills,'" Society for Cinema and Media Studies,  
[http://www.cmstudies.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=60&Itemid=110](http://www.cmstudies.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=60&Itemid=110) (accessed 12 March 2009). See also, Kristin Thompson, "Fair Is Still Fair, And More So," David Bordwell's Website on Cinema, 23 April 2008, <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/?p=2127> (accessed 12 March 2009).
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37. Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light*, 33-4.
38. *Ibid.*, 33.
39. *Ibid.*, 34.
40. *Ibid.*

41. See, for example, Elizabeth M. Perse, *Media Effects and Society* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001), 146-8; and Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass, "Media and Form," in *The Media Equation: How People Treat Computers, Television, and New Media Like Real People and Places* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 193-247.
42. Shuhua Zhou, "Effects of Visual Intensity and Audiovisual Redundancy in Bad News," *Media Psychology* 6 (2004): 237-56.
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44. Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light*, 34.
45. Karen Lury, *Interpreting Television* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), 47.
46. Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light*, 34.
47. John Thornton Caldwell, *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 152.
48. Fiske, 260.
49. *Ibid.*, 250.
50. *Ibid.*, 249.
51. Paul Messaris, *Visual Persuasion: The Role of Images in Advertising* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997).
52. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), 174, <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>, Louis Althusser Archive (accessed June 12, 2008.)

53. A significant body of work in film studies has been devoted to understanding how style might signify ideological undercurrents in 1950s melodrama. The key to this notion is the principle of irony, which has not found extensive application in television studies.
54. Rick Altman explicates six functions of television sound style in "Television Sound," in *Television: The Critical View*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Horace Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 566-584.
55. Christine Geraghty, "Aesthetics and Quality in Popular Television Drama," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 25 (2003): 26, 27.
56. Jason Jacobs, "Issues of judgement and value in television studies," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 4, no. 4 (December 2001): 433.
57. *Ibid.*, 434.
58. Greg M. Smith, *Beautiful TV: The Art and Argument of Ally McBeal* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2007), 4.
59. *Ibid.*, 197.
60. Smith relies on Russian Formalist methods ("devices," "functions") to describe and analyze style. *Ibid.*, 9.
61. *Ibid.*, 197.
62. According to Google Book Search, "beauty" is used only five times in reference to *Ally McBeal*, the program, in *Beautiful TV*. Of course, "beautiful" turns up many more times as it is in the title of the book. "Preview This Book," *Beautiful TV*, Google Book Search, <http://books.google.com/> (accessed 20 March 2009).
63. Geraghty, 41-42.
64. Sue Turnbull, "The Hook and the Look: *CSI* and the Aesthetics of the Television Crime Series," in *Reading CSI*, 15-32.
65. *Ibid.*, 27.

66. For more on stylistic mysticism, see Barrett Hodsdon, "The Mystique of Mise-en-scene Revisited," *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media and Culture* 5, no. 2 (1990), <http://www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/5.2/Hodsdon.html> (accessed 26 March 2009).
67. Andrew Sarris, "Notes on the Auteur Theory in 1962," in *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 43.
68. *Ibid.* Even Sarris's description of the shot is inaccurate. He writes that Renoir turns to his *right*, but actually he turns the other direction.
69. Charlotte Brunson, "Television: Aesthetics and Audiences," in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. Patricia Mellencamp (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 61.
70. *Ibid.*, 63.
71. David Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 1. Available online at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cjs/images/0920054.0001.001.pdf>. The evolution of Bordwell's thinking is well chronicled in Colin Burnett, "A New Look at the Concept of Style in Film: The Origins and Development of the Problem-Solution Model," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 6, no. 2 (August 2008): 127-49.
72. Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 17-18.
73. Bordwell, *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema*, 1.
74. Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light*, 265.
75. See E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 146-78. Regarding Bordwell's use of Gombrich, see Burnett, 139-40.
76. Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, 152.
77. *Ibid.*, 150.

78. See “Exceptionally Exact Perceptions: On Staging in Depth,” in *Ibid.*, 158-271.

79. *Ibid.*, 158.

80. Burnett, 143.

81. Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television: From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 121.

82. Mittell, 122.

83. Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, 8.

84. Caldwell, 352.

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