Inter(acting): Television, Performance, Synthesis

Abstract:

In placing synthesis as a central dynamic, this article seeks to identify and value the occasions where the work of the television actor manages a delicate balance between functional requirements of an environment and their potential to establish a more developed set of interrelationships within it, disclosing intricacies of character interiority through expressive interactions with commonplace tasks and spaces. In response to their dual potential for expressivity and significance, we choose to focus on performances that occur within modes of transport, using detailed moments from *24* (Fox, 2001-2014), *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), *Happy Valley* (BBC, 2014-) and *Broad City* (Comedy Central, 2014-).

Keywords: performance, visual style, TV drama, TV Comedy, space

This essay considers the work of the television actor as a method of precise interaction and integration with aesthetic elements such as properties, set, costume, location, lighting, camera, and other actors. At a fundamental level, the actor's achievement involves working with these various elements in order to create a plausible reality within a staged composition. In television fiction, this can involve maintaining the essential familiarity of a character's real world setting or, alternatively, ensuring that an environment divorced from an audience's everyday experiences exists as a conceivable fictional world. Given the degrees of artifice and disruption that actors are regularly asked to engage with and manage on a shoot, composing a credible and coherent reality through a series of measured engagements with their environment becomes integral to their achievement as performers. In what follows, our analysis aims to address the achievements of television acting through its functional necessity and expressive interaction by engaging in detail with a broad selection of differing but

interconnected moments from *24* (Fox, 2001-2014), *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), *Happy Valley* (BBC, 2014-) and *Broad City* (Comedy Central, 2014-).

The achievements of the television performer can never be uniform, due to multifaceted parameters for performance that television offers. The sheer variety of genres and types of programming presents opportunities for many different types of performer, ranging from professionally-trained actors to participating members of the public. Television therefore accommodates a wide expressive register of performance styles and modes, running a large gamut between direct/ostenstive and intimate/invisible. As a result, the spaces that television provides for performance and performativity are equally myriad. Our expectations for what performance might achieve are shaped by this breadth, as television creates opportunities not only for change (important to genres as diverse as the drama serial and the makeover show) but also sameness (a key feature of the long-running soap opera and central to the familiarity required for the presenter of a chat show). Given this especially wide context, it is encouraging to note an accumulating presence of work on performance and acting in TV scholarship over the last few years, with significant contributions from Simone Knox and Gary Cassidy in their blog series on *CST Online* 'What Actors Do', monographs by Richard Hewett (2017) and Tom Cantrell and Christopher Hogg (2017), as well as forthcoming edited collections: *Exploring Television Acting* (Cantrell and Hogg, 2018) and our own *Television Performance* (Donaldson and Walters, 2018). Taken together, these contributions give emphasis to the range of performance styles found across different genres of television and, furthermore, provide persuasive accounts of the ways in which compositional elements such as lighting, costume and set influence – and are influenced by – the work of the performer on screen.

Within these debates, the matter of medium specificity features as an important consideration, and work on television acting and performance has been guided by a keen

attention to the particularity of television production and text, or the 'determinants of television acting', as outlined by both Roberta Pearson (2010) and Richard Hewett (2015).[1] In the most straightforward terms, television texts tend to be bigger and longer than films, though typically featuring less time and money for production, a fact that can place certain pressures on television performers who are often required to sustain their work across many hours of screen time, with little (or no) rehearsal time. With these particular professional conditions in mind, it is apt that scholarship on the context of television performance has sought to address the specificity of television acting through attention to actor experience and training (Cantrell and Hogg, 2017; Hewett, 2014 and 2017; Pearson, 2010; Rawlins, 2012). We might see this focus similarly reflected in the work of Cassidy and Knox as they combine their close analysis of acting with knowledge of technique, drawing attention to the terminology of acting approaches – as in their discussion of Aniston 'acting off the line' (2015) – as well as to the work and skill invested by the actors under scrutiny.

A key facet of television that impacts both performer and performance is time spent (something Pearson and Hewett both make specific reference to). The seriality of television, especially that of fictional programming, distinguishes the work of the actor (and how we might respond to it) from other major forms of performance in the companion mediums of film and theatre. Attending to this theme, Elliot Logan considers how seriality can shape critical approaches to television performance, especially our involvement with it, embedding this key concern in an article that poses the question 'How do we write about performance in serial television?' (2015). Writing elsewhere about *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015), Logan suggests that 'the long-term, ongoing presence of performers and their characters onscreen, and the interactions of that presence with the shifting places, spaces, objects and histories that constitute the world in which they live' is of crucial importance to developing critical engagement with serial television's medium specificity (Logan, 2014, 46). While there has

been a great deal written about serial television, and especially the drama serial, performance has not figured as a prominent aspect of its complexity, with key contributors to such appraisals, like Glen Creeber (2004) and Jason Mittel (2015), attending more consistently to the achievements of writing and character. Logan, in contrast, centralises the performer's role in 'building-up of various layers of history' praising 'the way *Mad Men* handles this concern through expressive synthesis of screen performance and space, which relies for its impact on a deep intimacy with the series' internal history' (Logan, 2014, 47).

Logan's attention to the involvement and intimacy that is developed through the performer's work connects performance to often-cited pre-eminent qualities of television, the closeness evoked through its place within the home and the familiarity created by regular and long running programming. It is worth thinking further about how these critical ideas on medium specificity shape not only the centrality of the performer to the experiences offered by television but also the way performance is incorporated into television style. In her highlighting of the visual as a key determinant of television acting, for example, Pearson suggests that: 'The smaller screen size makes facial expression even more important in television than in the cinema; much of television consists of close-ups of the actors' faces' (Pearson, 2010, 174). While television screens have got bigger over the last ten years, Pearson's attention to performance within the technological and stylistic parameters of the medium is valuable to understanding, as Logan does, the degree to which it is the performer who leads our involvement with what we see and hear, and how the space of television – its representational space – best captures the work of the performer. In our discussion, we will build on these kinds of approaches in order to address how television creates a space for performance and, especially, how the performer's interaction with their surroundings brings them into a meaningful relationship with other aspects of televisual style. Our analysis is led by a desire to engage with the achievements of performance on television, (rather than

focussing exclusively upon acting technique) through detailed attention to expressive interactions with commonplace tasks or action, which we might regard as responding to or even contributing to the familiarity and intimacy fostered by the medium's specificity.

These television-based concerns find resonance with equivalent work in the related discipline of film studies, where attention to performance has been more prevalent through the work of scholars such as Naremore (1990), Klevan (2005), Baron and Carnicke (2008), Baron, Carson and Tomasulo (2004), and Stern and Kouvaros (1999). At the beginning of *Film Performance: From Achievement to Appreciation*, for example, Andrew Klevan set outs some distinctions between his approach and those that place an emphasis either on 'stars' or on 'acting':

> Both these fields draw on external evidence to assess a performer's effect, but they tend not to pursue the complexity of a performer's internal relationships within a film. This book places the emphasis differently, treating performance as an internal element of style in synthesis with other aspects of film style and explores the achievement of expressive rapport. (2005: ii)

We would not struggle to recognise the influence of equivalent approaches based around 'stars' or 'acting' within critical accounts of television performance. James Bennett (2011), Kylo-Patrick R. Hart (2008) and Beth Johnson and David Forrest (2016), for instance, have considered performance within the frame of television stardom (whilst elsewhere, as we have noted, there has been considerable interest in the interaction between acting 'technique' and certain industrial contexts). Examples of this kind illustrate the types of fruitful crossovers that can occur between film and television studies as the disciplines influence and inform each other. It follows, then, that efforts to understand television

performance in greater detail, especially those concerned with a precise attention to the textual evidence presented onscreen, might profitably draw on certain of these more established approaches in Film Studies. Returning to Klevan, we are entitled to ask what it might entail to treat television performance 'as an internal element of style in synthesis with other aspects of…style' and how we might advance notions of 'expressive rapport' as 'achievement.' We can find these kinds of questions starting to be addressed in Television Studies. In one instalment of their blog series, Cassidy and Knox investigate an extraordinary scene from *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-) that brings together functionality, performance and expressive coherence as Tywin Lannister (Charles Dance) conducts a pivotal conversation with his son while preparing a deer carcass. Cassidy and Knox's analysis highlights the balance of the performer's physical work with its expressive significance: 'Charles Dance manages to establish this imposing, commanding presence in this scene through his mastery of the physically demanding performance under difficult conditions' (2015). Although dealing primarily with acting technique, this example echoes Klevan's focus on the 'complexity of a performer's internal relationships' and the way in which successful performance is dependent upon finding an expressive balance or synthesis with its surroundings (both literal and narrative).

These kinds of approaches to film and television performance resonate with the critical articulations offered by V.F. Perkins in his landmark volume, *Film as Film: Understanding and Judging Movies*. Perkins asserts that:

The specifically filmic qualities derive from the *complex*, not from any one of its components. What distinguishes film from other media, and the fiction movie from other forms, is none of the elements but their combination, interaction, fusion…The

meanings which are contained most securely within a film are those formed at the deepest level of interrelation and synthesis. (1993: 117)

Klevan and Perkins' accounts share the central concept of elements working in synthesis, with Klevan regarding performance as one such element. In a similar vein, Cassidy and Knox's blog analyses involve a range of examples that treat performance as one element of television, engaging with the ways in which performers respond to the particularities and demands of space, handling props, and format (for example, Aniston's listening and reacting, which is partly shaped by a multi-camera/studio audience set-up). Whereas for film, synthesis can be conceptualised as a tight relationship between the 'combination, interaction, fusion' of elements, the patterns of television take on a different quality as the shape of the text has the potential to grow and expand over time, its internal relationships forming part of a much larger whole, developing and even re-shaping in the process of making. However, as Logan illustrates (2014), the opportunity for performance, and performance analysis, created by this longitudinal development, need not be conceptualised negatively in terms of a 'thinning out' of expressive coherence, but rather an accumulating and layering of expressivity. Following this direction, rather than use the concept of synthesis in an effort to fit television into preconceived notions of successful performance, this article intends to use it as a catalyst for approaching the particular ways in which performance responds to television and its aesthetic qualities.

Containing performance: actors in cars
This widening of temporal boundaries relates to a broadening out of the fictional world in certain television series. As the hours of screen time accumulate, so the physical variety of locations can increase and, with this, travel and transport between locations can become more

commonplace as a means of mapping a coherent fictional environment. Consequently, inconspicuous and transitional spaces such as corridors, car interiors, elevators and subway carriages often become a focus, transcending their functional status as a means of moving characters between more discernibly climactic locations. Indeed, due to their inherent functionality, these spaces might develop into a regular part of a series' structure: a useful, but no less expressive, means of progressing narrative and character interaction while grounding action in the familiar spaces of its fictional world. Beyond a pattern that responds to the rhythms of a character's life or profession, the requirements of dramatic action in television can also provide performers with such limited or enclosed spaces as sites for expressive interaction. In response to their dual potential for expressivity and significance, we choose to focus on performances that occur within modes of transport, specifically cars and subway carriages. This concentration offers a first step towards evaluating television acting through its functional necessity as these forms of transport present particularly transitional and confined spaces (both physically and expressively) which place specific demands on actors to maintain certain basic rudiments of behaviour while, at the same time, providing occasions for them to infuse their actions and reactions with detailed layers of meaning and significance. Finally, we use the broad span of television as a means of tracing wider patterns between the moments we describe, capitalising upon this medium's special ability to create far-reaching resonances through subtle repetition and variation.

This focus upon modes of transport is motivated in part by their ubiquity on screen. The car, particularly, is a recurrent television space, found within many different types of programme. Perhaps more prevalent in some genres than others, it nevertheless features across a television performer's working environment. While there are some programmes where the car is the principal working space, for example *Marion and Geoff* (BBC2, 2000-2003) and the 'carpool karaoke' segments of *The Late Late Show with James Corden* (CBS,

2015-), which both feature performers (comedian/actor Rob Brydon; James Corden and his musical guests) speaking/singing to a fixed camera inside a car. For other kinds of television, the car can be a significant part of a series' dramatic pattern, perhaps tied to a particular character (Inspector Morse's distinctive Jaguar is an archetypal example) and part of the regular routines of action. Jonathan Bignell (2016) has written about the importance of cars to police drama, arguing for their significance as 'a way into the stylistic and generic specificity' of such series (123), linking them to connections between modernity and police work, historical production shifts from studio-based to location-based shooting as well as to distinctions between tone and narrative style. Certainly, the propensity for crime dramas to feature conversations between detectives in cars makes them a space that balances the logistics of police work with a certain amount of narrative movement and potentially rich character interaction. Series pick up on these possibilities in a variety of ways, from the extended and almost self-consciously philosophical dialogue scenes between Rust Cohle (Matthew McConaughey) and his partner Marty Hart (Woody Harrelson) in *True Detective* (HBO, 2014) to the more matter-of-fact but at times no less emotionally-wrought exchanges between Janet Scott (Lesley Sharp) and Rachel Bailey (Suranne Jones) in *Scott and Bailey* (ITV, 2011-2016). In *True Detective*, consistent use of rack focus invites us to focus on one person at a time, thus shaping our attention to the minute details of facial expression and response as the performers are lingered on and framed in a way that means the narrative is entirely shaped through them. In *Scott and Bailey*, rack focus is also used, but within a shooting strategy where the camera set-up more regularly moves from one performer to the other, side and front on, meaning that both Sharp and Jones are kept in almost continuous exchange with one another, their expressions and reactions balanced equally, so complementing the partnership of the series more widely. The emphasis on close-ups in both

hints at the focus on the actor informed by these confined spaces, and perhaps their particularly televisual qualities, as prompted by Pearson.

Car interiors offer particular restrictions based upon straightforward functional requirements, leading to further constraints for both performer and director/camera operator, who, as noted above, has a limited number of possibilities when it comes to capturing performance. Fixed seating positions, low ceiling heights and narrow internal widths can all curtail opportunities for the performance of elaborate or complex movements or gestures. Likewise, for a car in motion, an attention to the realities of driving conditions means that interactions can be structured around a need for performers to be plausibly engaged in 'watching the road' (either as a driver or a passenger). This emphasis on the realities of being in a functioning car can become part of character work, as with Steve Coogan's Alan Partridge, signalling his efforts to appear a masterful 'man of the world' while driving his Rover Metro in series one of *I'm Alan Partridge* (BBC2, 1997-2002), wearing leather driving gloves and a headset (so that he can communicate with his long-suffering PA). Coogan delivers his lines looking forward at the road while retaining some conversational gestures, moving his eyes up and taking his hand off the wheel for emphasis. For the television performer, it may be the case that the task of forming expressive relationships with such spaces becomes challenging in different ways due to their potential frequency. Indeed, because car journeys have an innately practical or even mundane purpose, there is a creative pressure in finding points of dramatic interest within cars, which in turn places a responsibility upon performers to help make the car interior an engaging space. The tension of balancing public and private behaviours, and how these are to be negotiated, is further intensified in a space that is physically contained while also being on display to the outside world. In dealing with this duality, performers, as we will see, are often required to negotiate the car interior as a space where a character might move in and out of a controlled public

persona to accommodate a more emotional or visceral response, and often very quickly. More broadly, in their functional purpose of moving a character from A to B, the car is also involved with narrative progression, combining the practical with the dramatic to become an integral element within the narrative structure of a programme or series. Giving life to these linking moments in which the pace of a narrative has apparently eased requires care and, when sequences of this kind recur across episodes, seasons and series, an acute weight of responsibility is placed on the television performer to find fresh opportunities for expressive rapport with the elements that surround them. Equally, a measure of restraint is required: performances within linking moments cannot risk becoming so pronounced through heavy assertion that they negate the function of these intermediate scenes, disrupt the narrative shape of the programme, or compromise the integral coherence of the fictional world. They must remain balanced between function and expression.

In the following discussion, we attend to a series of moments in forms of transport from different programmes that exemplify the potential for television performance to work in synthesis with other environmental elements in patterns of expressive rapport. In placing synthesis as a central dynamic, we move beyond the requirement for an actor to take their place within a coherent audiovisual space and begin to concentrate on their potential to establish a more developed set of interrelationships within that environment, disclosing the intricacies of character interiority through expressive interactions. As a result, this focus offers a way to think through the challenges of television performance, as well as the particular and distinct opportunities for evaluating achievement in performance.

Performing confinement, crisis and control

Paul Woolf has noted of *24* that 'In a show in which people are constantly mobile and are dependent upon the speed and reliability of their transport, motor vehicles have an almost

heroic role…' (2007: 79).[2] The strong association between cars and heroism persists in the programme. And so, when Jack Bauer (Kiefer Sutherland) makes a final return in the 2014 mini-series *Live Another Day*, it follows that his enduring (if ethically dubious) courageousness should be encapsulated in his ability to successfully manoeuvre an onslaught of vehicles through busy London traffic in an effort to outrun a missile-laden drone.

This overall pattern makes the brief final scene of season three striking for the fact that it pursues an apparently different dramatic trajectory. At the end of a characteristically traumatic twenty-four-hour period, which has culminated in him being forced to cut off the hand of his colleague (and boyfriend to his daughter), Jack returns to the driver's seat of his SUV and takes out his keys to start the engine. He pauses, however, and (framed in a new medium close-up) exhales, sniffs, and places his head against the palm of his left hand, using his fingers to pinch the bridge of his nose and the corners of his eyes. Brushing his sleeve across his nose marks a partial return to composure, but then he succumbs: staring out beyond the car windscreen, his face crumples with grief and (as the camera zooms to close-up) a deep, convulsive sob breaks his breath. We stay with Jack for over a minute as he repeatedly struggles and fails to resist the emotions that threaten to overwhelm him. Sutherland retains an upright posture even as his shoulders heave and shake; he places a hand and fingers across his face in partial concealment and bangs an open palm against the glass of the car window, as though Jack were attempting to physically grasp control of the situation through force.

All of Sutherland's performance choices relate to Jack's position within this vehicle. As a consistent symbol of dutiful heroism, the sleek, robust car interior is in conflict with Jack's sudden anguish, a fact that he is aware of as he repeatedly tries to reassert a controlled demeanour. In addition, this environment has the capacity to both enclose and reveal: to trap Jack claustrophobically with the force of his sorrow and also to make him vulnerable as he is

visible to the world through the windows. Sutherland builds these tensions into his performance, creating levels of intensity within the moment as he shifts between attempts at containment through hand gestures of pinching and wiping and emotional release through the movement of his upper body and changes in breath. It might be said that this scene conforms to David Lavery's assertion that 'endings – of episodes, seasons, series – often prove to be more tear-jerky' (Byers and Lavery, 2010, 2), yet Jack's tears are not obviously designed to elicit a reciprocal emotional response in us. Indeed, the mood is not sustained as he concludes by taking a call from CTU (Counter Terrorist Unit) and returns to duty without revealing even minimally the extent of his trauma. Nevertheless, the sequence demonstrates ways in which the tone and meaning of space can transform, even briefly, through a performer's changed interactions with their immediate (and intimate) environment.

The capacity for the car to operate as a space that enables an actor to showcase a character's emotional state can be achieved in significant narrative moments, as in *24*, and in more frequent bursts across a series where the car becomes a space that expresses a character's relation to their wider world. *The Sopranos* foregrounds its interest in car travel from the outset with a title sequence that famously charts Tony Soprano's (James Gandolfini) commute from city to home. The series builds on this investment by making automobiles synonymous with notions of power, status and prowess. When in episode seven of season five, for example, Tony feels he has been snubbed by an associate, Phil Leotardo (Frank Vincent), he responds by engaging Phil in a dangerous street-race: a test of nerve and driving skill that can only conclude when one of them crashes. Similarly, when two would-be assassins attempt to kill Tony in episode twelve of season one, he retreats to the interior of his car, using it to block the first attacker and then managing to start the engine and drive while gripping the barrel of the second attacker's gun, dragging him along the street until he finally falls under the vehicle's wheels. Gandolfini's performance in these scenes

encompasses both energetic tension and exhilaration, making clear his character's enjoyment in using the vehicle to exert his potency and control. This approach to characterisation reinforces the fact that, in each case, entering the car provides a means of attack for Tony, rather than offering only a haven for retreat.

We might reasonably conclude that *The Sopranos* capitalises upon certain dubious associations made between cars and masculinity, shared with *24*, whereby interactions with the former offer a measure of the latter. The series does not provide easy endorsements of these notions, however. Tony is afflicted with a succession of panic attacks and, in episode one of season two, he suffers an episode at the wheel of his car. He is listening to Deep Purple's 'Smoke on the Water' on CD and Gandolfini tilts his head rhythmically in time with the music, letting this motion extend to his shoulders and upper torso as Tony rocks in time with the music's beat. Gandolfini's facial expressions convey the kind of muted pleasure Tony often exhibits: the eyes narrow and sparkle as though lost in a moment of reverie, but the mouth remains a parted straight line, as though enjoyment cannot infuse Tony's demeanour entirely. The actor complements this depiction by demonstrating Tony's casual control over his vehicle, steering by resting the palm of his left hand on the wheel with his right hand resting at his side, a posture combining levels of relaxation and alertness. This ease is quickly compromised, however, when the CD track skips. At first, Gandolfini responds by prodding at the player's buttons and briskly tapping the dashboard, as though Tony were attempting to coax the technology back to recovery. But it is not only an effort to coax. Gandolfini's deft performance of these 'heavy-handed' gestures encapsulates Tony's appetite for control and his belief that he *can* exert control over the elements within his life, *especially* those elements found within the close, comfortable interior environment of his car. And then suddenly, because the CD player doesn't yield to Tony's efforts, he is repeatedly and violently smashing his balled fist down on the dash, his face contorted into a tight snarl and

his voice expelling stunted bursts of angry speech: "Come on, motherfuck-! Motherfuck-!" This rage triggers an anxiety attack, however: Gandofini shortens his breath, lets his gaze drift from the road and blinks repeatedly, whilst the visual and audio tracks become slow motion, evoking the deadening of Tony's senses. Finally, he crashes the car and slumps, unconscious, into the car's inflated airbag.

This car interior sequence from *The Sopranos* is demarcated as extraordinary and, indeed, illustrates the extent to which Tony's condition has the potential to threaten his life (in this instance, causing a potentially fatal car accident). It is also the case, however, that Gandolfini builds aspects of Tony's general driving behaviour, seen first in the opening credits, into this depiction: the qualified casualness followed by an assertion of control, which rapidly spills over into unbridled aggression. The performance capitalises upon qualities David Johansson identifies in the show's title sequence-depiction of Tony: 'we're with him, inside the frame with his face, his hairy hands, his brute strength, his air of danger, but within the intimate bounds of the car we get a sense of strength in repose, the alpha male at rest, his guard down, vulnerable' (Johansson, 2006, 32). Gandolfini's performance balances this strength and vulnerability, illustrating the extent to which an intimate, safe space can become claustrophobic and dangerous for his character. It is both part of the character's everyday experience – his way of moving through his world, as a mode of transport and extension of his own powerfully masculine presence – and a space for the actor to dramatise the ways in which Tony's public persona capitalises on appearances of assertion and control but ultimately falls short of suppressing the emotional outbursts of his private behaviours.

Performance and traumatic space

In common with Jack Bauer, the interiors of cars feature heavily in the professional life of Sergeant Catherine Cawood (Sarah Lancashire) in *Happy Valley*. In episode two of series

one, for example, she is faced with a prominent local councillor who has been involved in a crash but refuses to be breathalysed. Catherine walks over to his vehicle to retrieve his car keys from the ignition. As she bends over the driver's side of the car she pauses, straightens up, puts on a pair of plastic forensic gloves and retrieves a small packet of white powder from underneath the front seat. The discovery of drugs changes the dramatic tenor of the scene. Catherine's interaction with the car interior instigates this shift as she instinctively regards the space as a potential crime scene, rather than merely a benign feature of her environment. (Given that this attitude shapes her everyday existence, often to the detriment of her relationships with others, Catherine's way of being – which combines her skill as detective and blunt practicality – is developed precisely through Lancashire's set facial expression and emphasis on sustained and direct movements.) This ability to find new possibilities in car interiors emerges again in episode four when a traumatised Catherine responds irrationally to a young man's sarcastic comments as she takes another man into custody. She pulls the young man from his car, arrests him, and then forces him into the back of her police car. Following him in, she clutches his collar with her right hand and uses her left hand to grab his genitals, saying: "No CCTV cameras in here, sunshine. It's just your word against mine." Here, Catherine uses the confinement of the car interior as an opportune setting in which to intimidate the young man both verbally and physically, using its boundaries to entrap and conceal.

Scenes of this kind illustrate Catherine's ability to navigate and adapt the spaces of car interiors with ease in the course of her professional duties. We might also say that she challenges certain gender associations by making males susceptible in and around cars, using these vehicles as an important means of asserting her authority as a police sergeant and a woman. In each scene, Sarah Lancashire performs Catherine's actions with an assured purposefulness, underlining her character's control as not only deliberate but also instinctive.

As with *24* and *The Sopranos*, *Happy Valley* finds opportunities to disrupt this confidence and ability, adapting Catherine's relationship to car interiors at points in which she loses control and so becomes vulnerable within them. In episode four of series one, entwined plotlines exert pressure on her. Her colleague, a young woman whom she treated quite strictly, has recently been murdered: brutally run over by Tommy Lee Royce (James Norton), who had previously raped Catherine's daughter. Catherine believes the rape contributed to her daughter's suicide after she gave birth to Tommy's child. She has just completed a visit to Tommy's mother (Caroline O'Neill), following his release from prison, in which the older woman horrified Catherine by revealing that she knew Catherine's grandson is Tommy's son. Back in her squad car, Catherine pauses and takes a couple of deep breaths before reaching down to find her keys and put them in the ignition. Lancashire's handling of these actions illustrates the tension, always present in *Happy Valley*, between Catherine's brisk professional manner (the keys in the ignition marking a return to duty) and the emotional burdens that weigh upon her as she performs her job (the deep breaths and stillness). In these moments of pause, Lancashire also references her character's intellectual response to situations. She drops her eye-line and then focuses on a point beyond the windscreen, as though Catherine were already picking over the events of the past twenty-four hours, searching out connections, and planning responses that will allow her to stay ahead of events; the jangle of the keys instigating a new burst of forward momentum as she works to stay ahead of events.

This pause does not lead immediately to a new tactical direction, however. As she glances at the rear-view mirror, a reverse point-of-view shot reveals a vision of Catherine's dead daughter, Becky, on the backseat: her fixed stare, open mouth and scarred neck a horrifying reminder to her mother of the moment she was found, hanged. The image is shocking, its impact emphasised further by a percussive double-beat and high-pitch strings on

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the soundtrack. The shot is also a somewhat heavy-handed insertion into the scene, an unusual misstep for *Happy Valley*. For the actor, it might compromise the refinement of a performance, providing an especially unambiguous stimulus for dramatic response. Lancashire's reaction, however, is measured and nuanced. Having looked around to find the backseat empty, she remains in a half-turned position, breathing unsteadily as she murmurs "Shit" four times, her tone shifting from staccato panic to brittle desperation with each utterance of the word. In this pose, Catherine is caught between the imagined trauma behind her and the reality of a world in front of her: trapped, equally, between her roles as grieving mother and self-assured policewoman as past and present meet in the car. A single tear rolls down her cheek as she works to control her emotions and regulate her breathing. As she sits, Lancashire allows her gaze to keep returning tentatively in the direction of the backseat, never fully turning around but at times shifting her shoulders minimally to the left, as though she were about to begin that movement. Given that Catherine has already turned around fully, the temptation to repeat the action is curious. Lancashire's slight movements create the impression that Catherine is struggling to resist a senseless urge to catch a final glimpse of her daughter again, however painful and traumatic that might be; to remain close, even to this cruel vision of her. For Catherine, this harrowing, degraded apparition from the past is the last tangible fragment that remains of Becky and turning away completely – turning back towards the world of the present – risks the possibility of breaking that fragile bond forever. As the seconds accumulate, she is lost in this impossible dilemma and it takes a grimace of determination to pull her back, turn her around, start the car engine, and carry on. We might conclude that Lancashire moves beyond the straightforward shock of the sequence to provide a delicate portrayal of Catherine's hopeless, tormented devotion to her daughter. Her performance ensures that the confines of this interior space, one which Catherine has

commanded so fluently in the past, become a site of emotional claustrophobia, finding her character's fragility as she is made to face her pain and her love.

Performance as movement through space

Each of the examples discussed thus far involve the space of a vehicle as being explored or even exploited for dramatic value through performance. As an extension of these concerns, and as a point of useful contrast, we can move to consider an example in which it is customary for ordinary activities to take on an extraordinary quality, requiring performance to be the focal point for controlling, and stretching, coherence and tone. *Broad City*[3] is a US sitcom concerning the everyday activities of the central characters, Ilana Wexler (Ilana Glazer) and Abbi Abrams (Abbi Jacobson); episodes deal with the mundane activities of women in their early to mid-twenties, which tend to have more or less outlandish results.[4] As with the example of Sarah Lancashire in *Happy Valley* (in turn part of a strong, central ensemble cast), it is the performances of Ilana Glazer and Abbi Jacobson that drive the narrative consistency of the series. Although their modes of performance are not engaged with the same subtlety of reaction and glance required by the dramatic complexity of performing Catherine Cawood's response to her physical and emotional surroundings, Glazer and Jacobson move flexibly between registers of emotional connectedness and comedic excess in order to dramatize the women's friendship. Moreover, concluding with a pair of performers provides the opportunity to expand on the challenges of presenting more than one performer in a confined space. In our previous dramatic examples, the performers' isolation within their restricted interior enables a focus on their expressivity, captured most frequently in close-ups on their faces, which supports the unfolding of intensity seen in different degrees in Sutherland, Gandolfini and Lancashire.

In one episode the potential of moving through space as an interim is heightened through a confined spatial environment, as Abbi and Ilana endeavour to make their way through a crowded subway to get to the back of the train. In their efforts, they encounter a variety of equally habitual and grotesque behaviours on their way (including intense public displays of affection, sexual harassment, a dance crew, unpleasant food, a carriage empty aside from a pile of faeces and a woman eating, and finally a large group of Hassidic Jewish men). During the sequence, which features minimal dialogue, Glazer and Jacobson move together and apart, either side to side or one in front of the other. Obstructions of other bodies or objects necessitate squeezing or bending through space in movements that establish correlation between the performers while also speaking to the relative ease or discomfort of each character respectively. Glazer's Ilana is characterised by a confidence about her body (as further developed through her wardrobe of cropped and skin-tight clothing), articulated here through the poise with which she straightforwardly moves to the side of and past other bodies, gently spinning around as she emerges from between huge backpacks and effortlessly bobbing her way past the dance crew in time with their rhythms. Jacobson's movements are in step with Glazer's, but serve to underline Abbi's corresponding awkwardness: she bends her whole body with arms outstretched above her head to avoid contact with a large man, sticking her tongue out with the effort of not touching him, and later clumsily steps over a dancer crouched on the floor. However, when faced with the crowd of men in the final carriage, the gestures and expressions of the women match, their shoulders hunched and their mouths clamped shut, moving slowly through them to stand, arms crossed over their chests.

This final part of the sequence gestures comedically to the frequent real discomforts of being a woman in a public space, with the characters' simultaneous awkwardness and self-assurance highlighting the difficulties of negotiating proximity with other bodies (i.e. moving without touching or disturbing others) alongside the transgressive power of asserting your

physicality. As the train arrives at the station, Abbi walks to the door, closely followed by Ilana who departs the group of men by slapping the nearest one on his bottom – Glazer walks forward and performs a small spin which she finishes by smacking the man with the back of her hand, all without breaking step. The movement is in line with her previous deportment as she progresses through the carriages, and the many moments across the series when Ilana affirms her body and expands her own physical space. The fluidity of Glazer's spin, which matches her previous rotation through the large backpacks, punctuates the scene with a neat flourish which in turn contrasts with Jacobson's efforts to keep rigid and as gesturally enclosed as possible throughout the scene; the specifics of their physical gestures mapping onto the characters' idiosyncratic ways of being, so that the joke is made through the pattern of their behaviours rather than to the side of them. The sequence thus dramatizes the complementary physical performances of both women which, while negotiating the outside world, generate exchanges and balances between the two. It also reveals space as something to be negotiated, not only by characters in fictional worlds but also by comedic performers as, in many ways, the scene offers a fairly obvious comedic sketch which is pushed into something more elaborate and extraordinary through the skill of performers who balance the need to be comedic against the need for their characters to remain consistent. The mundane is expanded to become comedic and, rather than simply becoming a vehicle for a joke about how terrible the subway is, the specificity of the performers' movements and gestures keep them securely inhabited within their characters.

Conclusion

Picking up on the final example provided by *Broad City*, where the skills of the performers guide a leap to expand the limitations of a vehicle and the joke itself, we might reflect on the ways that all the moments we have offered for consideration in this article expand the

parameters found in the confined spaces within which they occur. The mundane (here, cars and subway carriages) becomes a zone rich with expressive potential, a site for brief exchanges that dramatize public performances and duty, and thus prove effective in articulating tensions of power and gender, or revelations of personal trauma. Through a process of engaging with these examples, it becomes clear that one of the rewards of television performance derives from those moments when performers are seemingly 'just getting on' with the business at hand. Cars and other forms of transport are utilised as a means of getting a character from A to B and thereby offer a place to test performance consistency within the general texture of character behaviour and an actor's interaction with entwined elements of audiovisual style. Likewise, there is merit in seeking to identify and value the occasions where performances manage a balance between the functional requirements of an environment and their potential to establish a more developed set of interrelationships within it, disclosing the intricacies of character interiority through expressive interactions with tasks and spaces that are otherwise commonplace. Finally, by attending to a range of moments, we can assess the everyday alongside the extraordinary in order to highlight the ways in which these performances respond particularly to the parameters and rhythms of television and, in return, how television creates time and space for performance.

In our discussion, we have tried to remain sensitive to the specifically televisual qualities of time and space that guide performance. While achievement in film might be informed through observation of a tight and coherent fusion of interrelation and its synthesis, the broader temporal and spatial scope of television enables a wider but potentially thicker interaction between performer and world. The scope for expressivity in performance is opened up through repetitions of action and behaviour – often highlighted through repeated journeys or use of a car – and a straightforward requirement to fill the gaps in-between as

they recur. We use these observations as a foundation with which to advance notions of the actor as an author of complex and subtle relationships between those various compositional elements, establishing their own performance as a central force in the creation of meaning and significance.

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[1] For Pearson these are time, status (the hierarchies between star and guest, for example), the visual, collaborators' influences and genre; for Hewett, time, production process and technology, training and experience and the role of the director. It is worth noting that both writers are principally concerned with television drama.

[2] Woolf goes on to identify a potential for irony here, given that vehicles like the SUVs used in *24* contribute to the destruction of the planet through carbon emissions.

[3] *Broad City* was originally a web series (2009-2011).

[4] For example, the first episode involves a plan to raise enough money to afford to see the rapper Lil' Wayne, during which Ilana steals office supplies, books a cleaning job with a man pretending to be a baby and Abbi tells her boss she might have AIDS so she can leave work early, though they end up missing the gig, both drunk on a step and wearing fur coats stolen from the man baby.