

UNIVERSITE TOULOUSE JEAN JAURES  
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Intermediality, Re-mediation and Inter-sensuality

in Stephen Poliakoff's 'slow television':

The Poetics and Aesthetics of the In-Between

from *Shooting the Past* (1999) to *Dancing on the Edge* (2013)



Mémoire de Master 2 Recherche  
sous la direction de M. Laurent Mellet

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*For my daughter Cléo*

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## INTRODUCTION

Television aesthetics constitute a relatively recent innovation in the broader field of television studies where few scholars tackle the medium from a primarily aesthetic approach. Television scholars have typically been reluctant to focus their analyses on the medium's form, as television studies emerged from the twin paradigms of mass communications and cultural studies, both of which tend to foreground social impacts over aesthetic analysis. As television studies developed out of sociology and cultural studies, the main focus has been on television's import in political and socio-cultural terms rather than in artistic terms. Besides, as television is still regarded as artistically impoverished in comparison with other arts, it is generally 'used' to study something else (for example, society, ideology, gender politics), a customary focus which has had deleterious consequences for television studies as the neglect of close analysis in the field entailed overlooking and undervaluing challenging and engaging programmes.

This work follows Sarah Cardwell and Jason Jacobs' movement towards a recognition of television programmes as specific artworks as I share their belief that some television is worthy of sustained scrutiny and critical attention for its aesthetic qualities. While Jacobs considers television as 'a medium for artistic expression'<sup>1</sup>, Cardwell advocates the potential that an aesthetic approach might bring to the study of television if we consider television programmes as 'expressive works of art, replete with significant aesthetic properties'<sup>2</sup>. They both suggest a methodology that moves from close 'textual'<sup>3</sup> analysis outwards: in his 2001 article, Jason Jacobs argues that one can only determine the possibilities of a medium by looking at instances of works within it and Sarah Cardwell claims that the most responsive and persuasive theorising arises from careful observations of the particularities of television texts and convincingly demonstrates how the methodology of close 'textual' analysis can enhance television studies, by focusing on aesthetic matters.<sup>4</sup> Both scholars also outline the exploration of medium-specific traits as the final area of television aesthetics within which I wish to add seriality as a potentially fruitful domain to investigate.

The objective of this work is to provide a critical appraisal of a sample of the work of Stephen Poliakoff who is a very distinctive writer/director in television today. Through a diachronic study of his idiosyncratic style, I will try to demonstrate the individuality and distinctiveness of two of his televisual series and will address more theoretical questions that are raised by Poliakoff's 1999 landmark series *Shooting the Past* and his much more recent 2013 series *Dancing on the Edge*. I

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1 Jacobs, 2001, p. 427.

2 Cardwell, 2006, p. 78.

3 Cardwell's word.

4 Cardwell, 2005, pp. 179-194.

believe it is important to emphasize that the interest in conceptual questions arises from close analysis of specific television programmes as it is the minute attention to the series which brought to the fore the in-betweenness of media. Similarly, it is through the diachronic study of the series' evolving aesthetics that the passage from the quaint photo-graphic intermediality of *Shooting the Past* to the photo-filmic media convergence of *Dancing on the Edge* was brought to light.

Stephen Poliakoff is a British writer-director who has produced a body of work across the media of theater, film and television over the last fifty years, exploring the recurring themes of family, history and memory as well as technology. He is a multifaceted artist whose artistic versatility (for theater, cinema and television) comes across in his filmic oeuvre in favour of a very marked authorial discourse. The medium of television is the one which has most successfully cultivated Poliakoff's talent as a writer and director, it is within television that he has developed his authorial rhetoric and his most critically acclaimed work has been the television work he has made since his 1999 series *Shooting the Past* in which he has developed a distinctive textual and visual style. As both writer and director, he combines the writer-led traditions of British theatre and television with the more cinematic conceptions of director as creator and has thus developed a very idiosyncratic style. In this way, Poliakoff has generated a public image of himself as British television auteur par-excellence: writing, directing and overseeing every aspect of his work, which made him claim that he had written his 2013 televisual series *Dancing on the Edge* as 'a novel for television'. As an established theater playwright, he is a skilled writer of dialogue and in his landmark 1999 mini-series *Shooting the Past*, Poliakoff clearly pays homage to the filmed theater on television tradition in an overt transgression of the fin-de-siècle doxa that the rhythm had to be fast-paced to prevent viewers from channel-hopping. The influence of his dramaturgic work can be felt in his televisual series which appear distinctively stagey for their emphasis on the verbal signs as well as their poetics of the long take. But it is mainly through his use of the medium of photography that he managed to create his aesthetics of 'slow television' in a deliberate attempt to counteract the very fast cutting tempo of the television orthodoxy of the time. As the ultimate slowing down of a moving image is the freeze-frame, *Shooting The Past* deliberately foregrounds still photography and it does so to such an extent that Poliakoff believed his transgression of the key mainstream television drama codes might mark his swan-song in television. However, it provoked both the popular and critical acclaim of what became known as his 'slow television' strategy and the meteoric success of the mini-series ironically gave him unprecedented creative freedom ever since. Through his dual credentials as writer and director, he has been granted an unparalleled artistic control and creative autonomy which give him the status of "auteur" in the United Kingdom where his work has

become synonymous with 'high-end' contemporary television.

As Cardwell has argued, the intricate crafting of Poliakoff's television dramas (in terms of visual, verbal and alternatively acoustic construction) effectively communicates television's worth as an object of both narrative and aesthetic study, and demands a level of detailed evaluation which all too often remains unrealised within the analysis of television 'texts'. There is evidently a painstaking attention to detail within Poliakoff's television work, and such meticulousness deserves a correspondingly detailed critical response.

Stephen Poliakoff's work for the televisual medium foregrounds an explicitly intermedial visual rhetoric. His televisual series present an immersive world of art fusion where different layers of filmic, theatrical, photographic, painterly and musical materials come together to create a poetic form which provides a Gesamtkunstwerk experiment through a conspicuously hybrid style. His 'slow television' project deliberately foregrounds still photography and brings to the fore the implicit debate between stillness and motion and between space and time within the cinematic image. The photo-graphic effect of stillness in the moving image – and its fundamental relation to indexicality – is exploited to the full in *Shooting the Past* but is also enhanced in *Dancing on the Edge* which also conveys a lyrical form as painterly images of ethereal beauty are created through the intermedial figure of the tableau shot.

To address within his series key issues of the changes in technology, mediality and context of moving images, Poliakoff exploits the possibilities of television's intermedial status to bring into focus the changing cultures of sight and sound at the turn of the century and beyond. Both television series incorporate forms of all other media and initiate dialogues between the distinct arts: Poliakoff's 1999 series *Shooting the Past* relies on the power of the photographic image while his 2013 series *Dancing on the Edge* depicts supposedly 1930s jazz music as a medium blurring racial and social boundaries in Britain in the inter-war years. Besides, both series which are set during eras of technological change diegetically picture the emergence of new media - whether in a dysphoric or creative way - and provide a highly self-reflexive mise en abyme of intermedial relations as they offer a synchronic vision of the genealogy of media.

Poliakoff's work provides many examples of intermedial figurations: his series materially incorporate other arts (photography and music), embed in their diegeses mediatic forms which may even take responsibility for the narrative (inset photo-stories, embedded convergence within the intradiegetic music magazine of photo-journalism and comics as the ultimate hybridation of the word-image relationship) and eventually and less obviously resort to codes that are specific of other media which are thus evoked though not materially present (literary, theatrical and painterly

intermedial references - in Irina Rajewski's terminology -).

The aesthetics of his 'slow television' project seem to have been designed on the principle of dismissing a conventional "self-effacing style" as the moving images within his work for television operate within a network of interrelated media which proves challenging in finding the adequate theoretical framework for analysis.

This research will try to combine Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's ideas of "remediation" with the theory and analysis of intermediality as I will investigate figurations of filmic intermediality involving re-mediation, i.e. images in film that are perceived in an in-betweenness of media, images derived from media other than film, and that are in one way or another perceivably re-mediated and/or re-contextualized within film. This work will focus on the photo-filmic, the tableau shot and the embedded media as particular ways in which the "sensual" and "structural" mode of intermediality can be manifest in televisual series.

Though I will not study the figurations of intermediality in film<sup>5</sup> from a theoretical perspective but though the concrete analysis of Poliakoff's particular intermedial rhetoric distinguishable within his work, I feel it is necessary to try and define briefly the challenging and controversial concept of intermediality. Ever since the 1990s so-called "medial turn", its emergence due to the proliferation of new media and its appearance on an interdisciplinary basis resulted in a multiplicity of diverging approaches and even contradictory definitions which can prove so confusing that *intermedialities* was introduced as an umbrella term in the plural to define "phenomena involving media relations".<sup>6</sup>

I will therefore narrow my approach to focus on the concept of intermediality in film and try and define it by distinguishing it from the concepts of intertextuality and interartuality and by presenting the conditions or principles that are necessary for its occurrences.

I will first resort to Agnes Pethos's definition of intermediality as the manifestation of "the intricate interactions of different media manifest in the filmic medium, emphasizing the way in which the moving pictures can incorporate forms of all other media, and can initiate fusions and 'dialogues' between the distinct arts."<sup>7</sup>

I will follow her circumscription of filmic intermediality to phenomena always manifested as a kind of figuration in film through which medial differences are visibly and self-reflexively "re-inscribed" within the moving image so that I will consider visual heterogeneity and hypermediacy as necessary conditions for the occurrences of intermedial phenomena.

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<sup>5</sup> I use the word *film* as well as the word *cinematic* to refer to television (as Poliakoff does) for a lack of a specific vocabulary but also possibly as an evaluative judgement as I believe we may consider the programmes as 'art television', importing norms from art cinema onto the small screen.

<sup>6</sup> A denomination suggested by the ESF Exploratory Workshop held in Amsterdam, 12-14 June 2009: *Intermedialities*.

<sup>7</sup> Petho, 2011, p.1.

Though the use of these criteria does not depart from the framework of more traditional interartiality, I will prefer the less restrictive term of medium rather than art which enables a wider perspective on Poliakoff's work which diegetically and self-reflexively deals with the diachronic genealogy of media. I thus believe that his 2013 series *Dancing on the Edge* might be specifically and appropriately studied through the use of the latest concepts dealing with the interrelationship of media, like notions of emergence (diachronic embedding, Gaudreault and Marion, 2002), remediation (the processes through which different media absorb other media in their evolution, Bolter and Grusin, 1999) and convergence (dealing with the intricate web of interactions on the level of media production and consumption, interrelatedness of media and their interaction with an active consumer, Henry Jenkins 2006). The concept of filmic intermediality therefore seems fruitfully adequate to address the issue of the televisual series as a medium in continuous change and interchange.

I will also depart from the more traditional way of thinking about intermediality in terms of intertextuality by underlining the differences between intertextuality in which the object dissolves into its relations and intermediality which foregrounds the materiality of the image and the tangibility of the medial differences and focuses on the 'inter' as a performative space. I will therefore argue that Poliakoff's televisual series combine figures of hypermediacy with immediacy and connect intermediality with inter-sensuality thus turning the pensive viewer of Raymond Bellour or Laura Mulvey into an embodied spectator, as an embodied reflection on the cinematic synaesthetic experience.

I believe a detailed analysis of Poliakoff's series from an intermedial perspective seems particularly relevant as figurations of intermediality in his televisual series occur at multiple levels. We will see first how intermedial figures may function at a thematic level and serve as meditations upon history and time, cultural and personal identity as well as identity of the medium. A study of both series will show how a sense of history, place and cultural heritage is articulated through techniques of intermediality and how visual archaisms enhance the conception of film as a medial archive.

In a second part, we will see how televisual intermediality constitutes a specific authorial rhetoric in the work of Stephen Poliakoff who plays around the borders between arts and media to create distinctive aesthetics but also connects intermediality and narratology as he resorts to remediation for serial storytelling.

Lastly, we will see how Poliakoff's televisual series' haptic imagery links intermediality and inter-sensuality and how the represented and sensed body on screen serves as a site of intermedial figurations which enhances the embodied act of viewing and the sensory experience of moving images.

## **PART I: A METALEPTIC VOYAGE ACROSS MEDIA AND TIME**

### **I-REMEDIATING THE PAST: REMAKING HISTORY**

#### **A-PLACING THE PAST**

Since the late twentieth century the work of the British writer-director Stephen Poliakoff has centred upon an examination of memory, history and historical consciousness. Space and place have played an important role in the ways in which Poliakoff dramatizes his memory-narratives, particularly in his television dramas.

Poliakoff makes use of the setting in both dramas to construct memory-narratives where the Imperial Hotel, Lady Cremone's and Donaldson's houses or the photographic library act as both memory trigger and memory location. Through an analysis of the treatment of the places in both series, we will see how the preservation of the past is connected to the physicality of spaces as places of heritage and as sites of memory which function as spatial palimpsests but also how Poliakoff uses and subverts the codes of period drama to provide a more radical version of the past and possibly of the present.

#### **PLACE AND HERITAGE**

By exploring the relationship between memory, space and place, Poliakoff's dramas echo - with a focus on private history and memory - Philip J. Ethington's argument that "historical interpretation" might be reconceived "as the act of reading places, or *topi*"<sup>8</sup>. Poliakoff's dramas on stage and screen make sophisticated use of space and place to present multiple narrative strands and memory-narratives, in which space becomes a container for past experiences.

Through the fragmentary lens of personal experience in character-driven narratives Poliakoff explores individual microhistories which are embedded in characters' memories and strongly associated with their relationship with place and space as sites of memory, as raw material of memory work very literally represented by Lady Cremone's sons' memorial and by the Fullon archival photographic library.

Donaldson's words when presenting the hotel as a place of memory in part five seem to echo Casey's theory of space/place being "a container of experiences" as well as being where "the past can revive and survive"<sup>9</sup> when he says "if one thinks back to the great things that have happened, to the wonderful artists that have played here...I thought those days were coming back...when the

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8 Ethington, Philip J. "Placing the Past: 'Groundwork for a Spatial Theory of History.'" *Rethinking History* 11.4 (2007), p. 466.

9 Casey, Edward S. *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study*. 2nd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000. Print. Studies in Continental Thought Casey, pp. 186-187.

Prince of Wales came to hear the Louis Lester Band." Lady Cremone also treats places as sites of memory, which is underlined through the dialogue between Louis and Sarah when they comment on the memorial for her sons lost in the war but also as spaces where the past can be revived when she decides to have the Christmas party in the building formerly used by her son as an artist's studio. The building which has been shut since the war literally connects memory space and museum space as the place exhibits her son Ralph's acoustic sculptures, a connection represented by Donaldson as a figure of the collector as he says "I collect beautiful rooms around London" thus turning houses into museums as an embodiment of English heritage.

Both Donaldson's house and the photographic library appear as gallery-like containers of the past in the present through their exhibition of the objects of Donaldson's travels and of the archival photographs.

Conversely, Lady Cremone's house seems to contain the present in the past, since she possesses in her library all the copies of the Music Express magazine as a figure of modernity while her house at night seems to be inhabited by the presence of the past through a gothic-like atmosphere underlined in the script ("a dimly lit upstairs passage...the sound of the wind and the creaks of the old house"<sup>10</sup>). As Sarah notices that 'it creaks' and Louis stresses the paradox that 'a lady with such modern taste' should live in a 'house...this cold', the physicality of the building environment, as in other Poliakoff's narratives, seems to function as an interstitial space between past and present.

## **PLACE AND MEMORY**

### **Palimpsestic spaces**

Through the relationship between space, place and the past, the writer-director places history in locations that 'house' memory, in the Imperial Hotel, in Donaldson's and Lady Cremone's house in *Dancing on the Edge*, more literally in the Music Express building but most emblematically in the *Shooting the Past* archive library.

In *Shooting The Past*, Poliakoff achieves the inscription of memory within space mainly thanks to the use of the medium of photography but also through the locus of the Fullon photo library as both the photographs and the house containing them are depicted as spatial palimpsests.

The grandhouse represents the memory of the past both symbolically and literally since it is the location and setting of the archive. It functions as a spatial palimpsest whose different layers are uncovered by the voice-over of the narrator and emphasized visually with the shot of a latin inscription on the wall.

The insert of a superimposed black and white photograph over the grandhouse blurs the difference between the house and its content and thus alludes to the original value of the content of this

<sup>10</sup> Poliakoff, Steven. *Dancing on The Edge*, London, Methuen Drama, 1999, p. 123.



location. The photograph is inserted through editing but as if by the human hand, the possible gesture of the curator who seems to be at work in its presentation. The choice of an original famous picture of Liz Taylor by Baron – an archival photograph which was lent by the Getty Foundation for the shooting - acts as a synecdoche to enhance the historical value of this grandhouse and the importance of the preservation of the past. Moreover, the choice of a 1954 photograph of an American actress might be interpreted as a self-reflexive movement, a meditation upon the history of the cinematic medium as well as a return to its photographic roots.



**The dissolve as a trans-medial translation of the synecdoche:  
the original value of the grandhouse and the archive.**

Poliakoff recurrently resorts to the blurring of borders between the buildings and their contained elements. Both the walls of the Lyle Lane club and of the Music Express magazine literally depict the multilayered richness of the history of the places. Louis is thus able to find the poster of their first concert underneath the multiple layers for he underlines that 'they seem to keep everything'.



**The wall as a palimpsestic space: "Trying to find your band underneath all that?"**

The wall of the Music Express magazine functions as an intermedial palimpsest of the series' story and is used as a narrative device with its reporter Stanley as an inset narrator covering and uncovering the story as the episodes are told in analepses. Conversely, the virgin space of the new premises bought by the American millionaire emphasizes the absence and eradication of cultural heritage which is threatened by modernity.

The absence of any traces of the jazz band in the Imperial Hotel in Louis's final statement in the narrative -"it's as if we were never there"- enhances the tragedy of black invisibility revealed in the postscript episode in a chapter of his interview aptly titled "Being invisible".

### **Space memory**

The connection between memory and the physical experience of a space is repeatedly enhanced in the dialogue as Masterson mentions to Louis "you've been here before", which reminds the viewer of the smashed suite of the American millionaire, a commentary which is contrapunctually echoed when he says to Stanley "you've not been here before", as if his virgin experience of the place might enable their future partnership.

Without the physical experience of a given space, or place within space, both the survival and the retrieval of memory are put in jeopardy and body memory is opposed to space memory so that the reenactment of the corridor scene at the police station makes Louis unable to see the figure at the end of the corridor for he stresses that 'it's nothing like it was at the Imperial'.

The demolition of the Imperial Hotel endangers the preservation of memory and is perceived as a wiping away of the tangible traces of history, as is the imminent disposal of the archival photographs of the library. The demolition of the Imperial Hotel to be turned into an office block constitutes 'the final insult' in Donaldson's words and echoes the transformation of the photographic library into the Business School of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, which foregrounds the dichotomy in Poliakov's work between the erasure of the past entailed by modernity and the ethical responsibility of the preservation of cultural heritage. The preservation of the past is thus at the core of both series in which cultural heritage depends both on the salvation of the physicality of the building environment as a traditional trope of the period drama genre and on the conservation and transmission of the archive, very literally in *Shooting the Past* which diegetically depicts the threat of destruction of the archival photographs, more metatextually in *Dancing on the Edge* which is based on an archival discovery made by Poliakov when researching *The Lost Prince*.

### **PLACE, HERITAGE AND REMAKING PERIOD DRAMA**

A fundamental aspect of the period drama is the focus on the house which is a structure representative of a particular identity, an icon of Englishness. There is a clear link between heritage and physicality, between the memorial location of the past and the social discourse of that memory. Both Donaldson's and Lady Cremone's country houses which are presented in the very long shots typical of period drama appear as key spaces of nostalgic memory and of established class taxonomy.



Lady Cremone's country house: the typical long-shot of the period drama genre

However, the conservative discourse of heritage drama seems to be subverted as both Donaldson's and Lady Cremone's country houses prove not to be the safe places of refuge characteristic of the genre. Lady Cremone's house is a very cold and creaking place and the shots of Sarah being awake at night and going through the dark corridor lit in a German expressionist way and reminiscent of a gothic house seem to foreshadow Lady Cremone's refusal of hiding Louis in the fourth episode. The coldness of the place probably signals a darker side beneath the veneer of upper-class society. Similarly, Donaldson's house which is presented as the collector's house is the place where the characters seek refuge as both Louis and Julian mistake it for a safe haven which proves to be a place of enclosure. Louis is locked in the kitchen and possibly denounced to the police while Julian is betrayed by Donaldson who phones Masterson to reveal his presence in the fake sanctuary. The sentimentality of mainstream heritage drama is debunked as is its vision of Englishness as represented in the security of the home.

The comfortable narrative of English nationhood expressed through the house is here overturned and Poliakoff's use of historical space allows for a more radical version of the past.

The fake progressive liberalism and open-mindedness of the British upper-class represented by Lady Cremone and Donaldson – the character of Pamela being an interesting unexpected exception – is enhanced as Donaldson mentions that "Mr Lester appears to be the culprit, does he not?" and Lavinia states that with "a negro band in the hotel...it was always the likely outcome."

The fact that they are both immediately ready to turn in Louis to protect the comfort of their privileges must probably be interpreted as a prophetic sign and metaphor for the appeasement policy of the British upper-class denounced by Poliakoff in his feature film *Glorious 39* as a way of challenging national history.

In *Shooting the Past*, the British writer-director also uses and distorts the conventions of period drama as he resorts to the genre to tell a millenium story.

As the establishing shots feature the grandhouse surrounded by a deer park (*Travelling shots round*

*the exterior of the house and its gardens, and viewing it accross the neighbouring park*) and are accompanied by the soundtrack previously heard in the credits, we discover this large historic English house which is set in an idyllic location and whose mysterious interiors are part of its visual attraction. The elaborate disclosure of the location and setting of the archive is narrated over by Oswald and presented as a grand icon of Englishness and historic significance, a presentation which is reminiscent of British 'heritage' cinema and bears a striking resemblance with the credits of the very popular current British series *Downton Abbey*.

The English 18th-century house is an embodiment of cultural heritage and literal preservation of the past and the period drama genre is used as a figure of resistance, of stillness in motion – mimicked through the use of still photographs within the moving images – against the speed generated by world economics, an anti capitalist stance against the commercialism embodied by the American characters and their 21st-century business school.

## **B-MEDIALITY AND THE REMEDIATION OF HISTORY**

The overview of Poliakoff's oeuvre shows his strong interest in history and memory. Two centrally recurring and interlocking themes within his work are the enduring significance of the past for the present – with a felt sense of how the past informs, even haunts the present – and the value of the historical archive.

### **REMEDATING PAST IMAGES**

The presence of the archive as figuration may serve as the locus of meditation upon time and history. The incorporation of archival photographs within the texture of the moving images or the featuring of media technologies may thus be used for the purpose of documentation but it may also provide a reflection on the reconstruction of the past through images in a process of recontextualisation through which reviewing the past might be used as a device for figuring the present. Besides, the productive perception of medial differences reveals an attempt of remediation as a film's researcher's return to the roots of the medium as well as a form of linguistic experimentation.

#### **The value of the archive**

#### **A place of memory, indexical analog photographs and recorded 'reality'.**

*Shooting the Past* stresses the ethical and cultural responsibility of preservation and uses the archive as a place of memory as the archivists foreground the documentary value of the indexical image serving as evidence of the past.

The incorporation of photographs within the texture of the film narrative creates an alternative

modality of mediation, indexical archival photographs embedded into feature film create a dynamic structure and inscribe a sense of difference of spectatorial experience. Their presence as figuration may function as a reflection upon time and history activating in the spectator the documentary consciousness defined by Vivian Sobchack as "a particular mode of embodied and ethical spectatorship that informs and transforms the space of the irreal into the space of the real"<sup>11</sup>.

### **The value of the archive in illuminating or/and figuring the present**

*Shooting the Past* is an emblematic depiction of the value of the archive in illuminating the present as Anderson discovers a new identity through the revelations from recorded images about his past. The final photograph provides a startling moment of recognition for Anderson, not just of his grandmother but of an artistic impulse he now realises he has unhappily suppressed. The knowledge or awareness of the past is used as a revelatory tool in achieving a better understanding of the present. Anderson's discovery of "his new history" through the space within the photographs and across the place containing them ("I come to this city – to these buildings here, this weird library...and suddenly...I have a whole new history.") will provide a resolution for the photographic collection which is largely saved as he facilitates its purchase and will also affect his own future ("All sorts of things will change. I'll probably dream differently").

The return to the past is not treated in Poliakoff's work as a refuge but as a force of enlightenment for the present. While the rediscovery of the archival photograph proves illuminating for the present in Anderson's photo-story in a literal way, *Dancing on the Edge* metaphorically foregrounds the importance of embracing the past for a better understanding of the present and of the future. As a matter of fact, Poliakoff's archivist work of unearthing the past as a source for *Dancing on the Edge*<sup>12</sup> also serves to articulate a commentary about the present. Reviewing the past is a device for figuring the present and Poliakoff's choice of historical themes, as we shall see, provides a possibility to formulate a critical view of contemporary society.

*Shooting the Past* foregrounds the intrinsic indexical value of every image within the archive and denounces the financial consideration and materialistic outlook embodied by the American characters, as the 'worthless' and the 'valuable' photographs merge together indistinguishably and the Americans who make repeated reference to 'the prime collection', referring to a purely financial value are unable to find them among the library.

Once recontextualised within a narratively persuasive sequence of photographs, and accompanied

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11 Sobchack, Vivian, "The Charge of the Real: Embodied Knowledge and Cinematic Consciousness" in *Carnal thoughts: embodiment and moving image culture*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, p. 261.

12 According to Poliakoff, the seeds of the idea were sown when he was researching *The Lost Prince* and learned that various royal princes championed the cause of visiting jazz bands, with the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, even getting to play the drums with Duke Ellington's orchestra. (*The Guardian*, 4 Feb 2013).

by verbal interpretation, each individual image asserts its status, not only as an aesthetic object, but also as a valuable component within a reconstruction of the past.

### **Recontextualisation**

The appropriation and reuse of archival photographs invites us to question the manner and extent to which history may be constituted through images.

*Shooting the Past* provides a reflection on the reconstruction of the past through images and stresses the possibility of manipulation of the archive within the process of recontextualisation and within the archival interpretations of others.

The ease by which Poliakoff's archivists construct a punctum throughout the presentational device of the embedded photographic montage causes both intradiegetic and extradiegetic viewers to question the historical credibility of such a process. As the contextual fluidity of the photograph allows for the possibility of the tailoring of a punctum in order to affect a specific viewer in a specific context of presentation, the possibility of manipulation of the archival material by those who interpret it is emphasized in Marilyn's presentation of the story of Anderson's grandmother.

Ultimately, Poliakoff's *Shooting the Past* advocates an embracing of the archive and a greater recognition of its value in illuminating the present while enhancing its potential for manipulation. Even if the series deals explicitly with the archival manipulation of photographs, it also questions the filmic reconstruction of history through moving images which are obviously equally susceptible to such processes of recontextualisation. Poliakoff thus leads us to consider meta-reflexively the way the past is re-made within historical fictions and more generally through any filmic representation.

The incorporation of archival photographs also creates productive tensions between the private and the historical, between personal and collective memories and may provide a reflection on the representation of a traumatic past.

### **In between the private and the historical, the blending of personal and collective memory**

In the first embedded photo-narrative in *Shooting the Past*, Poliakoff eschews the iconic images of the Holocaust in favour of narrating the events prior to deportation and the incorporation of the medium of photography may function as a figure of displacement for performing the infigurable. When Anderson is shown a photograph of a group of Jewish people being rounded up, it is Marilyn's prior story and the earlier selection of images which enable him to recognise Lily on the left of the frame, clinging to the side of an anonymous woman who is clutching another child in her arms and to connect a face within the crowd of nameless faces.

Poliakoff blurs the borders between personal and collective memory by materially inscribing Lily's



microhistory within the official archival photographs of Nazi Germany through the literal insertion of a modern photograph of the character of the diegesis within the texture of the indexical archival photographs<sup>13</sup> thus turning the faceless mass into an individual face. Poliakov's focus on the private memory within his microhistory is enhanced through the camera movement zooming in on the little Jewish girl's face.



**The individual face within the faceless mass: a figure in between the private and the historical**

Through an unexpected unconventional last photograph of Lily as a homeless old woman in London, the writer-director ultimately eschews the pitfalls of the visual iconography of the Holocaust which are verbally underlined by Anderson who says "if it's a pile of those bodies, I'd rather not see it".

The British writer-director uses archival research to construct his memory narratives but always chooses an unusual prism. As in *The Lost Prince* where the massive tectonic shifts of History leading up to the First World War are seen through the fallible perspective of a child in a series which intertwines a familial history with a cataclysmic period in history, in *Dancing on the Edge* Poliakov favoured the idea of looking at the 1930s not through the eyes of Prince George, the future Duke of Kent or of his brother the Prince of Wales, who became Edward VIII but through those of the black jazz band leader. The perspective of the outsider looking in is indeed a principle of dramatic composition in Poliakov's work as well as a critical strategy. We will see how the Russian immigrant Jewish writer-director resorts to a complex relay of looks to mediate and subvert

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13 *Shooting the Past* mixes together real archival pictures (some of them very famous), new photos shot to look like archival pictures, and 'comped-in' images made by inserting new elements into old pictures. Original images of the Getty collection were fused with modern photographs of characters from the diegesis. As Mathew Buston, General Manager of Hulton Getty explains:

*One of the key ingredients in the screenplay was the use of digitally-manipulated images. Dave Roling was given modern photographs of characters in the screenplay which were superimposed onto original images taken from our collection.*

See appendix, online: [http://corporate.gettyimages.com/masters2/press/articles/CreativeTech\\_Shooting\\_the\\_Past.pdf](http://corporate.gettyimages.com/masters2/press/articles/CreativeTech_Shooting_the_Past.pdf)

the patriarchal male gaze of the power figures.

## **History of the media, history of the medium: a metaleptic and immersive voyage through media and time, re-mediating past media**

### **History of the media**

*Dancing on the Edge* depicts the advent of modern mass media and features the emergence of the wireless as well as the birth of photo-journalism. Hypermediacy<sup>14</sup> is foregrounded as the radio set, the gramophone, numerous cameras and a projector often fill the screen. While parallels between the awe that radio broadcasting provoked and our reverence for digital technology today are suggested, an emphasis on hybridity is achieved through the figure of the magazine as a figure of media convergence replicated within its inset cartoon as a possibly transcultural archetype of the word-image relationship.

*Shooting the Past* is set in the context of the emergence of digital media and the digitization of the image is reflexively depicted in a sequence of the ekphrastic epilogue which literally represents the animation of the still archival analog photograph thus foregrounding the fin de siècle shift from the analogue to the digital.

The featuring of media technologies through its effect of reflexivity introduces a quasi-documentary gaze but also arguably serves the purpose of confronting the medium's origins and its tradition.

### **History of the medium**

As a matter of fact, *Shooting the Past*, which expresses Poliakoff's artistic preoccupation with the past, and its preservation through the physical archive, was inspired in part by the destruction of archival material at the BBC so that it stresses the dramatist's concerns for the preservation of the past but also particularly, in this instance, a televisual past.

Figurations of intermediality and post-mediality function as meditations upon history and time as well as identity of the medium. A 'regressive', 'archaic', 'animistic' type of intermediality of film can be outlined, as both series may be conceived as medial archives in which the figurations 'revitalize' photographic representation and earlier forms of moving images as imprints of its own history.

The return to archival photographs as well as the creation of visual archaisms (new photos shot to look like archival pictures and 'comped-in' images made by inserting new elements into old pictures) reveals an attempt of remediation that confronts the film medium with its materiality,

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14 In their groundbreaking study *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1999, Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin defined the concept of "hypermediacy" as "a style of visual representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the presence of the medium." (Bolter and Grusin, p. 272).



historicity and temporality and creates productive tensions between the pre-cinematic and the texture of motion pictures in a gesture of revitalization of earlier forms of moving images, as a wish to explore the images that form the identity of the medium.

The peculiar interaction due to the medial differences seems to lead to a fruitful dialogue with the history and identity of the medium and the anachronism of the black and white photographs in both series acts as a return to the beginnings of film. The visual heterogeneity created by the insertion of the photographs without any prior diegetic explanation appears like a clear homage to the early cinema of attractions. The use of the soundtrack in both series to literally animate the still photographs seems to refer to the emergence of silent film as Poliakoff resorts to extradiegetic music as a recurring device to animate the pictures of dancers and musicians. The animated sequence of Sarah's behind-the-shots photographs within the magazine also aptly and alluringly illustrates the director's gesture of revitalizing earlier forms of moving images. The sequence of still photographs from Stanley's office representing dancers or musicians animated by the musical rhythm of the diegetic typewriter reveals the film researcher's experimentation with film language as a metaphor of collage aesthetics in the possible wake of European modernist cinema.

### ***Slow television's experiment with film language and attribution of meaning***

#### ***Shooting the Past's deconstruction of the televisual image***

In a context of fast-pace American television, we may see in *Shooting The Past* an attempt by Poliakoff to restore to the medium of television something of its theatrical heritage through the series' very long takes and emphasis on the verbal signs. It may be interpreted as a reactionary gesture against popular culture or more positively, as a response of traditional media to reaffirm their status as they see that status challenged by digital media<sup>15</sup>. Poliakoff's 'slow television' strategy can be interpreted as an avant garde trajectory aiming to disrupt expectations and to restore the medium's capacities by reconnecting the signifier with the signified.

The first scene of *Shooting The Past* opens with Oswald speaking directly to the camera and explaining his modus operandi: in a literal deconstruction of the televisual image, he is recording his voice on a dictaphone while intermittently taking photographs as a record for the mass media. We are subjected to a sort of schematic delineation of the creation of signs as Oswald's recording operates as a narrative signified informing and building the status of the photograph as signifier.

By deliberately foregrounding still photography, Poliakoff is taking a serious look at the medium of television and is seeking to reconnect the signifier with the signified and restore television's capacity to deal with the weight of experience. As the British-writer director believes that the very

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<sup>15</sup> Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin show that older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media, 1999, p. 15.

fast cutting tempo of television amounts to "the flickering of dislocated signifiers divorced from any apprehensible referents"<sup>16</sup>, his 'slow television' strategy and his use of the freeze frame serve as a means of analysing the signification structure of the moving image. When a medium becomes appropriated to the point that it loses any critical function, it might require *refunctioning*<sup>17</sup> to revivify its capacities.

## C-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

### Anxiety of influence

The dramatised incursions of fast-paced American commerciality on British tradition can be mapped extra-diegetically onto Poliakoff's concerns regarding US influence on the formal evolution of television as a dramatic medium. So, by extension, the archivists' resistance to the increased

speed and intensity of the American business operations taking place around them could be seen as analogous to Poliakoff's own creative resistance (through the crafting of 'slow television') to the prevailing forms of the modern televisual landscape which surround him.

Keith Peacock acknowledges that the "modern, materialistic and technologically oriented" nature of American society is often depicted by Poliakoff as an invading force, becoming a pervasive element within British life<sup>18</sup>.

Poliakoff embodies contemporary society's focus upon immediate progress at the expense of historical conservation in his characterisation of the new American owners of the Fallon Photographic Library. Both British identity and society are presented as the victims of alien influences and intrusive technology. The American businessmen embody the materialistic outlook of supposed progress, and their laptops and cell phones which fill the soundscape and their tight schedule symbolize the speed of modernity encroaching upon the archivists' work as preservers of the past.

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16 This is how Raymond Williams who coined what became the seminal concept of flow described his first encounter and experience of American television in *Television, Technology and Cultural Form*, London: Fontana, 1976.

17 Nelson, 2011, p. 24.

18 See Keith Peacock, "The fascination of Fascism: The Plays of Stephen Poliakoff", *Modern Drama*, Vol. 27, 4, pp. 494-505.



**The materialistic intrusive American technology**

**invading the British cultural and ethic responsibility of preservation.**

The title *Shooting the Past*, while referring to the photographic act also bears the equally possible destructive connotations of 'shooting' which diegetically refer to the deadly threat posed to the British photo library as it is about to be transformed in an American business school and its photographs are to be destroyed, in a movement towards the future which entails erasing history. The preservational values of the archival process through capturing (or 'shooting') an image on photographic film come into conflict with the modern preference for progress at the expense of historical materiality. While there is a clear ideological dichotomy here between the United States and the United Kingdom, the connotatively ambiguous title of *Shooting the Past* also seems to encapsulate a conflict between old and new media.

Poliakoff's *Shooting the Past* was produced on the eve of a new millennium, and on the threshold of a new, digital age, and dramatises concerns regarding the effects of such technological development on British society and its sense of history. The precarious position of the physical archive, specifically here the photographic archive, within contemporary society because of the technological sophistication of modern systems of image storage is foregrounded. The series reflects Poliakoff's apprehension for the uncertain future of the physical archive in this new age because of the transfer of much archival material into more compact digital forms. This fear is diegetically embodied through the threat posed to the character of the curator whose mental storage is to become useless, a threat voiced by the American character ("I take it you're computerized" Anderson says, to which Bates replies "It's all in here," tapping the database in his head). The intra-diegetic narrator knows that his time is up, that his encyclopedic knowledge, non-transferable expertise and economically superfluous passion are no longer required, which will lead to his attempt to commit suicide.

For Poliakoff, technological evolution means a wiping away of the tangible traces of history and his series seems to be a pledge in favour of old media. The technological progress embodied by the

American characters as alien influences is clearly treated in a very dysphoric way through the very intrusive noises of the characters' mobile phones and as we hear the fingers of Anderson's assistant tapping remorselessly on his laptop keys from beyond the shot.

While *Dancing on the Edge* depicts the progress of technology much more positively, the development of mass media is nevertheless presented as an invasive and repressive force. The series depicts the origins of celebrity culture and foregrounds the social impact of the new media through their erasure of the borders between the public and the private spheres. The invasive ubiquitous presence of the paparazzi is repeatedly enhanced in the soundtrack through the dissonant noise of the flash of their cameras while the unsettling aspect of the band's 'followers' is emphasized through their recurring appearances as ghost-like figures. Poliakoff also uses the American character as an embodiment of a materialistic outlook and dystopian society as the mass media function as a figure of entrapment for Louis as Masterson puts out a huge reward for his arrest and takes control of Music Express in a partial bid to gain leverage over Louis's friends. The ultimate Orwellian remediation of Louis' photograph foregrounds the panoptic repression of the image underlined by Louis who says that the paper boy "is holding a picture of [him] so he'd better not have" seen him and the themes of communication and the control of information are brought to the fore for while Stanley is given the chance to expand the magazine under Masterson's control, Rosie keeps telling him he won't have the same freedom working under Masterson, he will have no control. Stanley's secretary might be voicing Poliakoff's belief in the superiority of artistic control and creative autonomy over lucrative benefits, which may extra-diegetically refer to his refusal to work in the US for, as Robin Nelson writes, 'he is one of the very few who decided artistic control meant more than Hollywood wealth'<sup>19</sup>

### **Transculturality and convergence**

Nevertheless, even though both series depict the American characters as alien potentially destructive forces, the possibility of a fruitful crossing of borders through media convergence and intercultural exchange is brought to the fore in *Dancing on the Edge*.

While the soundtrack of *Shooting the Past* stresses the dysphoric intrusion of the high-tech world of mobile phones, laptops and global communication from beyond the frame, the diegetic sound off-screen of Stanley's typewriter is a musical refrain throughout the series, even a dancing tune animating the photographs inserted with no prior diegetic explanation which we are made to interpret as pictures on the walls of his office thanks to the cohesive function of the typing rhythm.

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<sup>19</sup> Nelson, Robin. *Stephen Poliakoff on Stage and Screen*, 2011, p. 193.



The emergence of new media proves to be very creative as their hybridation culminates in the figure of the magazine as a site of intermedial relations through the convergence of photography, journalism and comics as the ultimate figure of hybridity of the word-image relationship.

The mediatic migration of *Shooting The Past* also seems positive as the series concludes with Mr Anderson finally helping to save the archive in its entirety and thus retaining its functionality. However, as the collection is shipped to the USA, the situation may have resonances with the Americans' fondness for the wholesale purchase of other peoples' relics. Though we might interpret the ultimate salvation of the collection in the USA as a positive outcome of media migration enabling cultural preservation, Poliakov may be suggesting in *Shooting the Past* that spatial migration to the US constitutes a threat to national heritage through the reappropriation by the Americans of other cultures.



"Christopher Anderson got an American collection to buy the whole library...

**It's saved - but not in this country of course..."**

*Dancing on the Edge*, however, seems to depict much more fruitful transcultural crossing of borders through instances of media migration permitting intercultural exchange.

## II- THE POLITICS OF INTERMEDIALITY: BORDER CROSSINGS AND CONTACT ZONES

### A-MEDIA MIGRATION, HYBRIDITY AND INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE

#### **Jazz music as a figure of the in-between**

The intrinsic hybridity of jazz music through its fusion of two distinct cultures functions as an allegory for interracial contact zones and intercultural exchange. During the first funeral scene in the mining village, while the black jazz band mixes with the villagers in the street, the widow mentions to Louis that her late husband "had the latest gramophone records sent over from America" as a literal figuration of the crossing of borders. Through Sarah's commentary on the band's first 'unexpected' performance at the Imperial, jazz music is clearly connected with race as she mentions that the conservative audience of the hotel 'couldn't believe their eyes'. The medium's progressive - in both meanings of the term - performative power of racial and social in-betweenness is foregrounded in the series.

Its gradually suturing power through the crossing of social and racial boundaries is emblematically depicted throughout the first episode which starts with a couple of white upper-class people dancing on the edge in the Imperial hotel and closes on a full dance floor before Prince George and the Prince of Wales go backstage and dance with Carla and Jessie in the kitchen passage which functions as a metaphorical threshold. However, the intercutting "between the diners dancing to jazz music and the shot of Wesley's face staring back out of the window of the bus at it moves off into the night"<sup>20</sup> and the subsequent cross-cutting between the close shot of Wesley's eyes staring back at us and the shot of the two Princes dancing with Carla and Jessie undeniably overshadow the story of "The Princes and the jazz band" that Stanley is typing in the stairs. The contrapunctual shot of Wesley's deportation strikes a dissonant chord to the ensemble.



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20 POLIAKOFF, Steven. *Dancing on The Edge*, London, Methuen Drama, 1999, p. 102.



## **The ubiquitous power of the wireless through space and class**

Several echoing wireless scenes foreground the suturing power of the radio through a spatial and social crossing of boundaries.

The first radio scene from part 2 (39'28"-40'55") starts on the conservative BBC executive Hardiman staring straight at the camera looking very pale and very tense with a microphone labelled BBC in front of him. After his introduction of the band, Jessie begins to sing before we cut to a filmic montage of the broadcast reaching his audience which foregrounds the medium's social and spatial fluidity and is mimicked in the seamless editing. As we cut smoothly from the chefs in the corridor of the hotel to Stanley's mother's parlour and then from Lady Cremone's country house to the pub in the street of the mining village near her estate, the ubiquitous presence of the wireless is enhanced as is the crossing of boundaries across class. However, the depiction of Lady Cremone as a progressive aristocrat allowing her butler to stay and listen to jazz music on the wireless arguably corresponds to the stereotypical presentation of an iconically British harmonious stratified class system through the conservative discourse of period drama. The presentation of the lady with modern taste offering her servant to take a seat reinforces the *Downton Abbey*-like class nostalgia as a conservative icon of Britishness.



**"William, stay for this, take a seat please and listen"**

As we finally cut back to Jessie's live performance at the Imperial Hotel, her closing the song on the words "I'm gonna be a star" underline the performative potential of the medium.

The ubiquitous power of the wireless enables the transmission of jazz music across social classes and this social fluidity is mimicked by a filmic montage across a series of places thanks to the suturing power of the soundtrack. In the radio broadcasting scene, the cohesive function of the music enables a seamless montage across space which foregrounds the performative power of the cultural in-betweenness of jazz music. This suturing power is also replicated through the cohesive

function of the medium in several echoing scenes in which the wireless becomes the object of focus around which the people gather.

While the jazz music from the wireless sutures a series of spaces through a filmic montage across places and social classes, the new medium itself becomes the main focus within a given space as it draws people together on several occasions. In the New Year's Eve scene, the characters are grouped around the radio set as the radio announcer states that "for the first time ever [they] are going to broadcast New Year's greetings from a variety of cities around the world" thus enhancing the performative power of interconnectedness of the medium through space and time which is underlined by Lady Cremone's emphasis on "all the cities of Europe linked together" and by Donaldson's satisfaction with everyone "drinking together, raising a toast at the same time".

Visual echoes of this scene appear in part 3 as all the characters first gather unsuccessfully around the wireless in the Atlantic Bar to try and get some news from Roosevelt's assassination attempt in the US before going to the new premises of the Music Express magazine where the domineering position of the 'incredible wireless' is enhanced by the emptiness of the room. The close up on the radio set as we hear Italian language foregrounds the spatial crossing of borders and the intercultural exchange enabled by the medium. Lady Cremone translates the news about the American President's assassination attempt before the change of tone of the announcer moving to another item leaves her riveted so that it is Louis who goes on translating the news about the murder of the jazz band singer. The crossing of boundaries across space and across languages is enhanced through the transmission of history across the geographical frontiers. Besides, the blurring of borders between the public and the private spheres in the emerging celebrity culture as well as between the personal and the historical is also emphasized as Jessie's story is embedded within History and crosses the threshold between collective and personal memory which is aurally embodied as they hear Jessie's voice on the wireless.





### **The magazine's performative power of in-betweenness**

The performative power of the magazine's intermedial crossing of boundaries across space, class and gender is also brought to the fore. Both Lady Cremone and Pamela reveal they are careful readers of the magazine mostly written by the cockney journalist Stanley Mitchell. Lavinia possesses the copies of the modern magazine in the library of her heritage country estate and it is the working-class journalist's mention of *Music Express* which enables him to cross the threshold of the aristocrat's sanctuary. Pamela as the figure of the young upper-class aristocrat also admits flirtatiously reading the magazine from cover to cover and recurrently crosses its narrative borders through her repeated metatextual commentaries most specifically about the inset 'Farquhar and Tonk' cartoon.

### **B-INTERMEDIALITY AND THE SUBVERSIVE PERFORMATIVE POWER OF REMEDIATION**

The intermedial crossing of borders throughout *Dancing on the Edge* often serves as a means of disrupting conservative power.

#### **The magazine's countercultural power**

The magazine's countercultural power is enhanced through the figure of the daring working-class journalist who distorts the social conventions of class structure and subverts the cultural and political conservatism of the upper-class. By introducing the black jazz band to the dowagers of the Imperial Hotel and by championing the Louis Lester Band within his magazine, Stanley Mitchell serves to figure the politics of intermedial staging and storytelling. The embedded cartoon whose political subtext is underlined in part two by Pamela's self-reflexive commentaries about Stanley's "sneaking more and more things in...Like Farquhar and Tonk running a soup kitchen" functions as an intermedial mise en abyme of the story and of Stanley as its inset narrator through the comics characters causing havoc among the British upper-class.



**"It's getting more political." (part two)**

## Performativity and staging

Staged scenes are often subversive as the perception of medial differences through theatricality often provides a critical view of social conventions and may even function as a vehicle for satire. While Hettie's staged photographs in *Shooting the Past* subvert the biblical intertext and deconstruct some of the literary constructions of femininity, the inset staged scenes in *Dancing on the Edge* acquire a more political dimension through the mise en abyme of the stage within the stage.

The theatrical mise en scene enhances the subversive power of the staged representations against conservative boundaries. A very theatrical scene is staged at the Lyle Lane Club by Lady Cremone who traps the reactionary BBC and HMV executive directors into attending the jazz band concert in the presence of Prince George. Both Boxley and Hardiman look mortified and keep apologizing for their being late through a theatrical repetition of their cues which provides a comic effect. As his Royal Highness loudly manifests his enthusiasm, they have no choice but to proceed to the recording and the broadcasting of the band. Interestingly the reversibility of the gaze is foregrounded in this scene where the inset spectacle seems to waver between the Jazz band, the conservative media representatives and the Prince who is positioned on stage.



The performative power of the scene is underlined through Pamela's metatextual commentaries as she mentions to Stanley that "its like one of [his] cartoons come to life...except a little sexier" thus enhancing the sensual dimension of jazz music. At the end of part three, she again refers to the magazine comics by stating that Stanley "really is living one of his cartoons" when he causes outrage at the German embassy party by staging Louis' performance before the appalled Nazi audience. While Stanley's transgressive theatrical mise en scène turns him into an "anarchist" in Donaldson's words, the female protagonists also distort the phallocentrism of a patriarchal structure through the subversive power of their gaze.

## **Subversive re-mediation through the female gaze: The female protagonist as bearer of the look.**

According to Laura Mulvey, the construction of woman as spectacle is built into the apparatus of dominant cinema and Poliakoff resorts to highly-coded Hollywood genres through his intermedial references to the musical and the film noir which produce in some recurring scenes a very traditional exhibition of women's bodies when the female singer is asked to perform for Prince George's scopophilia.

However conservative the scenes may look by showing the female singer as, in Mulvey's terms, 'isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualised', I will argue in the analyses of the following sequences that Poliakoff's white male dominant vision and his 'penchant for very attractive young women quite frequently featured in scenes involving nudity'<sup>21</sup> is more ambivalent than is usually assumed as the traditional structures of looking are distorted through instances of performative female gazes and disrupted by the mediation of a complex and contradictory relay of looks on the screen.

The distortion of the apparently traditional construction of the traditional male gaze is achieved through Pamela's upper-hand upon the narrative in the garden and the train scenes and through the intermedial performative power of the female photographer's gaze as an instrument of eroticization and retaliation.

### **The distortion of an apparently patriarchal construction of the traditional male gaze**

The introductory scene of the series appears consistent with Mulvey's description of a patriarchal structuring of male looking as the spectator is invited to identify with the male gaze which is foregrounded from the very first shots of the opening sequence. As we are introduced with the main characters and focalizers, POV shots alternate between the male hero with whom a strong identification is encouraged through the initial use of subjective camera and the reporter with the typewriter. The opening sequence presents the main focalizers of the whole series and clearly associates the male gaze with the narrative space while the female character is portrayed as a mothering figure (*Rosie...is bandaging Louis' hand with some white cloth, a makeshift bandage.* p. 4). Men tell the story while the female character though being Stanley's co-journalist fulfills the stereotypical role of the inset narrator's secretary retyping his articles and being his occasional mistress.

The opening scene clearly replicates the structure of unequal power relations between men and women and announces Mulvey's dual structure of male looking/ female to-be-looked-at-ness. However, while Poliakoff seems to comply with the traditional structures of looking of dominant cinema, his use of the female gaze disrupts the phallogentrism of the patriarchal pattern as his

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<sup>21</sup> Nelson, Robin. *Stephen Poliakoff on Stage and Screen*, p. 135.

construction of the gaze is much more complex, diverse - even contradictory - and subversive.

The forms of looking in the garden party sequence (Part one: 27'29"-31'50") go from voyeurism to fetishising the body as the woman as spectacle entails "the musical pause in the narrative". This sequence is a pivotal scene as the gaze first shifts from voyeuristic to fetishistic forms of looking as the band which initially plays in the garden while the audience remains hidden in the house is invited in for the female singer to perform for Prince George's enjoyment in a moment of erotic contemplation that freezes the flow of action and constitutes a pause in the narrative which is eventually disrupted by the female gaze of Pamela who will take the active role of forwarding the story.

### **The female protagonist's upper-hand over the narrative.**

I believe the garden scene is a pivotal and complex one for, while using traditional structures of the male gaze, it also foregrounds the female gaze of Pamela which disrupts the pause in the narrative constructed through the female singer Jessie's performing for Prince George and inscribes the actual desires of the female protagonist which will be acted upon in the later train scene in which the female character takes the upper hand over the narrative.

The woman as icon is displayed for the enjoyment of the male gaze which is enhanced through its replication in a series of close shots on individual male viewers before a long shot gathering all the male viewers staring at the female singer and unifying the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film is distorted by the intrusion of the female gaze of Pamela. The pause caused in the narrative by the femininity as spectacle is disrupted in a shift from the woman as icon and bearer of meaning to the woman as bearer of the look and maker of meaning when Pamela has Stanley turn his gaze away from Jessie by commenting upon his having "an eye for talent" thus making him the object of her gaze which announces her taking the upper-hand over the narrative in the further train scene. The female protagonist reduces Jessie's song to a muted background soundtrack and enacts her actual desires as bearer of the look while Sarah the female photographer simultaneously turns the male musicians into the object of her gaze through the lens of her camera.

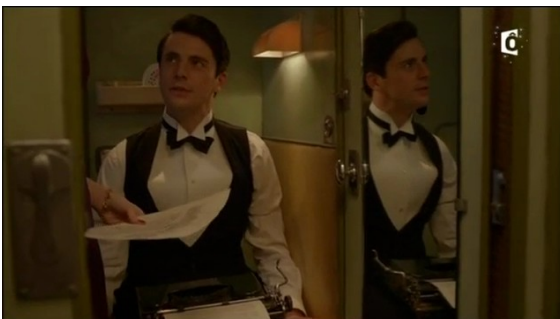




'You really do have an **eye** for talent, Stanley'



**The train scene: the woman as bearer of the look and the female protagonist's upper-hand over the narrative. (Part one: 46'16"-48'31" )**



Pamela is the one watching Stanley typing in the train carriage ('I like to see that') and has him lower his eyes thus overtaking control within the scene. She then stands up thus assuming a superior spatial position and takes one page from the cartoon inset in Stanley's magazine, before a close-shot focuses on the cartoon in her hand and on Stanley as the intradiegetic narrator within the frame while she remains above it thus asserting a superior authorial position and taking the upper-hand on the narrative. She then reenters the frame to move the plot forward by self-reflexively suggesting the possibility of their being inserted in the next embedded cartoon episode "we might find ourselves in it soon. **I** might be there." As she has Stanley kiss her, through a possibly gendered and

authorial reversal, Pamela as bearer of the look and maker of meaning inscribes the woman protagonist's actual desires on screen.

### **The performative power of the female photographer:**

#### **Eroticization of the male body**

Moreover, if the fetishising of the body is foregrounded in *Dancing on The Edge*, it is often done through the use of photography which is fundamental to the series's hybrid aesthetic and turns male as well as female bodies into objects of spectacle.

The eroticization of the black musician's body is mainly constructed through the female photographer's gaze, which underscores Mulvey's often quoted lacunae in her 1975 theory which does not consider the possibility of the male as spectacle and erotic object or the position of the feminine subject in the narrative and the female protagonist's active desire and object-choice in which sexual aims may be directed towards the male figure.<sup>22</sup>

The male bodies of the musician are also displayed and the main protagonist Louis is himself the object of the gaze in the series, most particularly of Sarah as the female photographer who is submitting the musicians to her gaze through the lens of her camera.

Through her activity as a photographer Sarah turns Louis the black male musician into the object of her gaze and the black male body in representation -literally as Louis performs on stage- is subjected to the female gaze. The male body is coded as erotic spectacle which may, in this otherwise apparently reactionary setting, show an instance of a woman in control of her own sexuality. However we may wonder whether Louis's body is not fetishized for its being coded racially as 'other'.

Sarah's camera operates as an instrument of fetishization and eroticization, the darkroom is the setting of the intimate scenes between Sarah and Louis connecting both the photographer's and the viewer's gazes - on screen and within the audience - with potential eroticism which is commented upon in an echoing 'darkroom scene' by the inspector who mentions in Part Five that her intimate relationship with Louis is ostensible in the photographs she took of him thus connecting the female gaze with the eroticization of her object:

*HORTON: You were having a sexual relationship with him?*

*SARAH: I'm not going to answer that -*

*HORTON: You don't have to, I just have to look around at your photographs, they say it all.*

The camera also enhances the characters' narcissistic impulses through many recurring (meta)commentaries to their viewing images of themselves. Their articulated uneasiness at being

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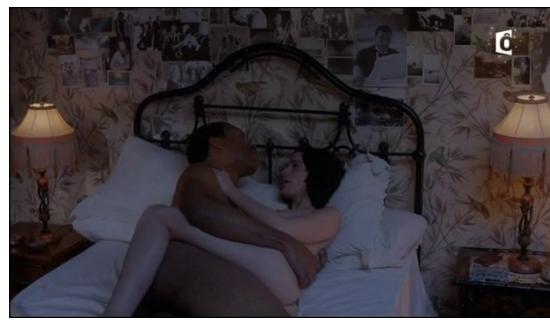
<sup>22</sup> On this point, see David Rodovitz, 'The Difficulty of Difference', in *Wide Angle*, vol. 5, n. 1, 1982.



watched by others or by themselves during intimate moments - which refers self-reflexively to our position as voyeuristic and narcissistic viewers - arguably calls for a psychoanalytic analysis and Mulvey's use of Lacan's mirror image proves relevant to study the mirroring sexual scenes during which the characters look at photographs of themselves or others on the wall over the bed.



"It's just a little strange... being watched by all of them." (Part Two)



"I don't think I've ever done this, watched by myself before...!"

"Don't you like it? I do." (Part Four)

### **Retaliation: 'Camera for killing bad people'**

In a revealing scene, Sarah is also the bearer of the look but her gaze then stands for her resistance against Thornton's phallogentric little-Englandism as her camera is still a metaphor for the power of her gaze but is turned from an instrument of eroticization into a weapon, an instrument of retaliation. In a previous preparatory scene, she first fights the male photographers' oppressive gaze by literally turning her 'camera **back** on them' and in a final scene from Part 5, threatens Thornton by taking photographs very fast while he retreats in a very long shot of the corridor he is trapped in by the female gaze which exposes his voyeuristic misogynistic drives. While the very long shot enhances the entrapment of the character, the repeated clicking sound of the camera suggests the firing of bullets, an analogy which is underscored by her mentioning that she has 'a new high-speed camera which can take pictures very quickly of people who don't always want to be photographed... people who prefer to live in the shadows' (script p. 423). While taking photographs, she highlights her active power by repeating 'I will find Louis...I will find him', thus connecting her gaze with the

forwarding of the story.

The power of the female photographer's camera as a Medusa gaze is enhanced as Thornton is petrified and the act of framing is metaphorically connected to the act of being enframed, which is all the more emphasized through the depth-of-field in a long shot of the corridor as a figure of entrapment. The performative and political power of the photographic act using the 'camera for killing bad people' is highlighted through an intermedial reference to Rossellini's 1952 film *The Machine that Kills Bad People* as Thornton's statuesque paralysis is reminiscent of the policeman petrified in a fascist salute in *La Macchina ammazzacattivi*.



The gaze of the female characters engagingly challenges the established unequal structure of power relations between men and women and stresses the limitations of Mulvey's theory.

But it may be argued that if the black male body is fetishized as the object of the white female gaze (and of Prince George's sexual fantasy as suggested in his flirtatious look at Louis in the Lyle Lane club scene in Part 2) and the working-class male as the object of the white female aristocrat's desire, the repressive power of the gaze may not be really subverted but merely displaced.

## C-INSIDIOUS BOUNDARIES

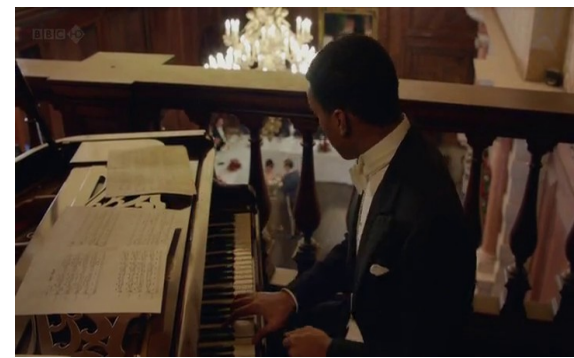
### **Blocked access: the isolated perspective of the alienated outsider**

It should be noted that the main focalizers are not stereotypical dominant figures of power as the hero is a black male on the run and the reporter is a working-class journalist, both elements of race and class being very significant in the narrative.

If seeing is at the core of the aesthetics of this series about watching and being watched, most scenes are observed by Louis behind windows, through half-open doors and through round oval-shaped windows behind closed doors. The investigative side of voyeurism is enhanced when the male characters spy on the freemasons' secret meeting through a hole in the basement of the Imperial Hotel but it most of all foregrounds the obstructed gaze at the impervious patriarchal male



power figures. The forbidden gaze, as we are made to understand retrospectively in the postscript episode, will prove fatal to Louis whose blocked access repeatedly enhances his outsider viewpoint. As we are made to share his perspective as an isolated observer in several illuminating scenes which bring into relief foreshadowing elements that disrupt the apparent crossing of borders, we are led to question the racial and social in-betweenness enticed by the jazz band.



**The perspective of the outsider:  
an obstructed gaze at the impervious patriarchal male power figures**

While the members of the jazz band very noisily and ecstatically run in the corridors of the hotel after their performance, Louis leaves the group to witness a scene through an oval-shape window behind a closed door. We half glimpse with him Masterson gesticulating towards Julian but we do not have access to what they say. The crosscutting between the exhilarated shouting of the musicians and the total silence of the scene from Louis' perspective enhances the illusory crossing of borders between the jazz band and the upper-class patriarchal power figures and prepares for the

parallel structure of the ultimate scene of the episode. The first part of the series closes on a crosscutting between the Prince of Wales attending the jazz band concert at the Imperial hotel and Wesley waiting for his deportation and the ultimate shots alternate between the Prince of Wales dancing with the black female singer of the jazz band in the corridor of the hotel and Wesley's frontal gaze framed by the window of the bus taking him to be deported. The close shot of his eyes is then replicated by a similar frontal close up of Stanley's gaze as an inset narrator's authorial address to the viewer which indicates right from the very beginning of the series the utopian blurring of boundaries as borders are reinforced for human migration.

The series is structured around Louis as the main focalizer with whom identification is encouraged but who is not a main controlling figure. He does not fulfill the man's active role of making things happen (Sarah says to him he's "not allowed just to watch") and he does not save Jessie who will eventually die so that while identifying with the male hero we do not share a sense of omnipotence and control of the narrative characteristic of mainstream cinema.

### **The triangular gaze: the subversive re-mediation of the patriarchal male gaze through the perspective of the outsider.**

However, if the main focalizer in this series is a black male character who does not control the events, the construction of the dominant male gaze in the allegedly conservative scenes is often diegetically replicated and mediated through the perspective of the outsider so that the film is not structured 'around a main controlling figure' and the audience shares the main male protagonist's uneasy, partial and critical gaze at the patriarchal super ego and identifies with a male character who does not forward the narrative by controlling the events but is submitted to them.

Through the subversion of mainstream Hollywood cinema codes, Poliakoff thematizes structures of social inequality in terms of gender, class and race. By showing the events through the perspective of the outsider, he denounces a structuring of dominance which is organised on the basis of class and ethnicity.<sup>23</sup>

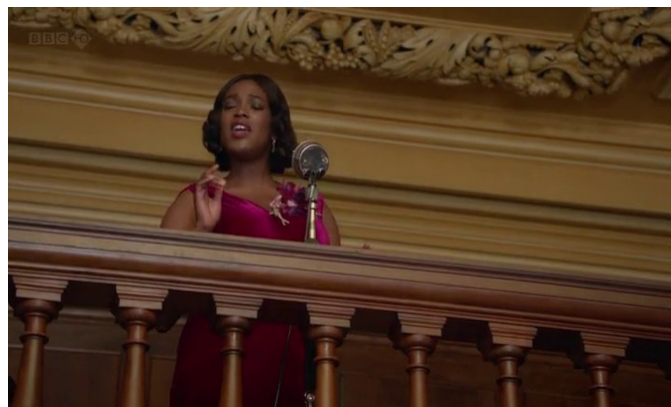
In the scene where the Louis Lester Band performs at the Royal Air Force dinner, we are made to share the black male hero's uneasy, partial and critical subjective vision of the sadistic impulses of the male dominant gaze in the power figure of the Prince of Wales. In this scene, as a response to the castration anxiety posed by the woman as icon, the female guilt is exposed through the dominant figure's sadistic control over the woman's body in a variation on the film noir murder of the female temptress which happens off-screen during the Royal Air Force dinner. Though Poliakoff

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23 I think it should be noted though that Poliakoff's mainly white middle-class audience is unlikely to deal with processes of identification based on the issues of class and race relations.

uses at first sight conservative highly-coded dominant structures of looking, he disrupts the binary gendered opposition through the mediation of a third gaze in a triangular pattern which subverts the codes of the Hollywood genres and plays with the audience's expectations.

Three echoing scenes of repressive brutal power over the woman's body ultimately leading to the female's death are seen through the powerless point of view of Louis who is the one to discover Jessie covered in blood and witnesses the previous scenes through the oval-shaped window of a closed door and the barriers of a balcony. The audience is thus given an obstructed view and made to question with Louis the violence of the repressive male gaze. Contrary to the garden party scene, the Lyle Club scene or some of the Imperial hotel scenes where the male characters' gaze is an alibi for the audience's gaze, the embedded male gaze in the Royal Air Force dinner scene is disrupted as it is mediated and questioned through Louis' POV shots whose unease and disapproval are shared by the audience.



**The triangular gaze: the subversive mediation of the patriarchal male gaze  
through the perspective of the outsider.**

We are given a more complex and contradictory model of the relay of looks on the screen (and between the audience and the diegetic characters) so that the codes of mainstream cinema are distorted through a triangular gaze which makes us share Louis's uneasy and obstructed perspective over the Prince of Wales' gaze.

While a conservative traditional male gaze supremacy seems enhanced in the series' intermedial references to the musical and film noir, the phallocentrism of the male look is partly subverted as the main focaliser is a black character whose vision is partially distorted and reflects the point of

view of the outsider (possibly Poliakoff's as a Russian immigrant). Since the audience identifies with a male hero who does not convey a sense of omnipotence, the codes of the genre are distorted and the viewers' expectations are subverted as they are denied the climactic emotional release of the male hero possessing the woman or saving her.<sup>24</sup>

### **Shooting the Present**

The hybridity of jazz music blurring the racial and social borders therefore functions as a figure of in-betweenness which is set in a heterotopian space in the inter-war years. The doomed ascent of the black jazz band clearly functions as a foreshadowing element on the edge of the second world war as the mediatic crossing of borders is pessimistically reversed right from the beginning by human deportation. The series' editing foregrounds the dichotomy between the free circulation, crossing of boundaries and hybridation of new media and the contrapunctual reinforcement of borders for human migration, which obviously bears a striking contemporaneous resonance. Even if the series is not overtly political, Poliakoff intentionally deals with a series of issues that remain relevant today – immigration, racism, antisemitism and class – and give the figurations of intermediality a somewhat political dimension.

The historical themes are used by Poliakoff to provide a critical view of contemporaneous society through unmistakable echoes between the development of new technologies in the thirties and our reverence for digital media today. The public obsession with celebrity depicted in both series also seems relevant and Lavinia's questioning the social ontology of the photographic image: "who wants to see what I look like? I'm not a performer." sounds particularly prophetic.

But it is most of all by foregrounding the issues of economic depression and immigration that Poliakoff encourages a parallel with present race relations. As a possible warning against the rise of xenophobic political parties in the UK, his depiction of rampant racism is probably also to be interpreted as the running metaphor for antisemitism which pervades all his work.

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24 As Louis clearly articulates his refusal to give closure to his romance with Sarah by telling her that it is not always possible to have proper goodbyes, the audience is denied the emotional romantic release of conventional melodrama.

## CONCLUSION

Poliakoff's remediation of past images in both series functions at several levels. Through intermedial figurations both series diegetically provide a reflection upon media migration, cultural heritage and intercultural exchange. *Shooting the Past* foregrounds the value of the archive and questions the reconstruction of history through past images in a process of recontextualisation which self-reflexively suggests the possibility of manipulation of moving images. The incorporation of the medium of photography and its creation of visual archaisms encourages a meditation upon the identity and the history of the televisual medium and constitutes a formal, almost linguistic experimentation with the language of film. Poliakoff dramatises the experience of border crossing and cultural in-betweenness in a filmic discourse that performs in-betweenness through intermedial figurations (tableau shot, photo-narratives, collage, comped-in images...) within both series. However a diachronic perspective on the writer-director's work reveals a passage from an overt transgression of the televisual conventions and a deconstruction of the televisual image which foregrounds intermediality as a battlefield in *Shooting The Past* to a much more fluid configuration of media convergence in *Dancing on the Edge* in which Poliakoff uses the codes of mainstream cinema and television to undermine them.

Reprising within remediation seems part of the series' core message and aesthetic originality. Far from weakening the series, it allows it to articulate more subversive messages, highlighting the racial, social and gendered subtext in established mainstream popular culture genres and subverting the patriarchal phallocentrism of Hollywood film noir and musical as well as the conservative ideology of period drama.

## PART II: THE POETICS AND AESTHETICS OF THE IN-BETWEEN

### I-THE POLIAKOVIAN INTERMEDIAL RHETORIC

Stephen Poliakoff's work for the televisual medium foregrounds an explicitly intermedial visual rhetoric. The British writer-director is a multifaceted artist whose artistic versatility (for theater, cinema and television) comes across in his filmic oeuvre in favour of a very marked authorial discourse. His televisual series present an immersive world of art fusion where different layers of filmic, theatrical, photographic, painterly and musical materials come together to convey a lyrical form.

In line with his auteur status, Poliakoff's television work displays a characteristic visual style. He consciously works in opposition to the modern televisual trend for fast-paced editing and rapid-fire narrative technique by slowing down his shots, creating spectacle not from rapid action but from the lingering impact of an image, constructing what Amy Holdsworth describes as 'slow television'.<sup>25</sup>

What came to be known as his 'slow television' strategy - which was originally conceived in the 1999 series *Shooting the Past* as a reaction against the fast-paced rhythm of the American television series of the time - deliberately foregrounds still photography and implicitly questions the relationship of stillness and motion within moving pictures so that his so-called 'slow television' project can be reinscribed within the traditional debate of interarts studies between the arts of space and the arts of time. Poliakoff indeed uses extensively - though not exclusively - the medium of photography within moving images and distorts the dichotomy of Lessing in his *Laocoon*. The British writer-director blurs the boundaries between individual media through techniques that enable the features of one medium to resurface within another, be it literally through the combination of media or indirectly through intermedial references to other media which are evoked but are not materially present. He resorts to medial border-crossings and hybridization which constitute intermedial phenomena which traditional interarts studies have acknowledged for a long time so that it seems that the concept of intermediality does not actually point to new problems but rather offers new possibilities for presenting and thinking about them.

The detailed analysis of *Shooting the Past* and *Dancing on the Edge* both actually shows instances where theatrical, literary, painterly or musical intermedial references are conjured up and applied to the televisual medium and to serial narration. Both series flaunt an explicitly intermedial rhetoric for the study of which the various typologies of intermedial categories and the taxonomies<sup>26</sup> of the basic techniques that convey medial differences may be applied and tested. I will first consider the

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<sup>25</sup> Holdsworth, 2006, p. 129.

<sup>26</sup> I will mostly use and refer to Irina Rajewski's typology of intermedial categories of media combination and intermedial references and to Agnes Petho's taxonomy of the basic techniques that convey medial differences whether in the form of cinematic figures or more traditional rhetorical tropes.

notion of intermediality as a specific 'Poliakovian' rhetoric distinguishable within the writer-director's work, a rhetoric that defines Poliakov's work within the cinematic trend of the "slow television" canon. Then I will study intermedial configurations as instances of media combination (when the filmic medium incorporates another medium or art) through a focus on the photo-filmic within the series. I will also analyse occurrences of intermedial references (when the series less obviously borrows specific codes or founding principles from other media which are thus evoked but are not materially present) through the tableau shot. I will consider both the photo-filmic and the tableau shot as extremely charged instances of intermediality which foreground the "Time-Image" of Poliakov's "slow television". Lastly, I will analyse the notion of 'remediation' as intermedial mise en abyme through the representation of various media within the diegesis which sometimes even take responsibility for the storytelling. I will focus on the trans-medial adaptation of the traditional trope of ekphrasis and analyse it as Poliakov's privileged intermedial figure for serial storytelling be it through the embedded photo-narratives within *Shooting the Past* or via the figure of the inset music magazine of *Dancing on the Edge*. Besides, while 'Music Express' corresponds to the remedial logic of traditional literary ekphrasis, it also brings to the fore the media-related concept of convergence through the intradiegetic music magazine's embedding of photo-journalism and comics as the ultimate intermedial hybridation of the word-image relationship.

### **A-Poliakovian tropes**

As Poliakov intends to refashion the idea of the 'authored television drama', figures of intermediality appear to be forged in the poetics of the writer-director as an authorial rhetoric within the cinematic trend of the 'slow television' canon. Poliakov's television series also seem to constantly reference their own functioning and thus facilitate the perception of medial differences through a rhetoric of self-reflexivity which has come to be regarded as a criteria of high-end television.

Some distinctive traits are fully visible in Poliakov's television work so that a Poliakovian piece might be identified from a glance at the screen. As both writer and director, Poliakov combines the writer-led traditions of British theatre and television with the more cinematic conceptions of director as creator and has thus developed a very idiosyncratic style. The influence of his dramaturgic work can be felt in his televisual series which appear distinctively stagey for their very long takes as well as their emphasis on the verbal signs and Sarah Cardwell has observed that "the use of repetition, patterning and rhythm is characteristically present in the dialogues".<sup>27</sup> Poliakov's work reveals identifiable patterns of distinctive tropes, evident through their repetition across the

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Nelson, 2011, p. 220.



television series: the recurrence of the colour red creates a kind of tonalism while the use of landmark buildings and their architectural space conjures up the interior painting genre as well as a theatrical stage. The use of embedded photographs is of course one of the distinctive traits of the Poliakovian poetics and the play with formats, the variety of grain and colour contribute to an artistic rendering of painterly stylization and haptic imagery.

While the painterly stylisation and the overflow of verbal, sometimes almost poetic language infuses a sense of literariness to the series, the iterative pattern through the visual echoes foregrounding single images, the linguistic reprising and the recursively looped haunting soundtrack and intrusive noise, can ultimately provide a lyrical and musical structure built on variations and repetitions.

These figures of intermediality may render the series less transparent towards the unfolding of the story and thus require what Sarah Cardwell calls a willing viewer<sup>28</sup> (i.e. 'an interested and enthusiastic viewer who wishes to thoughtfully engage with and interpret the text'), which reminds us of Henk Oosterling's theoretical writings about the interpretation of intermediality requiring an active viewer, willing to participate in interactivity.

Because there is evidently on the one hand a painstaking attention to detail within Poliakov's television work and on the other hand an enhanced rhetoric of self-reflexivity, I believe that the study of intermedial figurations which encourages the close-up investigation on the images' media components and relations provides a correspondingly detailed critical response to Poliakov's meticulous constructedness.

According to Joachim Paech, intermediality manifests itself as a kind of figuration, "the trace of the medium would become describable as a figured process or a configuration in the film".<sup>29</sup>

With the help of Agnes Petho's taxonomy of the basic techniques that convey medial differences via cinematic figures or through more traditional rhetorical tropes and possible trans-medial "adaptations" of traditional rhetorical figures<sup>30</sup>, I will try and identify within Poliakov's authorial poetics specific intermedial figurations to intent deciphering their possible functions and meanings within the televisual series.

The figures of cinematic intermediality which seem to be forged on a poetic level in the Poliakovian televisual rhetoric rely on techniques which emphasize visual heterogeneity and enhance self-

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28 Sarah Cardwell explains that she uses this phrase not to suggest that this is how one does respond but how one can respond, a willing viewer being 'an interested and enthusiastic viewer who wishes to thoughtfully engage with and interpret the text;' in "Television Aesthetics" and *Close Analysis: Style and Mood in Perfect Strangers* (Stephen Poliakov, 2001), in Douglas Pye and John Gibbs, eds, *Style and Meaning*, Manchester University Press, 2005, p.194.

29 Paech, 2000.

30 Petho, 2010, pp. 60-64.

reflexivity.

### **B-(Meta)cinematic figures**

Poliakoff's rhetoric of self-reflexivity is expressed through the use of the frame within the frame as the windows, door posts, corridors and mobile framing are recurring motifs in Poliakoff's work. The window functions as a threshold, as a passage between two worlds, that of the observers and the observed so that when we see people looking through windows, they are stand-ins for us as viewers. Poliakoff also resorts to the motif as a threshold into the narrative and uses it as a device for serial storytelling as the frame of the window appears at the beginning of each episode of *DoE*. It even provides a passage back in time in the first episode as a caption that reads "18 months before" is literally inserted within the frame of the window and blurs the borders between seeing and reading.

The motifs of the door and of the corridor are also Poliakovian figures whose origin can be traced back to the Flemish interior painting genre, an analogy which is encouraged by the recurrent framing of a Dutch painting of the Golden age in Pamela and Julian's house. The door and window function as liminal thresholds, they constitute self-reflexive figures reminiscent of Dutch interior painting which signal a pictorial in-betweenness giving a painterly and theatrical quality to the televisual image. However, if the Dutch interior painting of the 17<sup>th</sup> century seems to be a key influence, the motifs of the threshold can also be related to the early European cinema of the 1930s when the camera itself and not only the actors move through open doors. The tracking shot forward in the opening scene of *Doe* as we follow an anonymous character and only see his back as he enters the building of *Music Express*, hears the sound of Stanley's typewriter, hides in a corner before climbing up the stairs bears some resemblance with the opening scene of Visconti's 1943 *Obsession*. In both scenes, the vision of the character's face is postponed, only when we are 1mn 45 into the film do we discover the face of Louis - with whom the sequence has established a strong point of identification - after Stanley has seen him in shock. According to Ivo Blom, these postponements are quite Renoir-like and as we observe the character, we also observe through him and explore and validate the space and the location. In the 2013 series, as the spectator is made to adopt the perspective of the character hiding and moving rapidly in the building, we discover a labyrinthine environment made of long corridors and staircases which are Poliakovian tropes suggestive of the character's entrapment and we are being guided through one of the most important settings of *Dancing on the Edge* which will function as a spatial palimpsest throughout the whole series. While there are strong ties with the research in perspective and space in Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> century art as we will see in the next part, the mobile gaze refers to other models and marks, in Jacques

Aumont's words, "a break between the traditional art historical conception and the filmic conception of representation"<sup>31</sup>. The use of the motif of the door (and corridor) can be seen as an example of 'transmedial intermediality' that applies to the comparison of Poliakov's use of the motif with its use in 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch painting whereas the recurring use of mobile framing in *Dancing on the Edge* refers to the director's personal aesthetics and seems to belong to the cinematic medium-specificity. This analysis seems consistent with Rajewski's reference to Gaudreault and Marion's conception that "it is through intermediality, through a concern with the intermedial, that a medium is understood."<sup>32</sup>

Within the list of techniques that convey medial differences described by Agnes Petho, I consider that what Yvonne Spielmann refers to as the *cluster* as well as the *interval* are also instances of "frames within the frame". The *cluster* as "multiple layering of different images or image elements resulting in spatial density"<sup>33</sup> can be considered a motif of Poliakov's series with their multiple layers of images through the embedded photographs, paintings, posters, cartoon plates...

The cluster is closely linked to the category of the *interval* which is a category which marks a temporal difference and mediates the juxtaposition of different media. It may also be useful a category for Poliakov's series which use the photograph and the record as traces of a distinct time zone. The analog photograph being a signifier of a past time and the record marking the mediation of a former sound are devices used for flashback serial storytelling.

This intermedial figure also seems relevant as both series often depict the spatialization of the narratives through the inscription within the simultaneity of space of the screen of the successivity of time via the insertion of the cartoon pages or series of photographs.

The *photographic blur* (defined by Joachim Paech as "a figure of multiple mediation between the transparency of the cinematic image and the painterly, almost palpable and material rendering of an image on the one hand, and the photographic reality of the event captured in motion on the other"<sup>34</sup>) as well as the *tableau shot* (characteristic of the mannerist aesthetics associated with period drama) and the figure of the *tableau vivant* are instances highly charged with intermediality as we will see and constitute fruitful categories for our study. The *tableau vivant* which is an "extremely charged instance of intermediality" in Agnes Petho's words is an even further complicated figure in *Shooting*

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31 Jacques Aumont, *L'Oeil interminable*, 1989, p. 37.

32 Rajewski, 2005, p. 48.

33 A category identified by Yvonne Spielmann in Peter Greenaway's films.

34 Joachim Paech, "Le Nouveau Vague oder Unschärfe als intermediale Figur." In *Intermedialität Analog/Digital. Theorien – Methoden – Analysen*, eds. Joachim Paech and Jens Schröter, 345–361. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2008.

*the Past* as it is embedded within the staged photographs adding another layer to the cluster of palimpsestic images.

Another complex intermedial figure in film can be obtained by *translating verbal metaphors* or *word-plays into cinematic imagery* or narrative, thus self-reflexively foregrounding in cinema a deep underlying relationship between words and images, between discourse and figure.

The correspondence between the visual rendering of Sarah's activity as a photographer of representing reality by framing it and the narrative of "being framed," entrapped is enhanced when she chases Thornton with her camera in the retaliation scene from the last episode.

We may also find instances of word plays through the visual resemantization of dead metaphors when Stanley mentions that they're going to be trapped when they are precisely framed by a trap under the stage in a clear intermedial reference to the Elizabethan theatricality of the *mise en scène*.

[Fig. ]

Anderson's mentioning that 'this is a set up' may also have the same function of connecting the theme of being "set up" and being "staged".

The credit rolls which function as a figure of threshold also underscore the blurring of borders between the linguistic and the iconic, each one penetrating the space of the other and reuniting the discursive with the visual through the layering of the composite image both visible and readable. The blurring of borders between the word and the image is replicated by the blurring of borders between time and space as a caption reads "London, 1933" thus inscribing time in the image.

Beside these figurations there is also the possibility considered by A. Petho of exploring the cinematic versions of some more traditional rhetorical figures.

### **C-Trans-medial adaptation of traditional rhetorical tropes**

The opening sequence of *StP* is framed by a narrator staring at the camera and directly addressing the spectator, (*he fixes us with his gaze,... he is staring at us in giant close-up,... he sits again staring at us, then he stares at us*<sup>35</sup>). The framing device of the narrator with Oswald speaking directly to camera intimately addressing the spectators (*Why should we care? Or rather why should **you** care?...Anybody who knows how that feels-this is for **you..***)<sup>36</sup> is including us as viewers beyond the fourth wall. Besides, the recurring use of the frontal gaze and direct address at the spectator, within Spig's and Veronica's shorts as well as within Marilyn's epilogue provide other examples of trans-medial metalepses.

Through the insert of a superimposed black and white photograph over the grandhouse, the

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35 Poliakoff, Steven. *Shooting the Past*, London, Methuen Drama, 1999, p. 3-5.

36 Ibid. my underlining.

difference between the house and its content is blurred so that the dissolve functions as a transmedial adaptation of a synecdoche.

I may also mention the series' special features, "Spig's short" or "Interviewing Louis" which are used in the form of a paratext, a palpable frame on the margin of the series which illuminates the margins. As a figure of contiguity, I believe Spig's short may be interpreted as a trans-medial metonymy as well as an ekphrastic epilogue which blurs the distinction between image and text as the archivist verbally narrates over the static picture.

Intermedial mise en abyme and ekphrasis

It is indeed mainly *ekphrasis*, a figure that implies crossing media borders that proves to be particularly to study Poliakoff's series, especially when connected to issues of narratology since ekphrasis can be considered a form of remediation according to Bolter and Grusin<sup>37</sup> so that we may speak of intermedial mise en abyme. We have in both series multiple occurrences of remediated images of characters in photographs, posters, comic book drawings, magazines, newspaper articles, genre film iconography in *Dancing on the Edge* as well as reflections of characters in literary, mythological and painterly figures in *Shooting the Past*, which can be seen in parallel to the remediation logic of traditional literary ekphrasis.<sup>38</sup> Figurations of intermediality may then be connected to narratology as the notion of 'remediation' as intermedial mise en abyme may be used through the representation of various media within the diegesis which sometimes even take responsibility for the storytelling, be it through the embedded photo-narratives within *Shooting the Past* or via the figure of the inset music magazine of *Dancing on the Edge*.

While these taxonomies and definitions concerning the types of intermediality do not provide hermetic categories as many images belong to several of them, the close-up investigation on the images' media components and relations that they encourage enhances the filmic medium's multiple mediality and enables the deciphering of the possible functions and meanings of intermedial figurations within the televisual series.

Because of the meticulous formal construction and attention to detail within Poliakoff's television work, I believe that the study of intermedial figurations which encourages the close analysis of the images themselves together with their media components and media relation and flaunts the television medium's multiple mediality provides a correspondingly adequate framework that television aesthetics deserve.

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37 Bolter and Grusin, 1999, pp. 51-52.

38 The inherent intermedial nature of *Shooting the Past* had even given birth to the (unachieved) project of publishing the photographs in a book within the likely form of a photo-novel.

## II- THE TIME-IMAGE OF POLIAKOFF'S SLOW TELEVISION

### A-The photo-filmic

#### 1-Image vs narrative

The subversive attitude of Poliakov's 'slow television' towards the hysterical pace of spectacle in the wake of modernist and New Wave films was born in the context of an increased preoccupation with the sensual qualities and magic effect of the single, static image. This preoccupation has also been reflected in a film theoretical interest in the still image as attraction versus issues of narration which is obviously marked by Deleuze Time-Image concept, defining "a cinema of the seer and no longer of the agent"<sup>39</sup> that can be applied to Poliakov's work as both series foreground the figure of the observer. Anderson is submitted to the magic effect of the gallery photographs and recalls Tom Gunning's theory of the cinema of attraction while Julian embodies the fetishistic dimension of Mulvey's "possessive spectator" and while we can see in Louis, who is often shown in the process of looking at photographs, a figure of Bellour's "pensive spectator," his often obstructed vision reveals a more haptic gaze that can be related to Laura Marks' haptic visuality and to Vivian Sobchack's phenomenological approach to the filmic experience (that will be studied in the last part of this work).

#### Pose and pause in the narrative

Poliakov's attempt to push the televisual medium to its limit through the use of the still frame foregrounds his creative belief in the intrinsic aesthetic and narrative worth of the televisual image. 'Slow' is meant as an assertion of its aesthetic value, which contributes, in Christopher Hogg's words, to "the construction of a larger televisual experience", "not as an ephemeral byte within a rapid-fire delivery of plot, to be instantly forgotten, but as something which deserves the viewer's consideration and appreciation, and which has the potential to linger in the mind."<sup>40</sup> As Amy Holdsworth suggests, the slow, embedded photographic sequences facilitate "an appreciation of and concentration on the image and the practices of storytelling within the series, opening up an interpretative space for the viewer to inhabit."<sup>41</sup> 'Slow' is not meant in this context as an unnecessarily laboured delivery, but as an assertion of the aesthetic value of the televisual image and the crafting of a story. Central to this approach is Poliakov's use of the still image, repeatedly embedded within his television dramas in the form of photographic montage sequences, which temporarily angle the viewer away from the diegesis to offer an alternative mode of contemplative engagement with image and storytelling; 'a significant televisual experience designed to haunt the

<sup>39</sup> Deleuze, 1989, pp. 126-129.

<sup>40</sup> Christopher Hogg, Re-evaluating the Archive in Stephen Poliakov's 'Shooting the Past'. *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, 6 (3) 2009, p. 444.

<sup>41</sup> Amy Holdsworth, 'Slow Television' and Stephen Poliakov's Shooting the Past. *Journal of British Cinema and Television*. 3 (1), 2008, p. 129-130.

memory<sup>42</sup>

As Jessie sings for Prince George in the Lyle Lane club, she poses according to the rules of what Mulvey calls "delayed cinema" and the pause in the narrative, the sudden emergence of time in the flow of actions "allows time for the cinema to denaturalize the human body"<sup>43</sup> A pose functions as a pause through Poliakoff's use of the genre of the musical but also literally through the photographic pose when Sarah the photographer asks the characters to "hold it like that", thus halting the narrative and increasing the spectatorial consciousness of time.

### **From the narrative 'glitch' to the palimpsest of narratives.**

Intermediality is experienced in Poliakoff's work through the literal insertion of photographs (i.e as instances of "media combination") which interact with the narrative structure of the series. This interaction ranges from provoking momentary interferences to constituting the centre of a plot (in Anderson's embedded photo-story in which the diptych matrix photograph constitutes the "beginning of a trail" in a detective mode) to even becoming the canvas for a palimpsest of narratives and narrative modes.

The change of medium even when dramatically motivated is always perceived as a disruption of the cinematic sequence, all the more so as Poliakoff often provides an only ulterior diegetic motivation to the insertion of the black and white photographs within the flow of events, which always has the effect of halting the narrative or opening it to an alternative space. In the first episode of *DoE*, it is only thanks to the suturing diegetic soundtrack of Stanley's typewriter that we are made to understand in the subsequent shot of Stanley typing his article in the office of Music Express that the a-narrative photographs probably belong to the same diegetic space and might have been seen through the eyes of the characters visiting the office. Nevertheless, this dramatic motivation is not confirmed by a shot of the protagonists' faces so that the incorporated photographs remain in an in-between space.

The insertion of Sarah's behind-the-shots photographs, though more clearly diegetically explained as the pictures are intercut by some shots of Stanley typing the articles of the embedding magazine and of Masterson browsing the special issue of Music Express, still provoke a momentary interference and foreground their medial differences and their state of in-betweenness, as a visual enactment of Raymond Bellour's statement that "the photographic exists somewhere in-between...in movement it is that which interrupts, that paralyses; in immobility it perhaps bespeaks its relative impossibility"<sup>44</sup>. Poliakoff relies heavily upon the aesthetic quality of the photographs themselves

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42 Holdsworth, 2006, p. 131.

43 Mulvey, 2006, 164

44 Bellour, 2008, p. 253.

through the stylised set up of lighting and shadow that characterise Hollywood portraiture. Even if their presence in the diegesis is motivated as we understand that they correspond to a sort of animated sequence of the magazine, they are inserted through editing and not camera work. As they are not shown within the pages of *Music Express* but directly fill the screen, they take a different quality and pace for which Poliakoff relies heavily upon the aesthetic quality of the photographs themselves through the stylised set up of lighting and shadow that characterise Hollywood portraiture. As the extradiegetic spectator is the direct recipient of the photographs, they may acquire a more fetishistic dimension if we agree with Mulvey's interpretation. Because they are photographs of the character who has just died, they may also have an elegiac ring similarly to the black and white photographs of Oswald do in *Shooting the Past* which are intercut within the montage of the drama almost as attractions and become iconic symbols which embody an emotive significance as relics of the character.

In *Shooting the Past*, photographs are often seen from a character's point of view, however, they are not always part of the movement of the drama when they are directly inserted into the film through editing. They may then appear to the characters in almost subliminal flashes and function like Roland Barthes' punctum but we may even sometimes doubt their intradiegetic existence. An interesting case in point is the insertion of a photograph of the "spirit of the Blitz" while Oswald who is faced with the imminent destruction of the library exposes his plan to go on having a formal meal while being shown presiding a rather sumptuous banquet, which conjures up a pictorial reference to Da Vinci's *Last Supper*. The photograph of the milkman deliberately picking his way over the rubble functions as a literal insert. It seems to constitute an authorial aside, a quick rhetorical metaleptic wink at the knowledgeable spectator, to suggest that Oswald's perception of the world is based on deceptive images as the spirit of the Blitz is a totally mythic construction of propagandistic national identity which was created through fake photographs. The inserted photograph seems to communicate directly with the viewer and as such seems to function as a rhetorical metalepsis, an aside.



Photographs in film, by marking moments of stillness in the narrative flow, open up another time and substract us from the fiction of the film even if they are part of it and turn us into "spectateurs



pensifs<sup>45</sup>". As Raymond Bellour explains, the hurried spectator of cinema is turned into a pensive one, an effect which is also achieved by the presence of other kinds of immobile imagery in films such as tableaux vivants. Poliakoff also resorts to this highly charged instance of intermediality but his use of Pascal Bonitzer's "composite monster" is further complicated as the incorporation of tableaux vivants is achieved under the form of embedded staged photographs, thus adding another layer to the intricate pattern of *Shooting the Past*. The series seems to illustrate that, in a slight distortion of Jason Jacobs' words<sup>46</sup>, "when [television] intermingles with photography, we even start talking about painting, sculpture and even theatre as well [since]...the encounter between film and photography inevitably involves references to a whole series of other media and combinations of artistic disciplines.

## **2-*Shooting The Past*'s new Laocoon of the photographic art of memory**

David Campany states that "cinema tends to dwell on the photograph as mute and intransigent object from the past" so that "the 'proof' of photography as memory or history is nearly always at stake."<sup>47</sup>

In *Shooting the Past*, Poliakoff resorts not only to the medium of photography but also to archival photographs thus clearly grounding photography as an art of memory. The British writer-director uses photography both as an art of space and an art of time and pushes each art form to its limits by disrupting and blurring Lessing's traditional distinction between the arts of chronology and the arts of simultaneity. Through his use of the static image within film, Poliakoff aims at the suspension of time within the narrative while he simultaneously attempts to inscribe time within space. He uses a medium which is iconic - in Pierce's definition - and constitutes an art of space but is also ontologically an art of time if we are to accept the conviction of its indexicality as trace and deixis, which makes it a temporal art after the imprint left by the object in the form of an obfuscation of light. The title of the series inscribes photography across time and is grounded on the traditional approach – that predates digital photography - which considers photography as an indexical trace of its referent, a chemical trace showing a 'that has been' to quote Roland Barthes in his *Camera Lucida*<sup>48</sup>. *Shooting the Past* bears in its title the disruption of Lessing's dichotomy as photography as an art of space is clearly connected to memory and thus constitutes an art of time so that the photograph functions as a chronotope<sup>49</sup> since the photographic frame coordinates and necessitates

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45 Bellour, "The pensive spectator".

46 Jacobs, 2011, pp. 122-123.

47 Campany, *Photography and Cinema*, p. 97.

48 Barthes, Roland, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard, Vintage; New edition, 1993.

49 In his essay, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope of the Novel," Bakhtin defines the chronotope as a site within a narrative where time and space "thicken" and merge assuming each the qualities of the other, p. 202.

the dialectic of Peirce's two, seemingly incompatible, definitions of the index, as trace and deixis. As the dialectic of the trace (the "once" or pastness) and deixis (the now or presence) produces the conviction of the index, the photographic medium specificity allows to navigate in between different time zones as the photograph is simultaneously 'apparently' here and a trace of what 'once was'. It is iconic but also indexical and if photography is a spatial art in the sense that it occupies space, it is also an art of memory.

The general narrative mainly relies on the intrinsic mystery of the photographic image itself that is used by the archivists to fight the impending destruction of their photographic collection. Marilyn Truman attempts to convince Anderson of the value of the collection and make him change his plans by overwhelming him with previously concealed narratives pieced together through Bates's remarkable visual memory and ability as a picture researcher. The narrative relies mainly on two embedded photo-stories which frame the archivists' attempt to save the collection of photographs as didactic demonstrations of the necessity of the inscription of the fixed image within seriality.

Each story is told entirely with photos, in the style of *La Jetée* by Chris Marker, except that *Shooting the Past* mixes together real archival pictures (some of them very famous), new photos shot to look like archival pictures, and 'comped-in' images made by inserting new elements into old pictures. Both embedded photographic montages, as photo-stories within the story prove fundamental to the director's construction of a truly engaging televisual experience for the viewer, both diegetically and extra-diegetically.

### **3-The embedded photo-narrative as a palimpsest of intermedial artistic references**

#### **The photo-story and the word-image relationship of Oswald's modernist collage**

Anderson's photo-story blurs the boundaries between the arts of time and the arts of space and is based on the dialectics of text-image relationships. This second embedded story constitutes the plot of the third and last episode and its final revelation brings a resolution to the whole series. The weaving of the story relies literally on a dialogic word-image relationship as the hermeneutic quest starts with the matrix dyptich photograph as well as with a mystery word repeatedly scribbled by Oswald and discovered among his paraphernalia which is brought over to the photographic library. The transference of his studio material to the museum-like gallery seems in keeping with his status as an artist figure and bears a certain visual resemblance with the transference of Francis Bacon's studio in the Hugh Lane gallery in Dublin where the single bare bulb over the painter's paraphernalia might encourage our interpretation of Oswald's studio and its emphasis on the unique light bulb ("Why did you take all the bulbs out - leaving just one? - Typically perverse..." says Marilyn) as a possible visual echo (see appendix).

Oswald created the image-text in the form of a collage ("he found her again and again...he sent for the cuttings.") and embodies the figure of the artist. (As such, he is first depicted as a poetic fantasist relying on a romanticised vision of life based on potentially deceptive images, but he is finally revealed as a visionary man who permits the salvation of the collection. He eventually finds a solution for the collection and enables Anderson's and Marilyn's lives to change, thus representing the figure of the visionary artist and ultimately modern man - in a construction of a character most likely based on Poliakoff's perception of himself - to whom Marilyn pays a final homage as a closure to the series: "without the Oswalds of this world, we have no future".)

The photograph of Anderson's mother is the clue used by Marilyn to look for his grandmother within the collection, which recalls the practice of physiognomy as a method of investigation associated with the technological innovation of photography. The fact that, in the manner of a forensic detective, she uses the resemblance of the features within the photographs to find the woman's ascendant connects photography and identity within photography's realism while providing a visual analepsis in the narration. The dyptich formed by the juxtapositioning of both photographs permits a a-temporal or rather crosstemporal representation within space. Besides, the fact that Marilyn puts the mother's photograph on the grandmother's image for both faces to form a dyptich suggests a form of stereoscopic vision of the woman, all the more reinforced when we know that the actress's face was materially digitally inserted - 'photoshopped' - into the real archival picture. Moreover, as Marilyn lays the mother's image on the original library photograph, the shape of a figure in the image underneath creates a shadow on the mother's face, thus encouraging a palimpsestic reading of the archive while hinting at a possibly darker and contrapunctual vision of Anderson's grandmother, as if to contradict Anderson's claim that 'there is nothing there', 'there is nothing to discover'. Marilyn's gesture literally enacts the palimpsestic composition through the superimposition of successive layers in the picture, which foregrounds the necessity of reading the image as a series of surfaces to uncover their meaning. The patch of shade provides a contrasting effect with the right part of the picture which is fully lit and depicts a woman in a virginal white corseted dress much in keeping with Anderson's textual presentation of her as 'a dutiful wife by all accounts'. Anderson's verbal construction of his grandmother as a Saint of the Hearth ('she lived for my grandfather') apparently matches the pictorial representation of the young woman as the round white hat connoting purity as a glowing halo circling the head of a saint turns Anderson's grandmother into an Edwardian version of the literary figure of the 'Angel in the House'. But this dyptich contrasting figure already suggests a stereoscopic vision of the woman, a prophetic sign of Marilyn's discovery of 'another sort of Hettie' and foreshadows the eroticism revealed by the

photographs through their depiction of a mythical Lamian figure casting her spell on the male viewers, a Pre-Raphaelite passionate and sensuous creature and seductress. The diptych photograph already underscores stereotypically antagonist icons of femininity.



**The diptych matrix photograph**

### **Aesthetic art's palimpsestic nature**

As the characters within the photo narrative are depicted as "artistic young people...taking their own pictures", the mise en abyme of the creative process is emphasized and foregrounds aesthetic art's palimpsestic nature through a network of visual echoes and variations.

The mise en abyme of the characters creating photographs lays bare the artificiality of the motif and the presentation of Hettie as a model for staged photographs foregrounds the complicity between the person gazing and the person being gazed at. The narcissistic nature of Hettie which is verbally underlined by Marilyn ("what was great about your grandmother - she loved being photographed") is mirrored in the pictorial photograph in a variation on the motif of the Narcissus figure which emphasizes the strong quotational and aesthetic quality of the photographs. The image of Hettie over the pond replicates the circular gaze of the other photographs as well as her position as bearer of the look but acts as a counterpoint as the character of Hettie does not look at the other characters but at her own reflection. The pictorial photograph through its depiction of layers of botanic elements and mythological references suggests an analogy with Pre-Raphaelitism and evokes John Waterhouse's *Echo and Narcissus* but also his 1909 *Lamia*. The vanity of the Lamia figure is also enhanced through the recurring motif of the peacock feather that can be read as a classical reference to the myth of Argos and Hera and thus foregrounds the gaze as a central theme.



The depiction of Hettie both verbally and visually conjures up a very pregnant literary and pictorial intertext through the intermedial hybrid references which play on various icons of femininity, thus forming an iconotextual palimpsest. While the literary quotations mostly rely on a Victorian intertext, the photographs seem to combine a pattern of visual echoes from John William Waterhouse's work as the staged photographs depict reclining figures and emphasize the motifs of botanic elements - narcissus flowers among others - and peacock feathers. The analogy is further suggested by the presence of birds in the series' pictures as a possible reference to the siren in Greek mythology as a creature half-bird and half-woman and thus depicted in Waterhouse's 1891 *Ulysses and the Sirens*.

The verbal narration plays on the clichés of the gothic novel through stereotypical locations as the story is set in a castle and as both men disappear on the moors, so that the landscape epitomizes the 'English mystery' – in Anderson's words - which is illustrated with real photographs from the Getty foundation – 'found among the collection to match the story' - as well as with 'comped-in' images as

Hettie's face was digitally inserted on a famous archival photograph of a police search.



Another literary intermedial reference is convoked through the motif of bigamy as Hettie is reported as having an affair with both men, a stereotype of the sensation novel which is echoed visually through the PreRaphaelite lens as Hettie becomes a passionate and sensuous creature reminiscent of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*<sup>50</sup>. The staged photographs indeed depict a PreRaphaelite femme fatale, often a reclining figure, and use the framing of the hair for its close association with seduction and mortiferous eroticism, as an icon of the witchcraft of womanhood.



As if to debunk Anderson's literary construction of his Edwardian version of the *Angel in the House* and as a counterpoint to his biblical intertext - be it in his convocation of the Gadarene swine or in his emphasis on visibility through the biblically connoted 'Lo and behold' -, the devilish female

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<sup>50</sup> Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 1862.



creature is secularised through the pictorial paganism of classical antiquity as she is rewritten into a mythical sorceress figure and as she adopts very statuesque poses in Pre-Raphaelite tableaux vivants.

Numerous suggestive factors in the photographs can be read as classical references and while the photograph of the reclining Hettie holding a peacock feather may evoke at first sight a woman of clear luxury in a moment of what may seem to be sheer nothingness, the intermedial classical quotation, itself remediated through a reference to John Waterhouse's 1880 *Dolce Far Niente* clearly associates the reclining woman with the figure of the hetaera (see Appendix). The visual detail acts as a metaphor and gives an increased signifying power to the storyteller's words so that the female figure is to be read as an accomplished courtesan and the Gadarene club is turned into a symposium.



In the supposedly more realistic archival pictures – which were shot to look like archives - the mythical murderous temptress is also conjured up in photographs which do not look like paintings but suggest analogies with some painters' works through mediatic transpositions. The woman musician for instance evokes John Waterhouse's *The Charmer* or *The Siren* while the photograph of Hettie holding her glass seems like a compositional echo of Waterhouse's *study for Medea* (see Appendix).

As the photographs waver in between the intermedial references to various forms of art, the visual representations of femininity seem to move across time. While the withcraft of womanhood appears as a constructed timeless icon in the staged photographs which play on the borders between the arts as Hettie adopts very statuesque and theatrical poses in Pre-Raphaelite tableaux vivants, the more 'realistic' photographs seem to present a modern version of the seductress as Hettie is depicted as an updated sensuous femme fatale in more cinematic pictures convoking an intermedial reference to the film noir genre.

Both literary and pictorial intermediality participate in the construction of femininity as a series of visual codes and the woman's body is fetishized in the photographs most notably and stereotypically through the framing of the hair. Nevertheless, the inscription within some photographs of the

woman as bearer of the look seems to suggest that she is the subject of her own desire and to claim the existence and imprint of the female gaze. Eventually, as a counterpoint to Mulvey's analysis<sup>51</sup>, the femme fatale from the film noir is not murdered, the man is. Nevertheless, the transgressive version of femininity which is represented through Anderson's grandmother's unconventional life seems to be tempered by the final reinscription of womanhood within motherhood as Hettie's gaze evolves from a sensuous voyeuristic and narcissistic gaze into the mothering look of the grandmother and as her previously loose hair is tied up in the recognition photograph thus losing its subversive connotations. (see Appendix)

Anderson's story-within-the-story uses the medium of photography to cross the frontier of Lessing's dichotomy between the arts of space and the arts of time and the hybrid photo-narrative disrupts the limits between the art forms by convoking simultaneously an iconotextual palimpsest through intermedial references to literature, painting and cinema and using sequentially an aesthetic consecution of visual motifs whose harmony evokes a musical pattern.

If the art forms are pushed to their limits in the photo-story, their boundaries are also disrupted within the still image as the art forms seem to be fused in the photographic fantasies when the tableaux vivants simultaneously convoke sculpture, painting and theater in a kind of mediatic hybridation. The PreRaphaelite photographs may be considered as intermedial references as they resort to the academic patterns of painting but they may also be intramedial references to the early twentieth-century movement of Pictorialism within photography, as a reference to pay homage to the first artistic movement constituted around the practice of photography. The reference to Pictorialism, a movement which advocates the status of photography as art and blurs the boundaries between the art forms through its reliance on both painting and theater functions as a self-reflective synecdoche for the whole series which plays around the borders between media and constitutes a pledge for intermediality as a creative process.

## **B-The tableau shot and the threshold of media**

While Poliakoff's 'slow television' strategy relies mainly on the use of incorporated photographs, he also uses the aesthetic of the tableau composition as a poetic figure as well as a transgressive and performative structure. As analysed by Agnes Petho, the cinematic tableau "is always able to bring forth the intermediality of cinema as a productive in-betweenness, assigning the form of one medium (e.g. painting, photography, theatrical *mise en scène*) to act as a medium for a specific figure (the tableau shot) in another media (cinema)"<sup>52</sup>. The intermedial aesthetic of the cinematic

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51 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, vol.16, no.3, Autumn 1975, pp.6-18.

52 Petho, 2015, p. 41.



tableau is a versatile figure in contemporary cinema since it has become a key figure of a mannerist aesthetic in heritage films as a shorthand to connect the narrative to a certain period of history<sup>53</sup> as well as a recurring device of contemplative slow cinema so that it proves no surprising that Poliakov uses it extensively in *Dancing on the Edge*. I will discuss Poliakov's original televisual style based on the rigorous aesthetic of the tableau shot and its inflections towards the tableau vivant and the transmedial paradigm of the Dutch interior as both a vehicle for social criticism or "expressive realism"<sup>54</sup> and a 'revitalization' of the role of architecture in the intermedial filmic image.

## **1-Contemplative television and social criticism**

### **Definitions**

The tableau shot is defined by Brewster and Jacobs as "a characteristic type of shots in early films and a type of construction that relies on that type of shot. This is the centred axial long shot, looking at an interior as if at a box set on stage from the centre of the theatre stalls".<sup>55</sup>

The intermedial reference to a painting can be achieved through "system reference" i.e the cinematic image becoming like a painting (when the moving image itself assumes the characteristics of a painting through specific techniques of lighting, framing and mise en scène), which can be achieved without individual references to particular paintings. The painterly reference can vary from a limited reference (the painterly style of a particular artist, e.g. the inserted staged photographs resembling John Waterhouse's PreRaphaelite paintings in *Shooting the Past*) to a broader reference (e.g. the shots using the architectural space and the motifs of Dutch interior genre painting in *Dancing on the Edge*), to a more "generic reference" (i.e being "like a painting" in a more general sense) when images become like paintings not by reference/resemblance but because of their static framing and mise en scène. In the latter cases however, I believe the artistic references that are conjured up convoke theater and sculpture as well as painting. There are many of these shots in *Dancing on the Edge* for public figures always seem to be on stage when they enter public places where they have to play social roles. They adopt very statuesque poses in the hall of the Imperial hotel or walk as if on a stage in the very theatrical cricket scene where the characters give each other stage directions for a literal social performance, which lays bare the artificiality of the social codes of representation as Louis has to change clothes and kinetics to play the part of the Negro servant. The cricket scene interestingly enhances the reversibility of the stage as the inset audience of Pamela and Louis's play is standing on a liminal space in-between theatrical curtains in a scene which foregrounds the theatricality of public life as well as the artificial conventions of racial and social stratification.

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53 Vidal, 2012.

54 Nelson, 2011, p. 69.

55 Brewster and Jacobs, 1999, p. 38.

## Staged scenes and stage directions: the theatricality of public life and social representation



Characters appearing as if moving on a stage



"If I'm your servant, I ought to stand..."



The actor's change of clothes and position as signifiers for social representation.



### ***Tableau vivant* and framed bodies**

The characters are trapped by social conventions and their bodies are framed and captured as pictures so that "the intermedial figure of tableau vivant also reveals the movement-stillness mechanism of the medium of film by turning under our eyes the body into a picture"<sup>56</sup>.

### **Objectification of bodies**

The characters of Pamela and Julian are transformed into pictures and tableaux vivants meant to symbolize the stifling social conventions related to family roles and family reunions. We see Julian objectified in between two vases into an ornamental tableau composition, Pamela is portrayed in a suffocating Christmas dinner scene that she has to flee and their house is turned into a museum in which Stanley and Louis feel oddly boxed-in as the room becomes the frame.

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<sup>56</sup> Kiraly, 2014.



**Stifling social conventions**



**Objectification of bodies**



**The room as museum**

As the tableau form is closely connected to architectural space opening up through inner frames, protagonists are also often portrayed in liminal situations but in mostly static, painterly poses, with dialogues delivered in single takes as if being on stage, as a reflection on social stratification and isolation of individuals, a possible aristocratic ennui and alienation which is clearly voiced by Julian and Pamela as they are framed by a door in a slightly incestuous scene, when they are about to be separated in part five.

The structural principle of "en-framing" as containment is also used in a rigid and meticulously composed tableau of Julian and Pamela with their mother mimicking the rigidity of the family

dynamics. The figure of entrapment is underscored by the image of the shadow of the grid framing Julian's face and of various inner frames. The shot of the enclosed space of the room through the entrapment of the closed door also figures the dynamics of family relations which are expressed through the domineering position of the repressive mother which is explicitly translated in the mother's point-of-view shot of Julian in a low angle and through a grotesque deframing of her body showing her ankles in the foreground.



**Spatial dynamics of family relations**

The Poliakovian aesthetics of stillness here functions as a vehicle for social criticism which relies on the structured interiors of houses through the painting of tableaux of domestic interiors which can be related to early modern painting.

## **2-The transmedial paradigm of the Dutch interior**

### **The motif of the threshold**

Dutch painting of the Golden age can be seen as a key influence for the box-like architectural tableau of domestic interiors. The motifs of the open door and of the corridor which are constant motifs in Poliakov's work can be researched in comparison with early modern painting. As analysed by Ivo Blom, the motif of doubling of the frame through the open door developed as a meta-pictorial image in 17<sup>th</sup> century Flemish painting. It becomes a prominent motif in its connection of two adjacent domestic spaces and is the matrix of interior genre and painting. The gaze through the open door, the famous Dutch see-through becomes a constant motif in the work notably of Samuel van Hoogstraten which reveals a fascination for the pure interior in which humans are almost absent. Though we may also find the origin of the creation of depth through open doors and corridors in the European cinema of the 1930s, the recurrent shot of another Flemish painting within a room devoid of any human presence in *Dancing on the Edge* encourages our interpretation of the embedding tableau shot as an intermedial reference to the Dutch "doorkijkje." The iterative presence of this shot punctuating the episodes gives a painterly quality to

the cinematic frame and even if the inset painting of a church interior by Pieter Saenredam does not itself embed the Dutch see-through, it foregrounds the open door of the framing tableau shot as an intermedial threshold thus positioning the viewer on a liminal space in-between the visual arts.



**The Flemish painting embedded within the Dutch tableau shot**



**Pieter Saenredam's *Nave and choir of the St. Catharijnekerk*, Utrecht 1655-60**

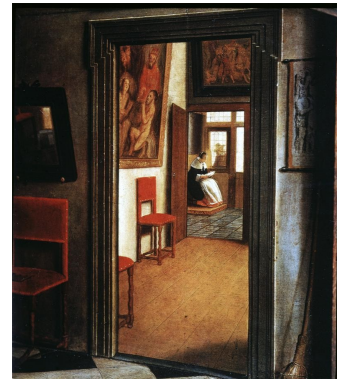
This intermedial reference to the Dutch interior may also be found in many other shots which bear a resemblance with Hoogstraten's well-know peepshows in which he offered three-dimensional looks onto a Dutch interior through peepholes at the far ends of the box. The corridor shot of Lady Cremone's apartment in the Imperial Hotel in which our view is directed towards the back, in a space beyond an open door may remind us of Hoogstraten's perspective which positions the viewer in a pictorial in-betweenness which is stressed by the presence of a painting on the wall. The chequered floor of Lady Cremone's country house may also act as a visual reminder as it is shot through an open door and lit through the large opening window at the back which draws our attention toward the figures entering the domestic space and gives a theatrical quality to the scene that is reinforced by Louis's statuesque pose which reminds us of Vermeer's 1669 *Love Letter* and



its similar play with three different spaces to create a sense of depth<sup>57</sup>. Of course the corridor scene which is one of the most dramatic moments in the series may also recall Hoogstraten's 1662 *View of a corridor*.

### The transmedial paradigm of the Dutch interior

Frames, doors, corridors and windows: the motif of the threshold.



Samuel Hoogstraten: *A peepshow with views of the interior of a Dutch House* (1655-1660)

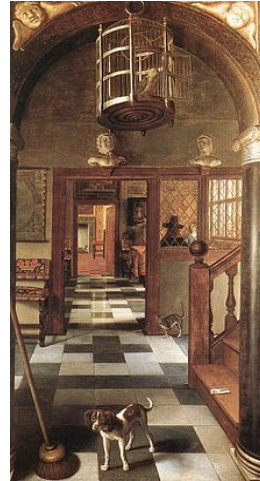


Johannes Vermeer: *Love Letter* (1669)

Emmanuel de Witte: *Interior with a Woman at the Virginals* (1665-1670)

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<sup>57</sup> The foreground of Vermeer's painting corresponds to a still-life which pushes our attention to the figure of the musician in the middle ground while the back opens the space onto a landscape.



Samuel van Hoogstraten: *View of a corridor* (1662)

The figure of the eavesdropper which introduces a kind of stage theatricality may also be a reminder of the paintings by Maes as Sarah's maid seems to be similarly calling attention to the socially immoral behaviour off-screen and to remind the spectator that he needs not only to look but especially to listen. But Poliakov may also be stressing - similarly to the semantics of the Dutch interior paintings – the interconnectedness of architecture and social structure.

It is a sophisticated, reflexive structure of in-betweenness which defines the aesthetics of the Dutch interior genre. With their recurring motifs of doors and windows leading the viewer's gaze through a series of thresholds, and staging the scene in depth, these paintings foreground the idea of liminality as well as an architectural division of space outlining a social and gendered stratification of a world which is transmedially adapted by Poliakov who enhances to the dynamics of class or family relations reflected in architectural spaces.



Nicolaes Maes: *Eavesdropper* (1655)

### **Architecture and social structure**

The social stratification of period drama and its upstairs downstairs division from the eponymous television series and going from *Gosford Park* to *Downton Abbey* is echoed in the spatial division within the hotel as the members of the jazz band are only allowed to use the back entrance. The ascent of the Louis Lester band is marked by a high angle shot of the hotel manager announcing to Jessie and Carla in a low angle reverse shot that they may use the front door. The social stratification of this upstairs backstage drama is mimicked through the camera angles as Poliakov regularly uses high angle and low angle shot-reverse shots to establish the class and power structural relations between the characters. Through an iterative pattern, characters are framed by stairs and high angle shots of repressive power figures (Masterson, Thornton, Schlesinger, the policemen) alternate with low angle shots of the jazz band members and of the cockney journalist whose hand on the stairs seems to be an intermedial reference to Hitchcock's 1927 silent film *The Lodger* as a claim for authorial television drama. [see Appendix]

The verticality of the social structure also acts as an intermedial reference to the Elizabethan stage when a low angle on the jazz band members and the working-class journalist makes them appear as characters on a stage and alternates with a high angle of the aristocrat Pamela observing as an inset spectator from the balcony before playing her part as a crucial agent in the success of Louis' escape in the last scene of the series.

### **Verticality, high angle and social structure**



**Low angle on the characters as if on a theatrical stage**





**Pamela as the inset spectator of the Elizabethan stage**

While Pamela's position as an inset spectator underscores the original function of the Lyle Lane Club as a performance space, in another more disturbing scene, characters replicate our position as viewers except that it is Jessie's funeral wake that is turned into an exhibited space.

### **From 'black box' to 'white cube': the metabolism of 'slow television'.**

As the funeral wake is held in a glass house, the space appears like a glass box which opens up a theatrical space, a "white cube" inside the film.

We see people staring at the characters inside through the windows which stresses the blurring of borders between private and public spheres, as an implicit ironic social commentary on celebrity culture. At the same time, the characters represent our stand-in as viewers so that we may see the image as a container, a glass box conceived as a display, an exhibited space which turns Julian's speech into a theatrical *mise en scène* and foregrounds the artificiality of his act as we share Louis' suspicion that he is the culprit. Besides, the sensation of exhibitedness is shared by the characters as Donaldson says that "it's probably not a good idea after all to hold a wake in a glass house," as a possible commentary on the inappropriate transformation of Jessie's death into a spectacle. However, it is mostly within its network of visual echoes that the scene may acquire its more reflexive signification. The glass house may first be interpreted as a visual echo of Pieter Saenredam's *Nave and choir of the St. Catharijnekerk* but is most of all a variation on the first funeral scene whose difference is emphasized through a contrapunctual shot. The first funeral scene was set in the street and we saw from the back a figure standing in the dark behind a window and watching the scene outside. The contrapunctual scene stresses the reversibility of the gaze as we see the viewers standing outside while watching throughout the windows towards the inside of the glass box as a possible visual representation of an allegoric passage from the "black box" of the movie theatre to the "white cube" of the modern art gallery within the aesthetic of "slow television".



**Variations on the funeral scenes: the reversed gaze  
from the black box (episode 2) to the white cube (episode 4)**

I believe the intermedial aesthetic of *Shooting The Past* may be seen as a photo-filmic installation as the excursionist ekphrasis of the characters around the gallery suggests an analogy with installation art. Both the photographic library and emblematically the glass house in *DoE* may be interpreted as figures of the architecture of the post-cinematic tableau where the room becomes the frame, as symbols of the white cube of modern art being incorporated by slow television.

Ultimately the social critique then seems to be subdued by aesthetical considerations concerning the image. The emotions which Poliakoff's work elicit are of an aesthetic kind and Sarah Cardwell's words in her analysis of *Perfect Strangers* seem adequate when she writes that "the intricacy of the patterning of word, image and music...afford[s] the jouissance of an aesthetic pleasure through a deferral of the more ordinary pleasure of aesthetic closure." Poliakoff's blending of several art forms enables him to find ways of suggesting analogies, between photography and painting, between photography and theater but also between images and language and between photography

and music, an analogy which is obviously encouraged by the figures of the characters of the musicians and the added value of the soundtrack. *Shooting the Past* and *Dancing on the Edge* thus aptly exemplifies the artistic fruits of intermediality as a creative process.

## APPENDIX



**Intermedial references and Pictorial photographs**  
PreRaphaelite fantasies: echoes and variations on John Waterhouse





**Media transpositions: The icons of the withcraft of womanhood**

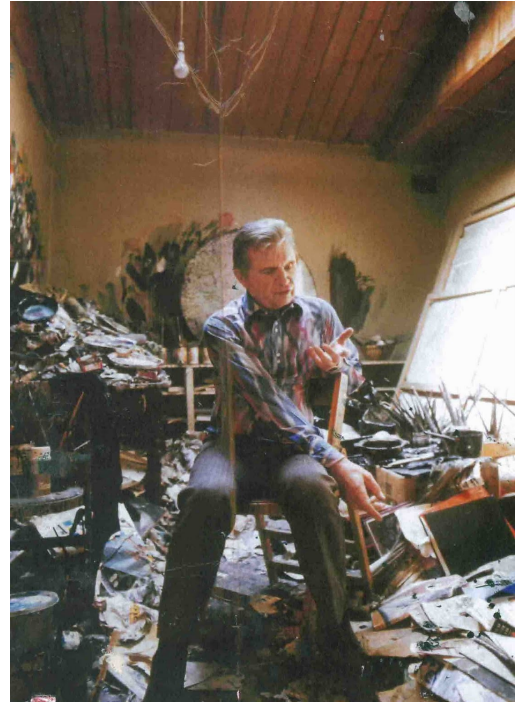


**The female gaze: Hettie as bearer of the look**  
from the voyeuristic and narcissistic to the mothering look





## Oswald as a figure of the artist



Oswald turning his studio into a camera obscura and his life into a negative.  
The bare light bulb as a wink at Francis Bacon?



## The artist's paraphernalia and epitaph



“In order for the light to shine so brightly, the darkness must be present.” [Sir Francis Bacon](#)

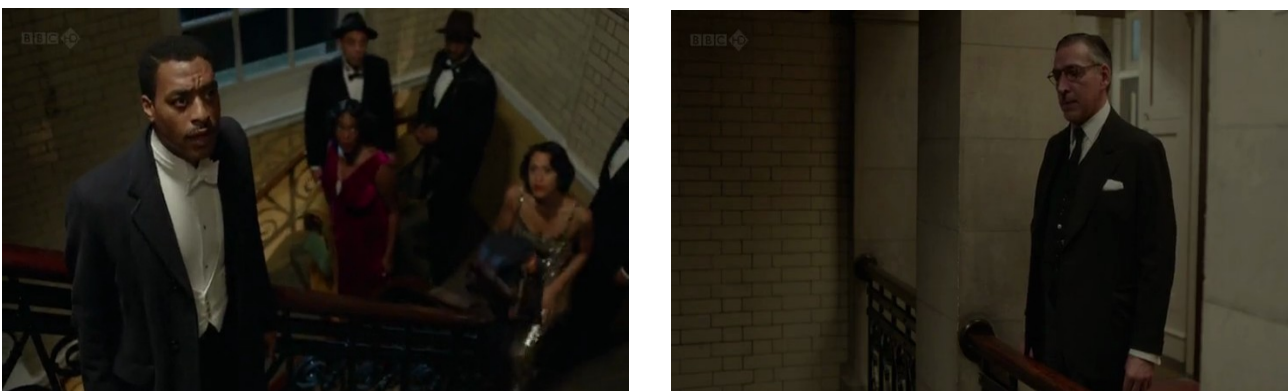
## ARCHITECTURE AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE



High angle, low angle and social structure



An upstairs-backstage drama.





### High angle variations on the repressive figures of authority



The proleptic shot of Wesley's deportation.



Thornton as the figure of the Nazi collaborator.



The police search



The hand on the stairs as an intramedial reference to Hitchcock's 1927 silent film *The Lodger*.

### III- THE POETICS OF INTERMEDIALITY AND SERIALITY

According to Agnes Petho<sup>58</sup>, the theory of intermediality in film has mostly focused on relations between cinema and the other media (i.e on how these relations can be perceived, interpreted or categorized) and on identifying figurations of intermediality but very little attention has been paid to the relationship between intermediality and cinematic narrativity in general<sup>59</sup>. As far as Poliakoff's work is concerned, I believe that the interaction between intermedial figurations and the narrative context in which they appear is at the core of the writer-director's poetics which rely on inset storytellers and mediatic hybridity, which is why I feel that a study of the specific connections between narrativity and intermediality proves hindsightful since the writer-director resorts to intermedial figurations for serial storytelling. Stephen Poliakoff uses intermedial figures as devices for serial narrativity as he resorts to the remedial logic of ekphrasis to structure the narrative. While the series play on echoing through intermediality, recurrence functions diegetically and intermedial mise en abyme in the form of inset remediation simultaneously flaunts the artificiality of the construction of the story and invites an active response from the viewer who enjoys the pleasures of repetition and variation. A study of the structural mode of intermediality proves fruitful since Poliakoff uses other media for reprising events (as a recurring device to introduce a recap of the previous episodes), for introducing flashbacks but also for preparing events to come. Intermedial figurations are not only used as analeptic or proleptic storytelling strategies but may even be taken a step further by taking responsibility for the narrative.

#### A-ECHOES, RECURRENCE AND VARIATIONS

Intermediality and non-narrativity are usually strongly bound together as the medium moving to the foreground pushes the narrative to a less perceptible level. The series convoke modes that are conventionally related to other forms of mediation and the breaking points and the blanks that result from these figures of intermediality may render the text less transparent towards the unfolding of a story. This strong intermedial dynamic probably enhances and requires a more active participation of the viewer when visual and aural echoes create a sort of musical pattern and painterly tonalism within the series and as verbal reprising infuses a sense of literariness. These intermedial strategies may induce a puzzling fragmentation into the narrative but they ultimately provide a painterly,

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<sup>58</sup> Petho, 2013, p. 66.

<sup>59</sup> Agnes Petho mentions the volume *Intermediality and Storytelling* (2010) edited by Marie-Laure Ryan and Marina Grishakova as a notable exception. In her collection *Storyworlds across Media*, M-L Ryan speaks of a media-conscious narratology and argues that "the diversity of games that narrative can play with the resources of its medium is one of the many reasons that make the intersection of narratology and media studies, an area still largely unexplored, into a productive field of investigation." (2005, 21).

lyrical and musical structure built on variations and repetitions.

## 1- Painterly composition

### Tonalism and visual echoes

The repetition of the colour red through the recurrence of red dresses participates to the creation of a tonalism which produces an analogy with painting and functions as an iterative pattern within *Dancing on the Edge* but also within Poliakov's work.

The iteration of the peacock feather and of the candles within the series of inset photographs in *Shooting the Past* also suggests a painterly composition within the frame as do the visual echoes of the characters' faces framed within the garden's bushes or the recurrence and variation on the motifs of the windows, corridors, or trains to name but a few of them.



Visual echoes and painterly tonalism

### The dyptich and the frame

The dyptich functions as a compositional structure within *Shooting the Past* as 'Spig's short' is a variation on 'Veronica's short' and as Hettie's embedded photo-story echoes the young Jewish girl's inset photo-narrative.

'Spig's short' is a short episode which appears on the margin of the frame as it is part of the 'special features'. As a figure of contiguity, this ekphrastic epilogue functions metonymically and gives structural and metaphoric clues to retrospectively enlighten the televisual series. It is also set in a structural dichotomy as a counterpart to 'Veronica's short' in a kind of dyptich constituted by the special features.

The special features of both series blur the boundaries between the genres and across the media and the director plays around the borders between the arts while enhancing the highly intermedial, metamedial and even transmedial dimension of his work<sup>60</sup>.

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60 Poliakov plays with the form in *DoE*'s post-script episode "Interviewing Louis" which constitutes an example of transmedial storytelling as the writer-director blurs the borders between 'fiction' and 'reality' by staging Louis's 'behind-the-scenes interview'.

In keeping with the structural motif of the whole series, Anderson's photo-story is part of a dyptich and functions as a counterpart to Lily's photo-story.

Lily's story-within-the story is presented sequentially and is not spatially juxtaposed as each photographic frame is projected on exactly the same space of the screen, a pattern of visual art in sequence which defines animated film, in a deconstruction of cinematic time.

Conversely, the structural counterpart of Lily's story, the American businessman's own 'history' is revealed through a parallel editing of alluring images until all the photographs are eventually being embraced visually simultaneously as they form a curved pattern on the floor of the room which becomes the frame. While the first inset story presents the images one after the other following the syntagmatic pattern of language characteristic of the arts of time, Anderson's contrapunctual embedded story ultimately presents all the photographs juxtapositioned within the frame of the screen, which creates a spatialization of the narrative whose harmony seems to rely on the various depictions of the female figure through their repetition and variation ('Oswald found her again and again') like a musical refrain in an intermedial reference which is suggested by the visual echoes of the woman musician.



## 2-Musical structure

The musical analogy is of course encouraged by the figures of the musicians be it Hettie in *Shooting the Past* or Louis in *Dancing on the Edge*. Besides, through the foregrounding of single images by repetition, a musical structure is conjured up within the series' multiple visual and aural echoes as the close shots of the Flemish painting and the chessboard for instance punctuate the episodes as do the reprising of the songs and the variation on the dialogue.

### **Suturing sonic echoes: reprising of the songs and the dialogue.**

The songs are structural motifs which punctuate and comment on the scenes in a straightforward way. The words of the song are reflexive of the scenes when Jessie concludes her wireless broadcasting on 'I'm gonna be a star', when we hear 'I felt so low' as an extradiegetic soundtrack while she's lying on her hospital bed or when Carla's 'a distant memory floats away' accompanies Jessie's awakening from a coma.

Sonic echoes are not only present through the recurrence of the songs but also in the reprising of the dialogue. The linguistic iterative pattern goes from theatrical repetition of the text for comic purposes to slight variations on anaphoric cues which have a cohesive function. In the Lyle Lane club scene, the static repetition of the theatrical cues ("we din't have an inkling. Not an inkling no") serves to ridicule the conservative characters trapped in social conventions in front of the Royal family members while Pamela's cue in the last episode when she says that 'she hates trains' functions as a reminder of the first episode when she claimed that she 'love[d] trains'. The contrapuntual reprising of the cue foregrounds the variation on the framing episodes whose mirroring structure is enhanced by recurring elements like the torrential rain, the return to the Lyle Lane club and the travel by train. The variations on the cues function within the series as Masterson's 'You've not been here before' to Stanley echoes his 'you've been here before' to Louis but also establishes a dialogue with Poliakoff's other series through this recurring cue which strongly emphasizes the relationship between space, place and memory as in *Perfect Strangers* or *Capturing Mary*. This dialogue between the series is also enhanced through the repetition of the deictics 'this' (e.g. in 'the Minotaur suite' scene) whose fluidity of reference is often left to the viewer's imagination throughout Poliakoff's work.

The use of repetition or near-repetition is present in music, in images but also in dialogue, which delivers a sense of coherence and unity. As Sarah Cardwell remarks, one of the most singular aspects of Poliakoff's dialogue is in its emphasis on near repetition or, more precisely, rearticulation which has the effect of stalling the narrative, slowing the pace more generally and allowing the

'patterning' motif present in the music and the montage of images to be extended into the dialogue.<sup>61</sup> That the viewer should be particularly attentive to the echoes in the dialogue is clearly emphasized by the repetition towards the end of the first episode of Stanley's initial cue to Louis *I've only got one clean glass...So I'll have the bottle.* (6), which the viewer remembers when Stanley and Louis drink whisky in Stanley's boyhood bedroom and Stanley says in the very same words *There's only one glass. So, I'll have the bottle.* (73)

The repetition triggers the viewers' memory and a retrospective understanding that the dialogue in the opening sequence was a reenactment of a previous scene except that the context seems to have shifted from a very ambitious scheme as Stanley says *I'm going to make you number-one band in Britain* to a climactic situation and the absence of any plot resolution : *we need to have a plan, don't we, Louis?* Thus, the echo of Stanley's cue in a different context enhances the reversal of the ascendancy pattern.

The construction of the first scenes is based on echoes, recurrence and variations and illustrates in a metonymic way the construction not only of the first episode but also of the whole series.

Because the play with temporality and the complex chronology makes time linear again only in the final episode, the construction is largely based on the echoes of the opening sequence which trigger the viewer's memories and constitute an interest for the audience who enjoys the pleasures of repetition and difference. The first episode draws attention to a device of echo and anaphora which the series will invest under multiple forms. To maintain the audience's engagement with the long form of the television series, Poliakoff foregrounds echoing scenes which bring into relief visual as well as aural and linguistic recurrence and variations.

## **B-REMEDIATION AND SERIALITY**

### **1-Remediation and storytelling: echoes and variations on recurring scenes**

Recurrence functions diegetically within the series and variations on the same scenes – the corridor scenes mostly but also the darkroom scenes, the funeral scenes or the garden scenes – are deliberately woven into the narrative. The garden scenes foreground the link between space and memory as we can hear Jessie's song as a muted background when Julian re-enters Donaldson's now empty garden in the last episode. The muffled soundtrack which most likely represents the character's aural memory simultaneously triggers the viewer's memory as we are made to remember

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61 CARDWELL, Sarah. « 'Television Aesthetics' and Close Analysis: Style and Mood in *Perfect Strangers* (Stephen Poliakoff, 2001) », in PYE Douglas et John Gibbs (eds), *Style and Meaning*, Manchester University Press, 2005, p. 190-191.



the band's concert from the first episode. The variation on the funeral scenes which has previously been discussed connects the second and the fourth episodes and enhances the reversibility of spectatorship and reflexively of our position as viewers. The recurrence of the darkroom scenes in part one, part four and part five also functions diegetically while bringing into relief the variation on the textuality of the filmic body as we will see in the last part of this work. But it is mostly the reprising of one major event - the corridor scene which constitutes the cliffhanger Part 2 ends on – which structures the narrative.

**Remediated scene:** the re-staging of the corridor scene

The reprising of the corridor scene structures the narrative as it is taken up in a series of inset remediations. The dark long shot typical of film noir constitutes the cliffhanger at the end of part 2 and is used as a visual echo in the credits of the subsequent episodes in which the motif of the corridor functions as a threshold into the narrative. It is framed in between two variations on the corridor scenes at the Imperial hotel, in between the depth-of-field shots of the first episode when Louis carries the bruised body of Hannah and the last episode's when Sarah frames Thornton in the corridor as the ultimate retaliation scene of the series. A visual echo of this scene occurs in part three at Lady Cremona's New Year's Eve dinner when Louis is the only to spot Julian from a distance "We suddenly see Louis look up and stare through the open door of the barn...he is the only one that notices [Julian] through the open door, at first glimpsed from a distance and framed by the lanterns.", which foregrounds Louis's status as an isolated observer. His perspective as an alienated outsider's is also underscored when the scene is re-staged in part four at the police station where Louis is unable to see the figure at the end of the corridor. The difference with the first scene is enhanced through two contrasting shots as the foreground is dark and the end of the corridor is lit in the Imperial hotel scene whereas the foreground is lit and the end of the corridor is dark at the police station. As Louis mentions that 'it is nothing like it was at the Imperial', the contrapuntual variation on the scene foregrounds the difference between body memory and space memory and reminds us that in Poliakov's memory-narratives, memory is mapped onto space. Besides, the multiplication of vertical lines created by the door posts which contrast with the horizontality of the frame of the screen suggests a figure of entrapment closing around Louis whose blurred perception may represent the repressed vision of minorities. The re-staging of the corridor scene enhances the gaze as a central issue in this drama of spectatorship and may depict the mutability of vision and question the problematic belief in our perception of what we see as Louis answers "*If you're asking me if I'm absolutely sure...Then I suppose it's possible I'm not*".

### The remediated corridor scene



The credit rolls as figure of threshold



Re-staging the scene at the police station



The entrapment of the reenacted scene:  
the indistinct figure as repressed vision of the isolated alienated viewer.

### Re-mediated voices

The remediation of voices and music also functions diegetically as the record is the device used in the introductory scene to provide a flashback and to permit a passage from the music of the record to the live music of the band.

The connection between the time of the opening sequence (London, 1933) and the time of the subsequent scene (18 months before) operates thanks to the soundtrack with the diegetic music of the record becoming extradiegetic in a similar space.

Music links both scenes which are set in Stanley's office but this mirroring subsequent scene appears to be a 'negative' version of the opening sequence as we move from night to daylight and from a closed window to an open one. On the wall of Stanley's office, there are no photos of Louis, it is a virgin page for the story to be written. Moreover, Stanley's office is no longer a closed trapped cluttered space and a very mobile camera takes us out of the office where an upward angle shot of the typewriter on the rooftop in the open suggests a blank space of possibility for the story to be started.



The very mention in the script of the absence of Louis's photos on the wall confirms its interpretation as a spatial palimpsest for the reporter Stanley to cover the story and for the spectator to uncover its various layers and patterns. The first scenes are linked through the soundtrack with the music of the record (diegetic in the first scene and extradiegetic in the subsequent one) but also with the parallel diegetic clatter of the typewriter which begins offscreen before entering the frame in the mirroring sequences.

The soundtrack is used to cross not only temporal borders but also spatial ones. As Stanley leaves the building of Music Express to go to the Lyle Lane basement club, we hear with the reporter the diegetic offscreen music of the band and we recognize the tune from the record the main protagonists have listened to in the previous scene. The similar tune previously heard from the record and mediated through the gramophone onscreen is now played live by the band but remains offscreen, which lays the emphasis on mediation and creates a sense of impending revelation as we hear the 'live' diegetic music but still have not seen the band.

The music links the scenes and establishes connection through time and space, there is a cohesive function of film music which operates one of Jarold Levinson's fourteen functions of film music: 'the imparting of certain formal properties, such as coherence, cogency, continuity, closure, to the film or parts thereof'<sup>62</sup>

The record which is played by Stanley in the introductory scene is the medium used to enable a flashback and to link the various episodes as we go from the record to the live music in part one and from the live music to the recording scene and to the record in episode two. Jessie's voice is being recorded in the HMV studio in part two before being played to the singer first by Julian and later by Sarah and Louis when Jessie is lying in a coma in her hospital room. The remediation of the singer's voice is ultimately foregrounded as we hear Jessie's song on the wireless after the announcement of her death before the series of remediations and reprisals comes full circle in the last scene through Carla's singing Jessie's lament as a closure for the series.

### **Re-mediated images**

The photographs also act as a prompt for memory both for the characters looking at them in the diegesis and simultaneously for the spectators. As with the record, Poliakoff resorts to the medium of photography to provide analepses and to trigger the viewers' memory. At the beginning of episode two, it is the character looking at a photograph which triggers a subjective flashback and a summary of the previous episode while in the last episode it is Stanley's looking at a photograph of Pamela which provokes Eric's question and commentary on the character's previous actions and

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62 Levinson, J. (1996) 'Film Music and Narrative Agency' in D. Borwell and N. Carroll (eds) *Post Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press). p 258.

motivations.

Lady Cremone's photograph is also used as an intermedial device for serial storytelling but less conventionally to produce a prolepsis. The photograph of Lavinia in the darkroom scene of episode one serves to introduce the character ("she's an interesting woman...maybe we can find a way of introducing you somehow") which we only see in the flesh in episode 2 as Sarah recalls that she photographed her once and that she didn't like it very much. Lady Cremone later poses as Sarah takes a photograph which is remediated on the cover of the magazine and subsequently commented upon by several characters who question the image as a signifier. [see Appendix]

It is mostly the remediation of Louis's image that Poliakoff uses as a recurring narrative device to mark his ascendancy to success as his first photograph in the darkroom scene of episode one is subsequently framed on the wall of *Music Express* and remediated on the magazine and the record covers until his downfall in the newspaper ad as a final occurrence of his photograph which foregrounds the panoptic repression of the image within the mass media while providing a satire of celebrity culture.

The remediation of images of characters in posters, cartoons, magazine covers, record covers, newspaper ads and of course photographs corresponds to the remedial logic of traditional literary ekphrasis that Poliakoff uses as recurring narrative cohesive devices across the episodes. The writer-director not only resorts to all the inset media to trigger the viewers' memories of previous episodes but he also uses the various embedded media to take responsibility for the storytelling. Both the figure of the inset music magazine of *Dancing on the Edge* and the embedded photo-narratives within *Shooting the Past* correspond to an intermedial mise en abyme as inset serial storytelling via changes of medium constitutes a form of echoing of the series themselves.

## **2- Remediated voices, words and images: reflexive figures of serial storytelling**

### **The embedded photo-narratives**

*Shooting the Past* relies mainly on two embedded photo-stories which frame the archivists' attempt to save the collection of photographs as didactic demonstrations of the necessity of the inscription of the fixed image within seriality. The narrative reading of the mute still image is emphasized, however its necessary inscription within seriality is repeatedly hammered throughout the series by the archivists who refuse to 'split up the collection' and 'tear it to pieces' as Marilyn enhances that Anderson 'would never have got the story about [his] family..if [the collection] had been split up'. As a form of echoing of the series itself, the inset photo-stories foreground the tension between episodic and serial structure as each constituent has a value in itself and can function as an autonomous part but takes a broader significance when reinscribed within the narrative arc across

episodes.

Even more clearly, the inset magazine of DoE epitomizes the series' metatextual image for itself as *Music Express* functions as a single hybrid platform of media convergence and serial narration.

### **The magazine as a space of media convergence and a reflexive figure of serial storytelling**

Both the building of *Music Express* and the fictional magazine serve as places of intermedial configurations. They flaunt intermediality as the choice of multiplatform storytelling and function as spaces "where old and new media collide" to quote Henry Jenkins' landmark work<sup>63</sup> on media convergence, through a process of hybridation that blurs the borders between the multiple levels of fictionalization, inset storytelling and changes of medium.

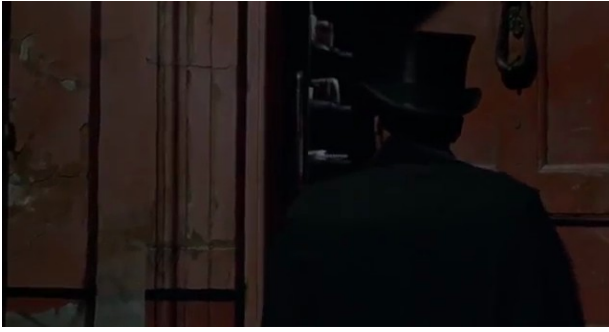
The credit rolls foreground the building of the magazine as a figure of threshold into the narrative and as a space of media convergence blurring the borders between the embedding and embedded discourse. The threshold function of the credits is stressed as we first see a closed door which the anonymous protagonist pushes open as the first of a series of doors into the narrative. As soon as the main protagonist enters the building, we can hear the clatter of the typewriter as a diegetic sound offscreen which is first mixed with some diegetic radio music before entering the frame in a shot of the reporter typing and smoking at his desk. The figure of the typewriter whose hypermediacy has been prepared by the previous offscreen diegetic sound of typing highlights the self-reflexivity of the writing process which is replicated in the words of the credits. As we read the words *Written and Directed by Stephen Poliakoff*, we are made to discover the figure of an inset narrator through a half-open door, a framing device which emphasizes the presence of the embedded storyteller.

The credit sequence makes two regimes coexist: the linguistic and the iconic, the letter and the line, each one penetrating the space of the other. The credits establish a frame or threshold that allows the outside of representation to contaminate the inside of discourse, they reunite the discursive with the visual through the layering of the composite image both visible and readable. The blurring of borders between the word and the image is accompanied by a blurring of borders between time and space as a caption reads *London, 1933* thus inscribing time in the image. The process is replicated in the opening sequence as the framing of the door is replaced by the framing of a window bearing the words *18 months before* as a threshold into the flashback of the narrative, a motif that will be used at the beginning of the other episodes and will function as a stylistic cue for the viewer who will recognize it as a signifier of the analepsis into the storyworld.

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63 Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York: NYU Press, 2006.

## The credit rolls: a figure of threshold



Opening the series of doors into the narrative



The figure of the inset storyteller



The word-image, time-space hybridation in the window's cross-temporal threshold

In the opening sequence, the 'vintage' typography, whether in the title, caption or credits, not only participates in a historical anchoring of *Dancing on the Edge* but also results in a blurring of the borders between the medias as it mimicks the lettering of the inset magazine *Music Express* as characteristic of music magazines in the thirties. The use of the similar typeface makes the boundaries between the embedding and embedded discourse porous as Poliakoff plays around the borders between story and discourse.

The magazine forms a single hybrid platform and a figure of seriality which serves as a space of media convergence and mimicks the episodic structure of the television programme so that *Music Express* constitutes a form of echoing of the series itself. It foregrounds intermediality as the choice of multiplatform storytelling through the figure of the inset comics and the depiction of the emergence of photo-journalism which epitomize the word-image relationship as well as the process of inset remediations. While Sarah's 'behind-the-scenes' photographs are remediated within the special edition of *Music Express* following Jessie's death, which entails a sort of animated sequence of the magazine within the series, the process of inset remediation is even taken a step further when the magazine takes responsibility for the storytelling.

Louis's final innocence is eventually told through the pages of the magazine that Stanley is

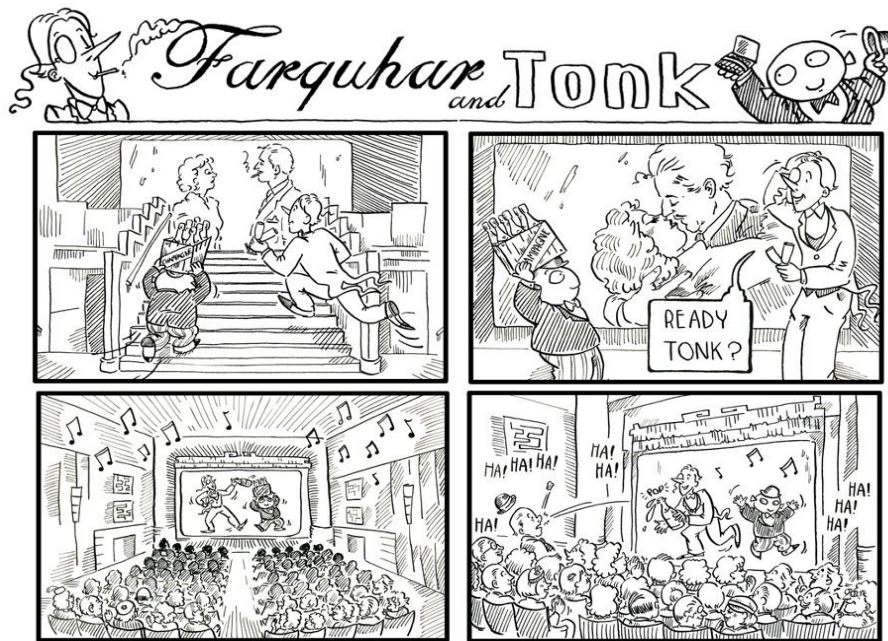
browsing in the last episode. It is the inset edition of the magazine that provides a remediation of Julian's letter as the viewers can read 'the confession of Julian Luscombe' on the cover of *Music Express*. As Stanley is turning the pages backwards, he disrupts the linear chronology of the story and mimicks the flashback structure of the series. As the pages start on "We never doubted you Louis" to end on "Presumption of guilt. Why the Police launched a manhunt for Louis Lester", the narration comes full circle as that is exactly when and where the first episode started, in the building of *Music Express* as Louis was attempting to flee the country, a circularity of action that is reinforced through the journalists' return to their former office. [see appendix]

Eric's metacommentary on the commercial aspect of the last edition of the magazine when he warns Stanley not to expect to sell thousands of copies as the readers are not as interested as when Louis was the culprit might be interpreted as a satirical metatextual comment on the subversion of the readers/viewers' expectations which may have been misled into the pretext of a detective plot through the initial cliffhanger.

### **Mise en abyme and metamedial figuration in the embedded comics**

The inset cartoon also provokes a series of metatextual cues exchanged between Pamela and Stanley across the episodes. Pamela's recurring self-reflexive commentaries foreground the mise en abyme of Stanley as an inset figure of the storyteller within the embedded comics. She repeatedly mentions that he uses his real life, remediating it into the magazine's cartoons and as Stanley confesses that '[he] grab[s] material from anywhere [he] can', the blurring of borders between the 'real' and the intermedial is underscored.

The serial inset cartoon constitutes a mise en abyme of the form of the televisual series through its episodic structure and explicitly intermedial style. As the series' metatextual image for itself, it depicts an ultimate metalepsis through a vertical camera movement on a page of 'Farquhar and Tonk at the movies' which shows the cartoon characters entering and tearing up the screen. As the characters open a bottle of champagne whose cork rebounds on one of the spectator, the transgression of boundaries between on-screen and off-screen space is depicted in a form of echoing of the series itself which shows how the multiple levels of storytelling, with their inset audiences, break down fourth walls.



**The blurring of borders between intradiegetic and extradiegetic space and exhibiting of narrative construction and of the audio, visual, and musical strands of storytelling.**

Intermedial mise en abyme is playing a pivotal role in the seriality of the series itself and underlines the idea that recurrence is not static repetition, but the creation of layers of narrative and of narrative depth. The remediation of *Dancing on the Edge* into a series of photographs, a magazine, a cartoon and an interview is a narrative pleasure in itself – that of immersion in “self-conscious media” and in the hybridity of media – in a subversion of the televisual form that reinforces the series’ identity. Poliakoff’s television series which embrace elaborate storytelling techniques, such as temporal play, repetition and overt intermedial experimentation with genre and narrative norms, are highly reflexive in their narration and encourage viewers to pay attention to the level of narrative discourse as well as the storyworld. Viewers can enjoy both the story itself and the uses of metafictionality, deconstruction and constant metalepsis and are required to engage more fully than typical for the medium as attentive viewers for, as Marilyn states in StP “it’s important to watch closely”.

As spectators of series that constantly reference their own functioning, viewers stay caught within the story even as they enjoy moments when the screenwriter-director shows his hand. While intermedial mise en abyme which enhances the presence of the medium entails reflexive responses from viewers, it simultaneously flaunts the materiality of the embedded media. The viewers’ immersion is thus encouraged thanks to the foregrounded materiality of the media which favours the intimacy of the spectator with the medium in a process of immediacy which is paradoxically produced by figures of hypermediacy.



## RE-MEDIATION OF IMAGES AND SERIAL STORYTELLING



"she's an interesting woman...maybe we can find a way of introducing you somehow" (part one)



Pose and pause in the narration (part two)



"That's very good your ladyship, hold it like that!"

### Re-mediation in the magazine, questioning the image as a signifier



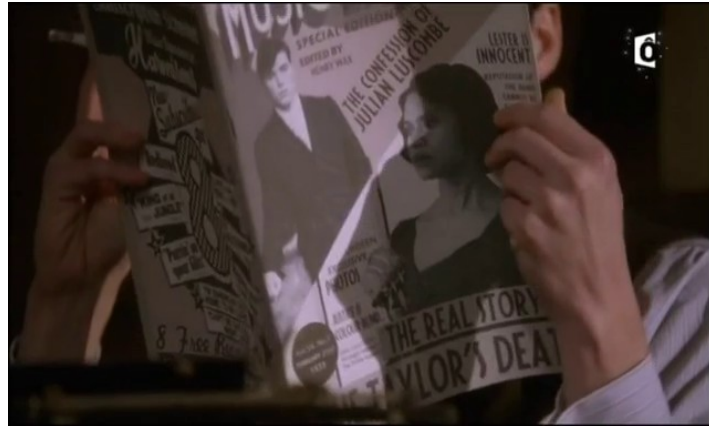
"What on earth is she doing on the cover of the magazine?"



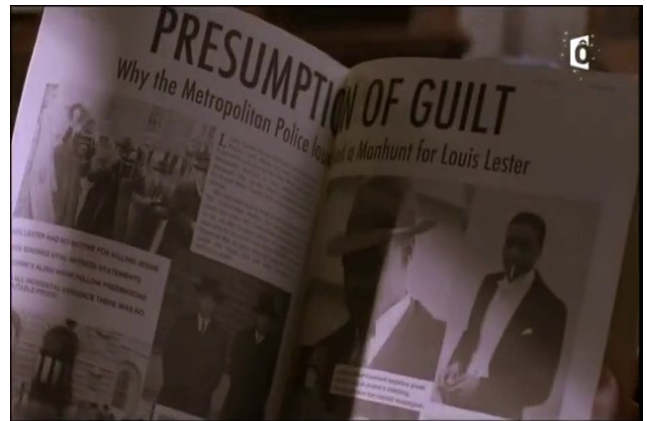
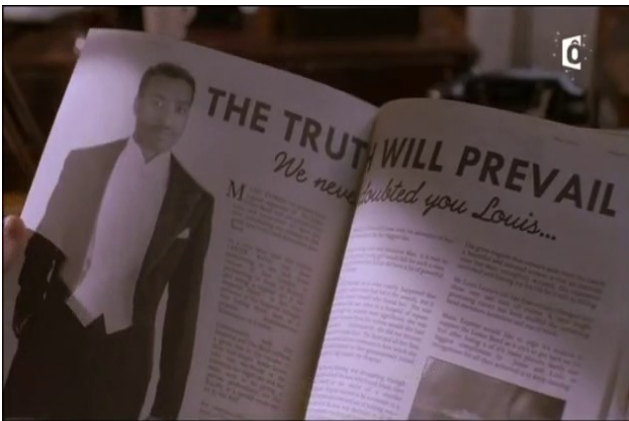
"I'm not a performer"

## INSET REMEDIATION AND TRANSMEDIAL STORYTELLING

### The magazine's re-mediation of Louis's innocence



*The confession of Julian Luscombe: Remediating Julian's letter*



### Browsing backwards back to the opening sequence

The trans-medial distortion of the linear chronology and the circularity of storytelling across media



### **PART III: INTERMEDIALITY AND INTER-SENSUALITY**

Figurations of intermediality in Poliakoff's televisual series occur through a fusion of hypermediacy with immediacy which connects intermediality and inter-sensuality. Both series point to the sensuality and materiality of the televisual medium through their emphasis on the physicality of the filmed and filmic bodies. The presence of the bodies whether in the form of the diegetic bodies within the film or within the incorporated media – mostly the photographs – contributes to emphasizing the sensory affect and haptic vision and leads to questions about sensation in relation to art. By showing how the body works as a conduit for sensory perception, the sensed body shown on screen as a site of intermedial relations enhances the corporeality of perception and leads to the representation of sensible (Oosterling) intermediality. Specific analyses of sequences show how figures merge "hypermediacy" with "immediacy" thus entailing a form of aesthetic detachment as well as simultaneously and paradoxically establishing the viewers' intimacy with the medium so that intermedial figures lead to sensible embodied spectatorship and foreground a sensual mode of intermediality.

#### **I- The materiality of the surface: Haptic imagery and aural texture**

Many elements in both series seem to be working towards emphasizing the materiality of the surface notably through the presence of the inset media. Agnes Petho's application of ekphrasis to film proves hindsightful as a film is ekphrastic when the "embedded art form" corresponds to the manifestation of "a medium that is different from that of the cinematic image in which it is embedded. In short, an ekphrasis requires the perception of intermedial relations, as 'transformative inscriptions' or 'figurations' of mediality in a work"<sup>64</sup>. Through instances of media combination, the incorporated medium emphasizes the physicality of the surface which can be literally apprehended by the intradiegetic viewers and reflexively by the extradiegetic spectators as the textuality is enhanced by way of the haptic gaze.

#### **A-Haptic visuality**

##### **1-The haptic gaze**

The incorporated photographs but also the inset magazine and records provide a material and sensory dimension to the series and the interplay with media provides a shift in our viewing experience as feeling rather than understanding spectators or in Philippe Dubois' words as the Figural partakes more of *seeing* and *sensing* than of *perceiving* and *understanding*<sup>65</sup>. The cinematic

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64 Petho, 2010, 213.

65 Dubois 1999, 248

device relies on the haptic gaze to point to materiality and sensory affect for which Poliakoff resorts mostly to the use of light and of the 'tactile close-up'<sup>66</sup>. The fragmentation of the close-up which is often extended up to the photographic blur and is combined with dissolves produces tactile images. As the camera movements draw viewers across the surface of the close-ups of the inset media whose textuality is enhanced, the director depicts the diversity of film formats to explore the televisual images' own materiality.

### **The use of light: chiaroscuro and red lighting**

The haptic sensation can be obtained through lighting as many scenes are shot indoors so that the light often comes from an artificial source. In *Dancing on the Edge*, the introductory scene is shot at night and the light comes through a grid in the office, which gives haptic qualities to the dots of light rendering light in an almost tangible, synaesthetic way. Our vision of Louis's face is thus connected to a sense a touch as we watch the close-up of his face in the office as well as its replica in the singer's framed portrait similarly interspersed with dots of light. Poliakoff also resorts to chiaroscuro lighting to create tactile images when Louis's face is lit by a match in the trap scene or within both series' embedded photographs which rely on the stylised set up of lighting and shadow that characterise Hollywood portraiture. [see Fig. 1-2-3-5-6]

The chiaroscuro lighting in the rooms that house the collection also foregrounds the haptic imagery as does the red light of the darkroom scenes which directs the viewer's attention both to the sensuality of the medium and to the artistic praxis for, as a tool with which to work the texture of the film, the red lighting calls attention to the artificial cinematic nature. It is also thanks to light that the temporality of the photograph is deciphered, "something about the lighting – this picture was taken some time in the sixties or seventies" says Spig when the filmic object is investigated in its materiality as a tangible trace of the past as the archivist claims that "the feel of the picture is modern".

The chiaroscuro setting also creates an emotional charge and may take on a melancholic tone when Oswald's agonising body lies in his dark studio and is only illuminated by a ray of light which gives a painterly Christic dimension to the scene, which seems to confirm that, as a rule, the haptic gaze opens the gate to a series of art forms and media. [see Fig. 4]

### **Tactile visuality and "the tactile close-up"**

The close-ups and extreme close-ups which may even be extended to the photographic blur through the camera zooming in the photographs in *StP* also contribute to creating what Laura Marks calls 'haptic visuality'. As we become increasingly aware of the texture of the images while the contours of things and human figures become blurred in the extreme close-ups, we are made to discern

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<sup>66</sup> Marks, 2000, p. 172.

matter rather than form. As the archivists scrutinize the photographs' qualities and examine them under a magnifying lens, their explanations are intertwined with inserts of the photographs which emphasize texture and matter. It has to be noted however that the process may be reversed as the darkroom scenes enact the performative process of 'becoming' when the indistinct contours of the ghostly figures gradually take shape as the photographs are developing in the chemical tray. Both instances nevertheless enact a process of in-betweenness and remind us that, for Eivind Roosak, the figure of sensation arises in the in-between<sup>67</sup> as the haptic imagery through "tactile close-ups" directs the attention of the viewer to the materiality of the surface and the sensuality of the medium. This sensory affect is verbally underscored by Anderson who says that "it's weird, sensual" while he holds a photograph of his grandmother as a young eroticized woman.

### **Hands and fingers gesture**

The hand and finger gestures come across as a way of making explicit the sense of touch inherent to the series' haptic images. The physical connection to the medium seems to be foregrounded as Pamela mentions flirtatiously that she 'read[s] the magazine from cover to cover' and repeatedly touches the cartoon pages which are often shown in close-up with Stanley's hand within the frame. [see Fig. 7]. The sensoriality of the embedded art forms is also verbally underscored when the director of *Music Express* claims that he 'had a great *feeling* about this band' while holding the edition of the magazine whose cover enhances the band's *sensational* record [see Fig. 8].

There are numerous scenes in *Shooting the Past* where the characters sift through photos, show each other photos, and spend time simply gazing at them so that the inset photographs belong to the diegetic space where the characters hold them and touch them. The focus on presence, texture and matter which is enhanced through the hand and fingers gestures on the photographs foregrounds Pierce's definition of the index in terms of physical connexion. While Marilyn repeatedly touches them and hands them to Anderson, Spig manipulates the photographs with surgical gloves which enhance the vulnerability of the medium. [see Fig. 9-10-11-12].

Marilyn's bodily engagement with the medium even mimicks the narrative as her hand halts the series of photographs to translate the disruption of the storyline during her diegetic telling of Lily's photo-story. The sequence of stills is halted by Marilyn's hand as Poliakoff shows her disrupting the pile of photographs on the table before mentioning that 'the persecution of the Jews started' and that 'the family was split up'. Marilyn's act signifies the disruption of both the temporal coherence of the embedded image sequence and the lives of Lily and her parents, as she explains that the Nazi persecution of the Jews soon followed, which Poliakoff depicts through a return to full-frame photographic montage as the images jump abruptly to German street-scenes.

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<sup>67</sup> Rosaak, 2006, pp 321-336.



The tactile close-ups are literally depicted in the scenes when Anderson watches the photographs of his grandmother. After Marilyn hands the pictures to him, he first puts his fingers around the pictures of Hettie, then we are drawn within the photographs as we are shown some body parts in close-ups which provide a fragmented representation of the body, thus evoking sensation more vividly. The camera then zooms in a close-up of the young woman's hand and literally draws the viewers in the surface of the photograph until the close-up is extended to a photographic blur where we no longer distinguish the contours of the body part, which makes us see and sense texture rather than perceive form. The camera then shows us a close-up of Hettie's gaze with a reverse-shot of Anderson's eyes which is immediately followed by a close-up of Anderson's fingers running on the surface of the photograph so that the tactile close-up becomes literal touch. The tactile close-ups function as a haptic caress which bring about an added sensuality connecting sight to the sense of touch and enhancing Peirce's definition of indexicality as physical connection.



Poliakoff not only resorts to a Merleau-Pontian synergy of the tangible and the visible<sup>68</sup> but he also exploits the conventionally unnoticed sonorous quality of shapes, surfaces, and interiors evoking Ihde's aural phenomenology<sup>69</sup>.

## **2- Shaped aurality: the "shape-aspect" of sounds**

Poliakoff, like Ihde, invites us to follow him to the sonority of bodies and things. Through the recurrent intertwining of the visual and the aural, he enhances the discernibility of what Ihde calls the "shape-aspect"<sup>70</sup> of sounds. Like Ihde who reformulates the traditional relationship of sight/the visual and sound/the aural, the British director depicts sound and music gaining spatial extension and as Poliakoff's aural field becomes enriched with a spatial dimension, our sensory experience is refined through an encroachment of the tactile, the visual and the sonorous.

### **Aural texture**

Poliakoff fills up the cracks of conventionally accepted discrepancies between vision, touch, or hearing through the emphasis on the intradiegetic tools of the embedded art or media. Through the off-screen sound of typing and the click of the camera, he gives an aural dimension to the magazine and to the photographs thus adding an aural texture to the visual shots. The close-up of the record, through a similar process, gives a spatial dimension to the diegetic sound thus adding a visual texture. The presentation of the tools of the intradiegetic arts and media provokes an intensification of the spectator's senses through the pictorial and aural textures connoted with the photographer's, the journalist's and the musician's professions.

The aural and visual quality of the opening scene of *Dancing on the Edge* is emphasized by a series of mises en abyme which bring into relief the corporeal materiality of the medias involved. The act of mediation is emphasized not only through the figures of the typewriter and the telephone but also thanks to the gramophone which is used to provide another diegetic sound in the scene as Stanley puts on a record of Louis' band. As the camera focuses in on the turntable as a device for a flashback, the corporeal materiality of the mediatic surface is enhanced and the sound is given a spatial dimension and a visual texture.

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68 Merleau-Ponty observes the mutuality of vision and touch: "We must habituate ourselves to think that every visible is cut out in the tangible, every tactile being in some manner promised to visibility, and that there is encroachment, infringement, not only between the touched and the touching, but also between the tangible and the visible [...]" (1968, p. 134).

69 Ihde, 2007.

70 Ihde, 2007, p. 61.



*The camera is moving into the record...so we are right into the **surface** of the record.*

The dots of light which appear through the dissolve to bright sunlight give a haptic quality to the surface of the record which combines the tactile, the visual and the aural constituents realising an intra- and intercorporeal texture of confluence.

### **Sound design and haptic space**

Poliakoff recurrently embeds the aural experience within the visual medium and resorts to sound design to create a haptic space. He foregrounds Lady Cremone's soundscape as he puts emphasis on her son's acoustic sculptures which are both visually and verbally enhanced when the close-ups of the wind chimes are followed by Stanley's saying that he 'like[s] the sound of them'. By enhancing the materiality and plasticity of sound, the British director subverts the traditional conception of sound and music as "weak spatially"<sup>71</sup> to literally depict Ihde's statement that "we hear shapes"<sup>72</sup>. [Fig. 13-14-15]

The recurrent motif of the sound of rain is also given a spatial extension when the sound of rain offscreen is shaped through the reflexion of the rain drops on the wall's rectangle of projected light from the window or when they create a reflected liquid texture on the skirt of Julian and Pamela's mother.

Sound also appears as a spatial phenomenon when its presence is foregrounded through the lack of it, i.e. silence. As Louis is watching Julian and Masterson through an oval-shaped window behind a closed door or nurses talking while framed by a door without being able to hear anything, the viewers-listeners are left with the sense of a disturbing lack. This sense of lack stresses the human perceptive mode as innately synaesthetic and foregrounds the body as the condition for sensual intercommunication. The receiver's expectation can hardly gain fulfilment in the unrepresented subject matter which is defined through its negative shape (shape denoting not exclusively the visual but the aural quality as well). Silence becomes enriched with a spatial dimension as the aural vacuum

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<sup>71</sup> Ihde, 2007, p. 58.

<sup>72</sup> Ihde, 2007, p. 61.

turns palpable through Poliakoff's exploitation of the conventionally unnoticed sonorous quality of interiors.

### **Sonorous bodies**

As Poliakoff invites us to the perceptual experience of voices, sounds and music, he directs our attention to the sonority of bodies and things and depict bodies which are often framed by sound as in Lady Cremone's soundscape where Louis and Sarah are framed by the wind chimes or in the recording room. [Fig. 16-17.] He also foregrounds sonorous bodies most evidently through the body of the singer but also enhances the aural qualities of objects and sometimes establishes a complementary relationship through a close-reverse shot between the anthropomorphic shape of the mouth of a kettle and the whistle of a little girl, the two becoming the members of a duet.



The fusion of different sensory fields is thus emphasised while being embedded and performed through the body.

### **B-Cinematic body as spectacle: filmed and filmic body**

In both series, the physicality of the body is enhanced and if we follow Vivian Sobchack's phenomenological approach, the intradiegetic textures – the bodies on screen – draw our attention to the texture of the cinematic materials as such, the film as body. The relationship between the corporeality of the film and the lived bodies of the spectators is represented within the diegesis as a means to convey intradiegetically the sense-ability at play in the cinematic experience, reinforcing the textural and sensual nature of both film and viewer.

This phenomenological approach to the filmic experience seems all the more relevant in these series which present us with the materiality of the incorporated art and media as well as with their intradiegetic tools previously described. The click of the camera, the sound of typing or the surface of the record metonymically represent the photographer's, journalist's and musicians' activities while intensifying the spectator's senses through the aural and visual textures as a discourse on cinema as art and medium.



## 1-The physicality of the body: the body as textured substance

Poliakoff resorts to the use of diegetic bodies to reinforce our sense-ability during the cinematic experience. He uses the bodies on screen, the bodies as spectacle (the musicians' bodies in the diegesis and in the embedded photographs as well as the inset photographs themselves which constitute an object of spectacle per se) as well as the diegetic spectators' bodies. The use of inset spectators has implications in how the bodies off-screen – the extradiegetic viewers - engage with the film. The spectator is drawn into the medium indirectly through the bodies of characters on screen or directly through the screen as body, a level of spectatorship which is metonymically represented by the incorporated photographs as a *mise en abyme* of the skin of the film.

The British writer-director thus intradiegetically represents Vivian Sobchack's three levels of reversibility in the cinematic experience: the bodies on-screen, the bodies off-screen (i.e. the spectator) and the screen as body (i.e. the film).<sup>73</sup>

He enhances the corporeal reversibility as the spectator is of the utmost importance in both series. The off-screen space is the locus of the viewer and both series are filled with shot-reverse shot framings constantly opposing and simultaneously joining the two sides of space since the film and the audience must interact with each other.

The diegesis of both series is based on sensorial display through their diegetic hybridization of arts. *Shooting the Past* and *Dancing on the Edge* stage the bodies of the photographs and the bodies of the musicians as spectacle in the wake of early cinema and of the backstage musical which is the genre that, according to Jane Feuer, mostly emulated the communication with the audience through the intercutting between the intradiegetic spectators and the performers acting on stage<sup>74</sup>.

The fragmented representation of the musicians' bodies conveys an erotic presence, whether in the inset photographs of Louis and Hettie or in the musical parts of *DoE* when Jessie's body is, in Mulvey's terms, 'isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualized'. The focus on her wet hair and on her bare skin with beads of rain emphasizes the textuality of the image and forms a "tactile close-up" which brings the viewer close to the surface. The beads of rain which trickle down the character's bare shoulders clearly give an erotic quality to the scene but also foreground the textural nature of the human skin and represent the sort of material surface detail of the film body which Marks calls 'the skin of the film'. Poliakoff's tactile close-up brings together matter and physicality and even seems to become literal touch in the reverse-shot of Pamela's fingers on a photograph. The intercutting between the skin of the singer's body glittering with beads of rain and the reverse shot of Pamela with her hand touching a photograph seems to connect the skin of the film with the

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<sup>73</sup> Sobchack, 2004, p. 67.

<sup>74</sup> Feuer, 1982.

sensual body of the singer while evoking sensation vividly as well as foregrounding a physical link through tactility.



### **Cinematic body as spectacle: the skin of the filmed and filmic body**

The scene may depict metaphorically our erotic relationship with some cinematic object via the intermedial reference to the musical genre. Through the haptic visuality proposed by Laura Marks which is produced by the hybridization of arts typical of intermediality, we may switch our voyeuristic look with a more tactile and intimate perception of the cinematic object i.e. a sensible spectatorship.

## **2-The skin of the film**

As Poliakoff's series are enriched by other media and other arts, the viewer finds himself/herself immersed within their aural and visual texture.

### **Visual archaisms and vulnerability of the medium**

Particular modes of occurrence of past images in form of the use of archival photographs create visual archaisms which confront the film medium with its materiality, historicity and temporality and produces tensions between the pre-cinematic and the texture of motion pictures. By showing the marks of temporal decay imprinted on the medium through the insertion of yellowish snapshots and slightly deteriorated archival photographs, Poliakoff underscores the tangible traces of indexical relations and the transient aspect of the medium whose vulnerability is enhanced by the archivist's use of surgical gloves to handle and preserve its body.

### **Seeing through the skin of the image**

Poliakoff's archivists also attempt to see through the skin of the image. As they study the past images, they try to decipher the signs beyond the surface, which seems to underscore the notion of passage from one form to another as we switch from the negative to the fully formed picture or from the blurred image of the extreme close-up to the distinct photograph when Marilyn scrutinizes

the photographs under a magnifying lens. [see Fig. 18-22.] Through this performative act of in-betweenness we even sometimes see graphic signs beyond the image as if to illustrate Balazs' argument that the close-up can reveal detail that the normal eye does not see<sup>75</sup>. Besides, this passage through the surface draws attention to the combination of different media since it literally presents a surface of "shared writing".



Seeing through 'the skin of the film' and the in-betweenness of media

### **The diversity of textures**

Through the depiction of the passage from one state to another and from one form to another, Poliakov flaunts the textuality of the surface and the sensual mode of intermediality. As photographs are repeatedly taken within the diegesis, their remediation as embedded photographs - be it with no narrative justification as with Oswald's photographs interspersed in *StP* or through diegetic motivation when on the covers of the magazine or on the frontpage of the newspaper - enables a passage from colour to black and white and flaunts the variety of texture and grain of the filmic body resulting in the production of haptic imagery.

Varying formats allow Poliakov to achieve a diversity of image textures as the different media used bring with them other variations in grain, texture, density of colour, and spectra of colour. Through his strategy of conspicuously using a diversity of film formats, Poliakov embodies what Deleuze defines as the haptic gaze<sup>76</sup> to explore the televisual images' materiality.

## **II- The body of the film and the mediation of bodies**

### **A- The medium as interstitial space between bodies**

#### **The performative intermedial act of in-betweenness: 'I thought you'd like to see it happen'**

The darkroom scenes provide a reflection on the sensual mode and performative potential of becoming intermedial which is verbally underscored by Sarah who says to Louis that she "thought

<sup>75</sup> Balazs, 2010, p. 103.

<sup>76</sup> Deleuze, 2003, p. 122.

[he]'d like to see it happen". We witness Louis and Sarah's increasing intimacy as they are watching Louis's photograph in the process of taking shape while both characters are framed within the same shot and are lit by a warm red light so that the body of the medium shapes the mediation of the characters' bodies. The scenes lays the emphasis on the in-betweenness of the figure whose performative potential produces a haptic imagery which exposes the membrane of the film and establishes the intradiegetic and extradiegetic viewers' intimacy with the incorporated and incorporating medium.

The second darkroom scene in which we see the photographs floating in the developing tray as faces appear in ghostly outline in front of Louis and Sarah also seems to depict a fascination for the medium and its materiality. Similarly, the beginning of the post-script episode starts with a photograph of Louis developing in the chemical tray of the darkroom and illustrates a space of in-betweenness as the picture's ghostly shape slowly comes into focus as Stanley's voice-over plays over the image. [See Fig. 23-24.] This passage from one state to another as well as from one form to another causes sensation in Gunning's theory about early cinema, a sensation that is related to the medium and to the passage from stillness to motion, an in-betweenness which, for Rosaak, constitutes an "emotional space" as the figure of sensation arises in the in-between.

### **The intimacy of seeing as palpation**

In the echoing second darkroom scene, both Sarah's and Louis's faces are very close to each other like in the first scene but this time Louis puts his arms around Sarah and she kisses him. The haptic visuality of the first scene in which Sarah carefully manipulated the photographs of Louis's face thus becomes literal touch as an explicit embodiment of the property of Marks' *haptic visuality* which "functions like the sense of touch" and in which haptic images "engage the viewer tactilely"<sup>77</sup>. As the sensual intimacy with the medium is established, the intimacy of seeing as palpation is literally enacted in the following shot as we cut to the naked bodies of Sarah and Louis making love in Sarah's bedroom while being surrounded by Sarah's photographs.

In the contrapuntual third darkroom scene, the bodies of Sarah and Inspector Horton are conversely shown in a shot-reverse shot sequence and are lit by a crude white light while the photograph of Louis's face hanging on a string acts as a visual echo of the previous scenes. The close-up of his face then gradually becomes blurred in Sarah's POV shot as the result of the emotional distance that is forced upon her by the blackmailing inspector. Through Sarah's evolving subjective shots, the photographic blur functions as a trans-medial prophetic sign of Louis's downfall and prepares for Sarah's betrayal. [see Fig.25-26.]

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<sup>77</sup> Marks, 2000, p. 22

## **B- The body as interstitial space between media**

The body works as a conduit for sensory perception, a space in which sensation is inscribed, in numerous scenes in both series. It functions as a sort of sensible interface between the photographs and film, it is itself a medium which constitutes an instance of inscription of sensations and emotions.

### **1-Synaesthetic montage and sensible spectatorship, the body as a conduit for sensory perception**

Louis's body constitutes an interstitial space between media as the body of the medium and the mediation of Louis's body and sensations often become intertwined, notably through a synaesthetic montage at the beginning of episode two. As Louis looks at a photograph on the wall of the office, the visual image triggers his aural memory and the sensual photographic close-up of his eye (a recurring motif throughout the series, see Fig. 29.) dissolves into the bell of the musician's trumpet thus literally embodying the cinematic synaesthetic experience. The intermedial inter-sensual montage thus turns the figure of Louis as a pensive viewer into an embodied spectator and entails a sensually reflective experience calling for a 'sensible' recipient. Poliakov intradiegetically represents the viewer's synaesthetic perception and depicts Louis as Sobchack's "cinesthetic subject" endowed with an embodied vision "in-formed" by the knowledge imparted through the other senses.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Sobchack, 2004, pp. 70-71.

**The represented and sensed body as a site of intermedial figurations.**

Episode 3: 28'13"-30'16". The body as interstitial space between media.



**The intradiegetic "cinesthetic subject"  
from pensive viewer to embodied spectator**



## **2-Corporeality of perception and corporeal liminality in Anderson's photo-story**

The inter-sensoriality of the aesthetic experiment is also emphasized in the embedded photo-stories of *Shooting the Past* which are narrated by the character as story-teller thus combining visual and aural signs. Besides, Anderson's photo-narrative follows a pattern where Marilyn tells his story to Anderson as they move across space so that the story-within-the-story is presented in the manner of an art installation.

As photographs mounted on walls or hanging from strings frame the protagonists at every turn, the intermedial figure of the character's excursionist ekphrasis enhances the perception of the medium difference as an event. Anderson's literal wandering across his embedded photo-story as in an artist's photo installation depicts both the intradiegetic and extradiegetic spectators' synaesthetic experience while self-reflexively foregrounding the filmic body.

Like in *Capturing Mary* which follows a pattern where Mary tells her story to Joe as they move through the house, Marilyn follows a sort of Ariadne's thread across the labyrinthine gallery of the photographic library as she states that "somewhere in *there* is what happens *next*". The static image as a medium placing elements side by side seems to accompany language as a medium placing objects one after the other in a word-image hermeneutic quest for both the storyteller and the recipient. The spectator-listener spatially embraces the photographs as he moves across the rooms of the archive gallery in a sort of excursionist ekphrasis, visually and aurally experiencing the photo-story in a synaesthetic aesthetic encounter. In the chiaroscuro of the rooms that house the collection, the protagonists are framed by photographs hanging from strings thus defying their bi-dimensionality, as though the entire establishment has become an artist's photo installation. The thread eventually leads to the ultimate room which makes the frame as all the photographs as well as the press cuttings are juxtapositioned and simultaneously visually embraced. Poliakoff thus blurs the boundaries between the two separate categories of aesthetic expression, the arts of time and the arts of space by combining succession and simultaneity within the frame. The hermeneutic quest of the photo-story is apprehended spatially across the labyrinthine gallery where the spectator has an active role to play in between aural and visual signs in the art installation.

## **C- Art installation and Gesamtkunstwerk experiment**

Following the actors as they walk about the rooms and corridors results in an immersive practice through which the film viewers collaborate in the art work, exploring it from within. Through a metalepsis which conjoins the intradiegetical with the extradiegetical, the interartistic nature of film where all the arts and respective media come together is embodied.

The reception of the photo-story constitutes an artistic event through a synaesthetic spatio-temporal

experiment as the intradiegetic spectator moves across the rooms of the library's cavern of inexhaustible photographic revelation as in an art installation involving both the eye and the ear of the recipient. Both the storyteller and the intradiegetic spectator experience spatially the photo narrative as they are literally framed by the photographs.



Anderson is thus made to insert his own story by crossing the spatiotemporal threshold represented by the liminal space of the lines of photographs hanging from strings and thus juxtapositioned in space. The American businessman is visually drawn into his narrative as the camera zooms within the photograph, literally and metaphorically inviting viewers in. But it is through a mutual gaze between Anderson and his grandmother, thanks to the interlocking of the pair of eyes created by the shot-reverse shot editing that he most effectively appears to be reinstated in his own history. Ultimately, the intercutting between the literal mirroring gaze of Hettie within the intradiegetic story and Anderson's as the recipient self-reflexively replicates our position as viewers.



The intradiegetic as well as extradiegetic viewer is afforded time for critical reflections while being given 'the grand tour' by the archivists across the gallery's 'magical place' as the camera foregrounds the archival library's space which embodies the multiple past stories which might have been told.

Poliakoff creates synaesthetic and intermedial effects by pushing the various art forms to their limits, in an attempt to generate a new televisual idiom which foregrounds the connection between intermediality and intersensoriality. He also resorts to the sensorial mode of intermediality via the sensed body shown on screen which serves as a site of intermedial relations to figure the infigurable interiority of the characters and the altered reality of dreams, memory, and psychic drifting.

### **III-The represented and sensed body as a site of intermedial relations**

#### **A- The body as an emotive and emotional vector**

##### **The close up of the face as sensorial space**

As the sensed body is shown on screen, the face becomes a sensorial space for which the full-face shot is a recurring motif. The close up of the face and the sensual close-up of the eye serve to enhance an embodied gaze and point to the fact that seeing, observing, the incorporation of the observer into the cinematic medium are central issues of Poliakoff's work in which making visible the gaze of the character becomes central to the relation of the viewer to the represented fictional reality. The emphasis on the embodied individual gaze is a recurring device in both series which foreground the character's subjective vision through numerous close-ups of his/her face.

To show the processes of memory related to physical senses - sight, touch and hearing - Poliakoff uses montages of layered media and sound to visually and aurally evoke the characters' memories within space and the British director depicts physiological remembering through the representation of reappearing or disappearing images and sounds as embodied experiences. Poliakoff resorts to the close-up of the character's eyes to depict the process of physiological memory as well as to serve as a mirror of the character's unconscious.

##### **Body memory and sensory stimuli**

##### **Physiological remembering: the reappearing and disappearing images and sounds as embodied experiences**

The photographs act as a prompt, something akin to Proust's famous madeleine and serve as a sensory stimulus to activate Louis's body memory at the beginning of the episodes.

The disappearing image is also similarly depicted as an embodied experience during the re-enactment of the corridor scene at the police station which only results in the character's blurred vision and lays the emphasis on the contrast between space memory and body memory.

Memory may also be triggered by aural stimuli as it is when Louis hears the names of the

freemasons during the Masonic dinner that he remembers these are the very names of the witnesses given by the police officer to testify of Julian's presence in the train at the time of Jessie's murder. The process of remembering is depicted through a close shot of Louis's face and the state of shock provoked by his making the connection is expressed through his distortion of hearing capabilities that we are made to share as we are immersed through the soundtrack into his subjective experience.

### **The reappearing images and sounds**

#### **Jessie's awakening from a coma: a trans-medial adaptation of the traditional rhetorical trope of hypotyposis**

The represented and sensed body also functions as a site of intermedial figurations in the sequence of Jessie's awakening from a coma. The aural stimulation of Jessie's senses by Donaldson may be studied as a trans-medial adaptation of the traditional rhetorical figure of hypotyposis for, as Donaldson evokes the memory of 'The Prince on the drums', he simultaneously taps the palm of his hands on the bedside table and asks Jessie to 'blink if [she] remembers it' thus laying the emphasis on the aural stimulation of the eye by repeatedly saying 'you can picture that again', 'picture that Jessie'. Visual perception is thus foregrounded in the verbal narration as well as through the close-up of Jessie's eye.

The medial representation of the corporeal liminal experience foregrounds the elusive experience of the body in-between life and death while simultaneously exposing the texture of the film. Jessie's awakening from a coma is depicted through the close-up of the opening of her eye and is accompanied by Carla's song voicing 'a distant memory [that] floats away', a flickering reminiscence which is materially represented in the film through faded images and muffled sounds. The altered conditions of bodily perception are mimicked through the body of the medium which performs the disturbance of vision through the de-saturated and the blurred moving image. The modulation through the cross-cutting between the blurred shot in the character's mind and the sharp one in the diegetic world indicates an act of medial transition, a medial event of difference which simultaneously signals the alteration of sensations and bodily perception and self-reflexively alludes to the filmic and photographic as a trace of media experience thus disrupting medial transparency. The living membrane of the film discloses the material fragility of the medium as well as its transient nature and reminds the viewer of corporeal vulnerability [see Appendix].

### **Marylin's synaesthetic punctum**

Memory is obviously presented in the series in terms of the visual and Oswald seems to have an extraordinary visual memory in *StF*. However, it is the musical motif which seems to trigger

Marylin's memory thus enabling her to make the connection between 'the innocent Hettie from Skibbereen' and 'another sort of Hettie'. It is the image of Edward Heath as a conductor which provides a punctum for Marylin and leads to her establishing a musical connection. It is when looking at the photograph of Edward Heath as a conductor that she suddenly remembers about Anderson's grandmother's story as a woman musician. Though the narrative device seems a bit far-fetched, it nevertheless lays the emphasis on a possible synaesthetic apprehension of the photograph and functioning of memory which is suggested by the soundtrack. While Marylin looks at the series of photographs, there is no musical background but as soon as Marylin through her visual apprehension of the musical motif in the photograph remembers the story of the Minotaur orchestra, the musical theme starts. While the recurring theme often accompanies the turning points in the development of the plot, the origin of the music here seems to waver in between an extradiegetic sound or an intradiegetic one as a mental sound within the character's mind. This interpretation of the music as a memory in the mind's ear may be encouraged by the insertion of photographs in the series as subliminal flashes or haunting memories in the character's minds.

### **Subliminal flashes: Anderson's psychicons**

The supernatural dimension of the photographic medium as a portal is repeatedly enhanced by the characters stating that it's 'uncanny', 'fantastic', 'surrealistic'. The haunting quality of the photographs is foregrounded by Marylin's words when she states that 'these images stay with you, they haunt the memory' but also through the editing as the photos are sometimes inserted within the film without any prior diegetic explanation as subliminal flashes in the character's mind and thus take the form of what Philippe Dubois, after Baraduc, refers to as 'psychicons'<sup>79</sup>. The apparition of the pictures then calls for a psychoanalytic interpretation which is confirmed by the character's words, "I'll probably dream differently...at night...all these new dangerous images coming at me..." says Anderson. Besides, the portal dimension of the medium is also conjured up as Marylin alludes to possible 'seances' in Paris where Hettie works as an artist's model, most likely for a photographer.

### **Anderson's punctum**

In Lily's story-within-the-story, a parallel editing stresses the variation on a motif between two photographs. The motif of 'the little bundles' of the little Jewish girl about to be deported - a synecdoche conjuring up the connotative meaning of the Holocaust - is intercut with a close-up of plastic bags within the last picture of Lily as a homeless old woman, which foregrounds the echoing motif as a possible visual resemantization of the dead metaphor of the 'bag lady'.

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<sup>79</sup> Dubois, 1990, pp. 218-219.



The insertion of these visual details through editing is not diegetically motivated since Anderson is not previously shown as sifting through the photographs so that the pictorial echoes seem to appear almost like subliminal flashes or visual memories in the character's mind's eye and function like a punctum, 'the piercing quality of a still image which arrests the interest' as defined by Roland Barthes<sup>80</sup>, the small detail where the converging lines of narrative meet.

### **B-The representation of the unconscious and sensible intermediality: figuring the infigurable**

Poliakoff uses figurations of sensible intermediality to depict the interiority of the characters. He resorts to hapticity introduced through sound and camera work to produce the effect of immersion in the subjective experience of the character in an attempt to figure the infigurable unconscious of the characters be it to depict their subliminal flashes or the altered reality of dreams or psychic drifting.

#### **Louis's embodied gaze and the subjective experience of psychic drifting**

Poliakoff resorts to hapticity to fix in the images the physicality of his character's sensation. As Louis is foregrounded as the observer in *DoE*, we are made to share his subjective perception which is that of an alienated outsider who often has a blocked or partial vision of scenes which are depicted through blurred, grainy or sometimes de-framed images which enhance Laura Marks's haptic visuality and provide a distinct sensing of the images. Through Louis's embodied gaze, we are made to share his sensible spectatorship underlying Poliakoff's sensuous approach to the cinematic experience.

We are immersed in the subjective experience of the character through sound and camera work as in the hospital scene when we watch with Louis the conversation of the nurses while being unable to hear what they say. Through the intercutting of the shot-reverse-shot between the close-up of Louis's face and the silent long shot of the nurses talking, we share his embodied vision and state-of-shock expressed through the aural fragmentation of the scene. We first hear a fragment of

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<sup>80</sup> Barthes, 1993, p. 27.



Pamela's statement before the sound begins to cut out as the camera moves in on Louis. Although the police officer's face appears very close to him, we hear Gunson's voice from a distance as Louis watches the nurses with apprehension and cannot concentrate on what Gunson is saying. We are thus immersed in Louis's interiority and made to sense his embodied synaesthetic gaze.

The masonic dinner scene previously discussed serves as an aural and visual echo of the hospital scene as Louis's embodied state of shock is similarly portrayed physiologically through a close shot of Louis's face as well as through a sense of aural fragmentation due to the character's loss of hearing capabilities. [see Fig. 27-28.]

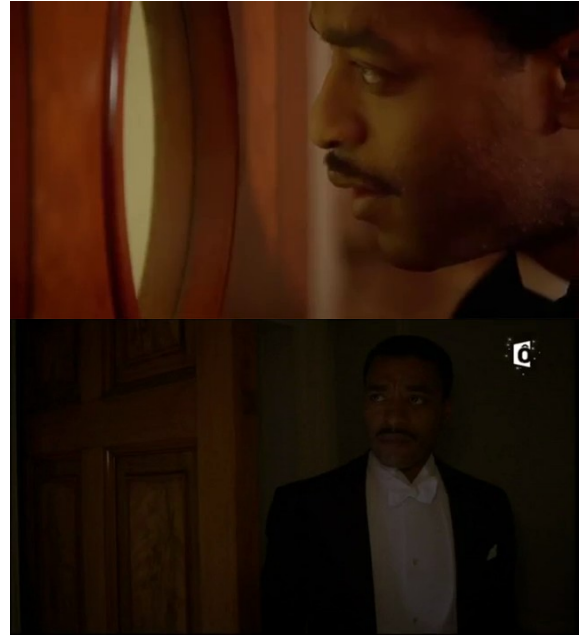
Louis is often foregrounded as an isolated observer, which is verbally enhanced by Sarah in the New Year's Eve street scene when she says to Louis that he's 'not allowed just to watch' while he observes Julian suspiciously. His vision leads to a blurred image and a muffled soundtrack which seem to cancel the border between the real and the interiority of the character.

As Louis is portrayed as a character who acts according to solipsistic directives and trusts no one's vision but his own, we are sometimes made to doubt the borderline between the reality and the imaginary in some scenes which take on an eerie uncanny quality.

In the scene when Louis discovers the new premises of the magazine, physiological and mental traits are fused together and the notion of phenomenological reality seems to be supplanted by aspects of psychic drifting bordering on paranoia and dream-like hallucinations.

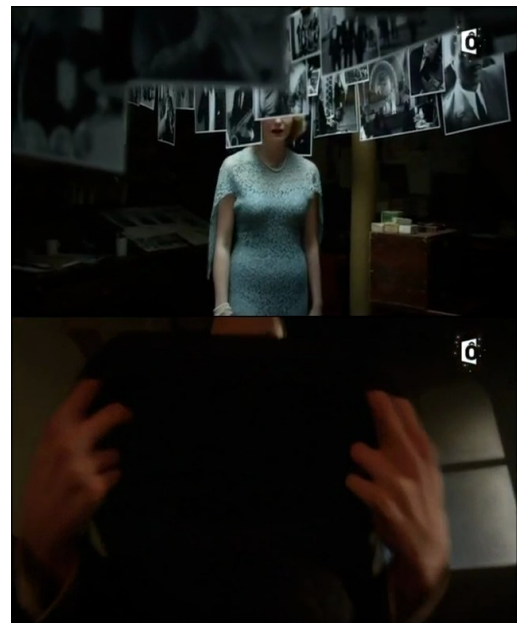
The spatial liminality of the observer who sees the characters through the frame of doors serves as a visual echo of the first episode when Louis watched Julian and Masterson around the oval-shaped window and enhances his perspective as an alienated observer's. As we discover the space through the mobile gaze of the character who walks around the premises and hear from a distance the muffled sound of the characters' ecstatic commentaries, we are made to share his sense of entrapment through the circular motion of the camera and body movements. The eerie dimension of this ominous sequence is enhanced as there seems to be no clear delineation between the real world and the altered reality of psychic drifting of a character who is on the edge of paranoia and acts according to solipsistic directives.





### The altered reality of dreams

A visual echo of this sequence is provided through a similar circular movement of the camera across space as we follow the character's motion while being immersed in his sensory experience in the eerie dream sequence after Louis falls asleep in Donaldson's kitchen. Desaturated images and muffled sounds convey a hallucinatory dimension to the sequence in which Jessie's body lying on a table serves as a visual echo of Hannah's body in the first episode as a displacement characteristic of dreams. Pamela similarly replaces Sarah in the unsettling darkroom scene where her face is de-framed by the photographs hanging on strings, which gives an uncanny dimension to the scene. The mobile gaze of the character through the circular movement across space again suggests a figure of entrapment which is replicated in a final close shot of hands trying to put a hood on Louis's face.



Though we are made to understand through a close-shot of Louis's tired face and a return to silence that Louis had fallen asleep and that the sequence we have just seen corresponds to the altered reality of dreams, no clear distinction is made between the 'real world' and the hallucinatory dimension of the dream sequence as its eerie dimension is prolonged through two echoing similarly uncanny close-shots of a cat's and a child's eyes staring creepily at Louis. The disconcerting effect of the dream is prolonged by the disturbing close shots of the eyes which foreground the ominous dimension of Louis's dream.



The representation of the interiority of the character generates a fluctuating structure which blurs the borders between the 'real world' and the one created by the altered reality of dreams, memory, and psychic drifting. The corporeal liminality and its medial translatability are thus foregrounded but also shape the embodied experience of viewing in the sequences.

The technique of the photographic blur, de-saturated images and fragmented close-ups and more generally the series' photo-filmic or pictorial imagery confer the moving pictures a "haptic visuality" which enables the intimacy of seeing as palpation - in Merleau-Pontyan terms - that is both embodied and reflective.

It should besides be noted that the use of the soundtrack also fundamentally shapes the 'inherently synaesthetic'<sup>81</sup> experience of viewing which Poliakoff highlights through the intertwining of different sensory experiences embedded in and performed through the body. As Poliakoff invites us to follow him into 'micro and macro-perceptual adventures' as Vivian Sobchack puts it<sup>82</sup>, to the realm of voices, sounds and music, to the sonority of bodies and things, he contributes to the refinery of our sensory experience by enriching the aural field with a spatial dimension through an encroachment of the aural upon the tactile and the visual.

Although the detachment of the sensuous haptic imagery created through both sound and sight disrupts the medial transparency of the film, it foregrounds a media-reflexivity which is nevertheless not self-enclosed as it is part of a liminal experience of the embodied self. As hypermediacy fulfils "the desire for immediacy" (in J. D. Bolter's words), we see productive

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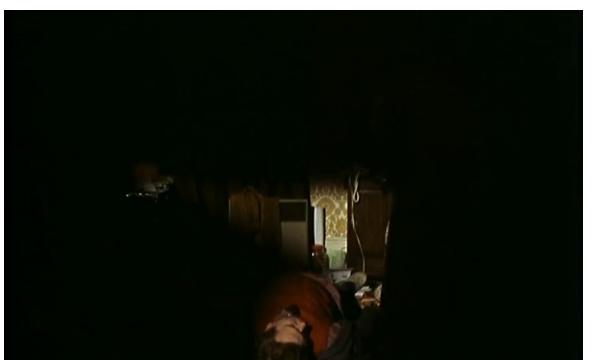
81 Bal, 2003, p. 6.

82 Sobchack, 2006, p. 13.

intersections between the emphasis on the senses and conspicuous, intermedial stylization since this sensually reflective experience, this distinct sensing of the cinematic medium, calls not only for a pensive spectator but for an embodied viewer, a sensible spectator, and the research perspective of sensible intermediality.

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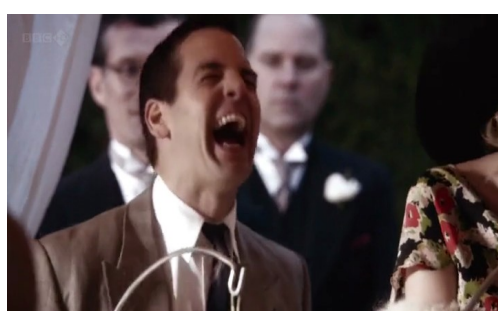
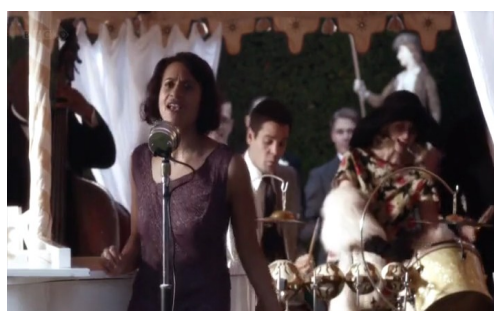
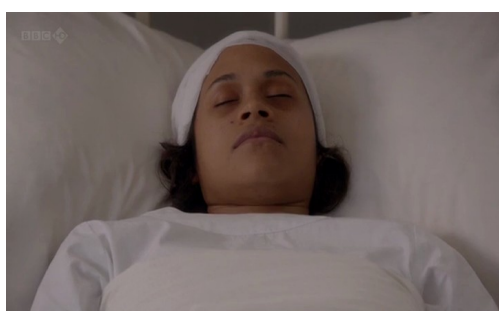
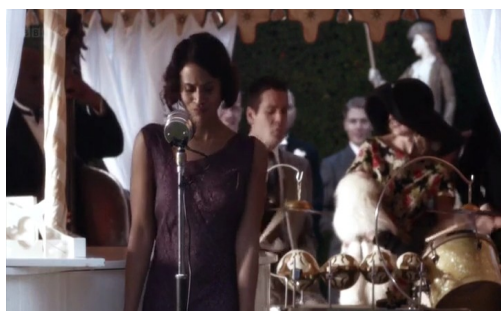


Figure 29. The sensual close-up of the eye



## The corporeal liminal experience

A trans-medial "adaptation" of the traditional rhetorical trope of hypotyposis



Donalson taps the palms of his hands on the bedside table: "The Prince on the drums"

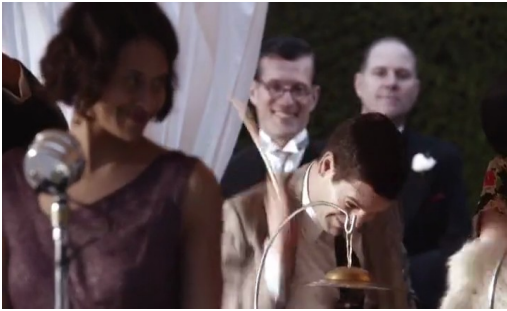


'Blink if you remember it'





Donaldson's voice-over: "You can picture that Jessie"



"Picture that"



" A distant memory floats away"

## CONCLUSION

I am greatly indebted in this research to the prolific and influential work of Agnes Petho and the following final interpretation of Poliakoff's evolving aesthetics as an allegoric passage from intermediality to media convergence is based on her analysis of "Jean-Luc Godard's Passages from the Photo-Graphic to the Post-Cinematic"<sup>83</sup>, which I thought could strikingly be applied to Poliakoff's work.

I believe a diachronic approach of Poliakoff's work from *Shooting the Past* to *Dancing on the Edge* may be analysed as an allegoric passage from the photo-graphic to the photo-filmic, from stillness versus motion to stillness in motion, from intermediality to convergence. In *Shooting the Past*, Poliakoff experiments with the deconstruction of moving pictures into still images and brings to the fore the birth of the photographic within the filmic image so that his fin de siècle series may be interpreted as an elegy for television itself, an allegory of the televisual image passing from the analogue to the digital age. This evolution may be grasped through a diachronic perspective over the aesthetics of Poliakoff's work itself as the British writer-director adopts the new technologies of the moving images and goes from the conspicuously quaint style of *Shooting the Past*'s photographic intermediality (i.e the dialogue of photography and film, image and text) to the much more fluid hybridity of media convergence and confluence of media in *Dancing on the Edge*.

Photography appears between intermediality and convergence as Poliakoff still assigns a major role to photography but no longer uses it as a center stage for inter-medial tensions in *Shooting the Past* but rather as a medium which facilitates the assimilation by other media in *Dancing on the Edge*. He uses film and the format of the televisual series not primarily as an "intermedial battlefield" as he used to, but as the site of media convergence as defined by Agnes Petho ("something that stresses hybridity and dissemination: given that different visions offered by different devices seen or unseen in the film alternate and modulate within a musical structure, without their differences being really brought into play") and as the site to reflect on media convergence.

While *Shooting the Past* exemplifies how media differences and interaction (i.e intermediality) can be meaningful, *Dancing on the Edge* shows how these differences can be weakened through processes of post-media convergence mimicked through the shift of Poliakoff's aesthetics from the opposition still/moving to the relation of still and moving images. The photo-filmic may be regarded not as a mere conjuncture of two principally distinguishable media (photography and

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<sup>83</sup> Petho, 2011.

film), not as an essential opposition but as a continuum between photography and film.

As the intermedial relations seem to be no longer so apparent, we may turn towards Gaudreault and Marion's process of institutionalization as well as question the existence of medium-specific traits in a post media age.

The diachronic perspective on Poliakoff's aesthetics may trace television's passage into the age of convergence as it seems to match the shift from intermediality focus on the *inter* highlighting media differences, the incommensurability between media to focus on the *enter*, immersion and the network logic of convergence.

While writing this work, alternatively watching parts of the series, I also experienced the shift within the corporeality of perception from the interaction of media to the interaction with media. I experienced the turn towards a more tactile mode of spectatorship on a computer screen, pausing the images and observing them as individual frames, capturing relevant snapshots to constitute a personal collection of photo-filmic images, turning them into quasi-photographs in Agnes Petho's words. Through the process of taking visual notes, I simultaneously experienced the aesthetic distance and tactile immediacy of virtually handling the images on my computer in a viewing involving a totally different feel of immersion in bodily space.

This led me to consider that the circumscription of the televisual medium cannot be separated from the new modes of production, consumption and reception of this new broadcasting age. I am aware that this work may be lacking the definition of medium-specific traits, which I believe is due to two reasons. On the one hand, there is probably a subjective perspective, an evaluative judgement through a wish not to distinguish art television from cinema so as to claim the value of television's visual style as cinematic, on the other hand, it may also become more difficult to define the medium's borders because of the "flow of content across multiple media platforms"<sup>84</sup> within the paradigm of post-media convergence, as the boundaries have become blurred by the ubiquitous digital environment and its new modes of production, reception and interaction.

This may lead to follow a paradigm of historical poetics that situates formal developments within specific historical contexts of production, circulation, and reception. Following a historical poetic approach, innovations in media forms are perceived at the nexus of historical forces that work to transform the norms established within any creative practice. A number of key transformations in the media industries, technologies and audience behaviors may coincide with the emergence over the past two decades of serialized television as a vibrant artistic form that many critics suggest rival previous modes of long-form narrative, such as nineteenth-century novels. Glen Creeber for instance argues that "now that we can enjoy television as we can read a book (anytime, anywhere

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<sup>84</sup> Jenkins, 2006, p. 2.



and for any length of time), it is no surprise that the 'small screen novel' has finally arrived."<sup>85</sup>

Within his analysis of television Nordic Noir, he writes that "it is arguably television drama coming of age, harnessing the sheer breadth and power of the long-form narrative to embrace and nourish stories that are as visually stunning as film and as complex and multi-layered as the novel."<sup>86</sup>

Creeber's statement is consistent with my evaluative judgement of Poliakov's approach to television drama, in a comparison which is all the more reinforced as he mentions that "the slower pace of these [Nordic Noir] dramas allows them to linger on deeper philosophical concerns".

I think however that it should be noted that the emergence of the televisual series is characteristically framed as television becoming more 'literary' or 'cinematic', drawing both prestige and formal vocabulary from these older, more culturally distinguished media. And while some point to this emerging form as 'novelistic' television, I would rather follow Jason Mittell's approach as he states that "serialized television has evolved into a robust and unique art form" and that 'it is vital that we recognize television's unique narrative techniques and highlight the innovative strategies it employs that help make it a distinctive and aesthetically valid medium.'<sup>87</sup>

From an aesthetic perspective, I find it difficult to set television apart from film firstly because, as far as visual style is concerned, cinema is a huge influence and 'art television' is importing norms from art cinema onto the small screen and secondly because the differing feel of immersion in bodily space is probably less relevant than it used to be owing to the development of new digital technologies. From a poetics perspective however, I believe medium-specific traits can productively be drawn as far as the narrative complexity of the long-form structure of series television is concerned. Narrative complexity offers a range of creative opportunities and palette of audience responses that are unique to the televisual medium which, according to Jason Mittell, appeals to creators for the broader challenges and possibilities for creativity of long-form series, as "extended character depth, ongoing plotting, and episodic variations are simply unavailable options within a two-hour film".<sup>88</sup> As serial television challenges the norms of what the medium can do, television's storytelling practices have undergone drastic shifts in medium-specific way, the study of which may prove challenging and productive.

As a final conclusion, I would like to consider that the inscription of self-reflexivity within the aesthetics of 'slow television' - turning Deleuze's *Image-Mouvement* into *Image-Temps* - has come to be regarded as one of the criterion defining high-end contemporary television. I therefore believe

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<sup>85</sup> Creeber, 2015, p. 23.

<sup>86</sup> Creeber, p. 21.

<sup>87</sup> Mittell, 2009, p. 14.

<sup>88</sup> Mittell, 2006, p. 29.

that Poliakoff's reaction against the fin de siècle American doxa that television programmes had to use a very fast cutting tempo actually constituted an avant-garde approach to the medium. Though I am not claiming that there is a causal effect, I feel it should be noted that while his landmark 1999 series *Shooting the Past* emblematically shared the schedule with HBO's *24*, contemporaneous American high-end television series like *Mad Men* precisely share the very characteristics the British writer-director stood for, as do the series of the *Nordic Noir* genre<sup>89</sup> which proves popular with television scholars.

Poliakoff's televisual series might then be reinscribed within the diachronic perspective of Gaudreault's genealogy of media as we may be witnessing the emergence of the medium of serial television going through its process of 'institutionalization' as defined by Gaudreault and Marion: "the process whereby the expressive resources developed by a medium give rise to their specificity and endow them with social legitimacy"<sup>90</sup>, a legitimacy which is likely to be consecrated through the entrance of serial television within university scholarship.

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89 Glen Creeber draws a convincing comparison between the Nordic Noir genre of serial television and Poliakoff's similar approach to television drama in his attempt to 'slow television down', 2015, p. 10.

90 Gaudreault and Marion, 2006, p. 28.

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