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Reference [Thompson 1996](#) (p. 8) is missing

Exploring the Wild Wild East

The Transnational Aesthetics of »Ripper Street«¹

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The tables are crude on which the cards are played. We see this in a close-up, so the ancient-looking label on the brown beer bottle, the unwieldy paper money and metal plates on which some simple food is served all become visible. There are lots of men, most of them bearded and unkempt, many wearing scruffy clothes. The material from which the clothes are made is coarse and simple. There is also one woman, wearing the colourful clothes associated with prostitution. We see a roulette table, and the sepia colours that seem so pervasive in candle-lit rooms.

This scene (from »In My Protection«, 1.2) offers quite a few pleasures of the traditional Western: there are rogue, gambling men, gun and fist fights and the shabby chic of worn-out suits, visibly grotty underwear, unkempt hair, big moustaches and beards and heavy, dirty boots. But this scene does not take place in Montana, South Dakota, Texas or any of the other states usually providing the backdrop for the stories of the Western. No, this scene is set in Whitechapel, East London, and is a scene from the BBC's »Ripper Street« (2012–2013). The series indicates that a new generic boundary has been blurred (Feuer 1992) in which the open wilds of the American West have become re-situated in the enclosed wilds of this city's east, a place close to the harbour, and hence offering access to the unchartered territory that is the rest of the world. In other words, this scene centrally partakes in re-imagining London's East not as a specific historical, embodied space, but as a generic place in which civilisation is situated in a border territory where its foundations are fundamentally questioned and where human beings congregate in the spirit of opportunity that marks this lawless borderland. This, I will argue, is the world of »Ripper Street«, a world that is fundamentally transnational – between nations – in its ontology, its aesthetics and its semiotics.

This chapter will explore this transnational theme. It will provide a contextualised analysis of the series by which I mean a textual analysis that recognises the specific industrial conditions that have shaped the text. This means that I will use a mixed approach: first I will explore the production history and in particular examine interviews with showrunner Richard Warlow. I will then move on to the

textual analysis that will first examine the aesthetics of the series, drawing on debates on style and value (see amongst others Jacobs 2001, 2006; Geraghty 2003; Johnson 2005) before drawing attention to the intertwined semiotics (Barthes 1968). I make a deliberate distinction between the two in order to highlight the value judgement of aesthetic choices so that I can emphasise how these are connected to a particular address to an imagined transnational audience. As I will argue, as a result of the aspirations both of the BBC and, more specifically, BBC America, »Ripper Street« aims to achieve a quality which appeals to a specific audience – the »quality audience« that Jane Feuer identified as early as 1984. It does this by providing generic and intertextual references not, as previously, to film or literature, but to other »quality television drama« and in this instance in particular »Deadwood«. Only then do I want to return to the above and indicate how these aesthetics also communicate a space that is experienced within the fictional world as transnational.

A transnational ontology: the production context

As different scholars (Camporesi 1990/2000; Hilmes 2008, 2011) have pointed out, British broadcasting has been operating transnationally from its inception. During the 1920s, the BBC was constantly comparing itself and was also compared by outsiders, such as politicians and other opinion leaders, to institutions elsewhere in the world, and in particular America, in order to guarantee a specific form of regulation. But the transnational comparison was made in order to define the national. More recently, British production companies have produced both fictional and factual content for exploitation beyond the UK. For its fictional output, this has meant that British productions have increasingly taken on a tourist view (Blandford 2005) which imagines the UK in particular ways.

Take »Downton Abbey« (ITV, since 2010), for example, a contemporary of »Ripper Street«, but one that encapsulates this more established form of transnationalism. The programme is produced by Carnival Films for ITV and »Masterpiece Theatre«, the PBS flagship programme series. In order to continue in the line of previous »Masterpiece Theatre« productions, it uses a number of tropes which regular viewers of British period drama will instantly recognise. This includes the lavish decors, the sumptuous period costumes, the setting on a British country estate, the RP English, and the easy and accepted class divide between working-class servants and upper-class gentlemen and ladies. This form of tourist view has marked British period drama for a while and is infused with a sense of nostalgia for a simpler past which is, of course, entirely constructed (Higson 1993).² Importantly, such an image of the past is in dramas such as »Downton Abbey« or, »Pride and

Prejudice» (BBC/A&E 1995) not constructed in order to re-examine national issues or offer a critical reflection on a nation's presence; it is constructed as a transnational commodity which already takes into account the tastes of other audiences. Importantly, these tastes centre on the specific, tourist view of Britain which excludes more troubling elements. Thus, dramas which deal with Britain's other past are often finding it harder to make it to the US (Weissmann 2012).

This transnational production context also marks »Ripper Street«; however, here it is played out differently. Co-produced between the BBC and BBC America, a subsidiary of the BBC's commercial arm BBC Worldwide, it seems to be completely controlled by British interests. However, BBC America has become a mature cable channel in the US which has developed a strong brand identity which separates it from other cable channels which have traditionally offered British series. This includes PBS, but also A&E, which distinguished itself in the 1990s by being a commercial version of PBS. Since the turn of the millennium, and the move to more home-produced drama on cable, Showtime has become an important outlet for UK drama, however, largely in the form of format adaptations (»Queer as Folk«, Showtime and Showcase, 2000–2005; »Shameless«, since 2011) or co-productions (Episodes, BBC, Showtime, since 2011). In contrast to PBS and A&E in particular, BBC America has developed a brand image that is based around the notion of »Cool Britannia«, and which celebrates the irreverent image of Britain during the Blair years (Becker 2007). While in the mid-2000, this still meant a complete reliance on imports for television drama output, by 2013, it had developed its first original series (»Copper«, since 2013), and had co-produced several other ones. As a mature channel, this meant that it could, and perhaps more importantly, would negotiate specific features that it understood to be of importance to its audience. Indeed, as vice-president of BBC America, Richard de Groce, made clear (Owen 2014), BBC America was deeply involved in any talks that affected »Ripper Street«'s development

In »Ripper Street«, features that point to the series' transnational ontology include amongst others one very obvious one: an American character, namely Captain Homer Jackson (Adam Rothenberg), the problematic, half-criminal, unreliable and yet driven and hence exceptional forensic scientist who is summoned by Inspector Edmund Reid (Matthew McFadyen) to complete his trio of investigators. In this respect too, »Ripper Street« is similar to »Downton Abbey« which stars Elizabeth McGovern as rich heiress wife. Such a strategy has also been adopted by different HBO dramas which populate their casts with recognisably British actors in order to appeal to a British audience. The British market is important for cable channels such as HBO because costs can be recouped there in the absence of a large enough number of episodes that would make the drama viable for exploitation in the syndication market (Weissmann 2012). But there is also a crucial dif-

ference: in »Downton Abbey«, the character remains the exception that highlights the Britishness of the others while in the HBO dramas the actors often play American characters; in »Ripper Street«, and this is where the drama moves into new directions for British drama, the presence of Jackson is further evidence that Whitechapel is a space outside of regular London society where people from across the world mix. It suggests a deeper transnationalism that runs counter to the established Britishness of UK period drama.

This is also achieved by the use of a range of genres from across the world. The use of generic markers is deployed deliberately and consciously by production personnel. This has been made evident in several studies (Levine 2007; Lotz 2007) that have investigated the production cultures of television drama. Both Lotz (2007) and Levine (2007) for example note the articulateness of production personnel in terms of aesthetic choices which are contextualised through references to other creative works. As Levine highlights, production personnel use a language that is decidedly »audience-like« (2007: 147) in its constant process of meaning making, suggesting attempts by production personnel to place themselves into the role of the audience during the production process. Within this context, it is also important to highlight that production personnel are increasingly aware of audience behaviour. This is made possible because the internet has made audience behaviour significantly more visible and has led to a monitoring culture within the industry (Jenkins 2006; Ross 2008), including in the UK.

Production personnel at the same time operate in an environment that is transnational. This is true not just because of the increasing number of co-productions even in America, but also because the shift towards TVIII (Creeber/Hills 2007; Johnson 2007) or the era of plenty (Ellis 2000) has meant that constant competition has created a drive for innovation and difference (Johnson 2007) that are often found in productions from outside national boundaries. In many ways, this continues the search for »difference« that has marked international sales for decades (Grade cited in BBC Radio 1984). What has changed is that increasingly this also needs to be reflected in home produced programmes in order to give the broadcasting channel a sense of distinction that defines it from the clutter of the multi-channel environment (Johnson 2007).

In Britain, television drama production is increasingly operating in a transnational sphere because dwindling audiences connected to increased production costs has driven up the need for co-productions or the potential for exploitation of a format. Britain has become the world-wide most prolific producer of formats (Steemers 2004; Esser 2013) and as a result is the second-biggest distributor of content internationally, after America (Dowell/Malick 2011). In part, this is driven by a burgeoning independent production market which since 2003, when independent producers were given the right to keep copyright of their material, has

pushed into the international market (Chalaby 2010). But as Jean K. Chalaby (2010) also points out, the British industry also operates transnationally because it consumes foreign, and in particular US, material. In other words, Britain remains dependent on imports to fill its schedules. Whilst the majority of US imports are still considered in a relatively negative light, US quality drama has captured the imagination of critics and has been at the centre of a bidding war between Channel 4, the BBC and Sky which has led to inflated prices of drama that can be classed as »quality television« (Conlan 2010). In other words, quality TV drama has garnered particular attention in the British TV industry.

These different elements of the transnational clearly come together in the production of »Ripper Street« as interviews with showrunner Richard Warlow make evident. Even in its development stage, the writers were attempting to develop a drama that was both drawing on national myths and foreign styles. As Warlow in a blog for the BBC makes clear, the continuing fascination of tourists with the Ripper story was as much a draw in the development as was the thought of making »a grimy, period version of ›Hill Street Blues‹ or ›NYPD Blue‹« (2013). Interestingly, Warlow here doesn't just draw on any of the American crime dramas – for example it is noticeable that the immensely popular »CSI: Crime Scene Investigation« (CBS, since 2000) is not mentioned, despite the fact that BBC America advertised the show with a trailer that is titled »CSI: Victorian Style«. Rather, he draws on those that have been celebrated as forerunners to other »quality crime dramas« such as »Southland« (NBC 2009; TNT 2010–2013) and »The Wire« (HBO 2002–2008) and by doing so claims for his own production a quality that in the UK has become associated with US productions.

Warlow however also situated the drama in the transnational through another means, namely by suggesting that the series wasn't just a typical British cop show but also a Western (Season One DVD Extras 2013). As already indicated, this article will investigate the aesthetic elements of »Ripper Street« that refer to the Western in more detail below. What I want to highlight here, is that Warlow articulates his desire to place the series in a context that is both British and decidedly not British. Whereas the Ripper story is part of the mythology that surrounds Victorian London, the Western's iconography is closely interlinked with the myths that surround American cultural identity (Coyne 1998). As a result, the Western is often considered to be American, even if other countries, such as China, Germany and Italy, have contributed to its numbers. The placing of »Ripper Street« within this context suggests that the drama's ontology is not only influenced by the transnationalism that originates from the material conditions that are presented in the context of the production – that it *is* a BBC-BBC-America co-production and hence needs to address two close but nevertheless different cultures. Rather, it sug-

gests that Warlow himself operates within a context of transnational consumption which he purposefully brings to his work.

Of course, such a context of transnational consumption is the norm in today's global television markets. American culture has become an international reference point which many of us share. As Tom O'Regan (1990) suggests this is due to a number of contradictory factors which include, amongst others, localising and transnationalising trends as well elements of homogenisation *and* hybridisation. Thus, Hollywood provides us with material that is both aimed at its diverse internal market (localising) and at international audiences (transnationalising). Similarly international audiences might pick up Hollywood fare because it presents culturally proximate or culturally divergent material. Lothar Mikos and Marta Perrotta also emphasise the need to understand the engagement with American content in these complex terms. Discussing the pitfalls of ideas of cultural proximity, Mikos and Perrotta (2013: 254) conclude:

»Aber das Publikum ist nicht einfach Teil einer generellen Kultur, die lokal oder national geprägt ist. Es differenziert sich in verschiedene Milieus und Lebensstile und unterscheidet sich durch soziodemografische Merkmale. Deshalb kann man im Kontext von lokalen oder nationalen Kulturen nicht vom dem Publikum sprechen. Es gibt stattdessen eine Vielzahl von Publika.«

It is the complexity of the »national« audience that also facilitates the circulation of a range of different international artefacts which shape our consumption habits in multiple ways. Crucially, such a complex reception environment, run through by both national and international elements, is drawn upon and used by Warlow not just because his own consumption is shaped by it, but because he clearly assumes that his different audiences' experiences are too.

»Ripper Street«'s ontology, then, is transnational in a number of ways: because it is a coproduction, because it draws on a number of genres, including the American »quality drama« and the Western, but also because the crew operate in a transnational consumption context which they also presume to be the norm for its audiences.

»Ripper Street«'s transnational aesthetic

As already indicated, »Ripper Street« uses particular aesthetics in order to make claims about its quality. As several scholars (Feuer 1984, 2007; [Thompson](#) 1996) have pointed out, the use of specific aesthetics is usually connected to value judgements that are part of the tastes of particular demographic groups. For example, the use of round characters connects to demands for literary values that attract the

better educated group of professionals courted by broadcasters such as NBC in the 1980s (Feuer 2007). As a result, much of the academic debate about quality and aesthetics has shied away from attempts to universally define what makes television beautiful or good, and has instead attempted to contextualise the use of aesthetics within the specific industrial use or political economy of a programme (see Johnson 2005). I too will here focus on aesthetics as connected to values that are appreciated by specific audience groups. As I will discuss below, »Ripper Street« draws on a number of different aesthetics in order to address a complex set of audiences, which includes the »quality audience« that Feuer (1984) identified, but also a general British audience. The »quality audience« is crucial for BBC America which, despite being available in some 63 million American homes, rarely reaches more than 2 million viewers (TV News Desk 2014). This audience is, however, the Anglophile, better-educated group of young professionals, many of whom work in the industry, suggesting a significant influence of the channel in the US (Martin 2003). Thus, when BBC America reached 2.4 million viewers with a »Doctor Who Christmas Special« in December 2013, this was made up by 50% of the A25–54 demographic (TV News Desk 2014). »Ripper Street«, then, has to employ aesthetics that this audience will enjoy as well as reaching the broad general audience that BBC One needs to cater to. It does this by mixing a range of aesthetics that are derived from a number of genres.

John Ellis (2013), for example, discusses the steampunk aesthetics of »Ripper Street«, arguing that this has led to an imagination of the present as ultimately superior to this grimy, physical past. It is clear that »Ripper Street« does not romanticise the past, but I am not entirely convinced if that goes along with an imagination of history as progress. Rather, the complex aesthetic which mixes that of steampunk with period drama with cop drama with the Western indicates a complex layering of values, ethics and meaning.

If we look at the steampunk aesthetic in more detail, what emerges is an apparent fascination with Victorian London (and Britain) as a centre for technical and scientific innovation. Indeed, the series gives us episodes that engage with the taming of electrical current, the building of the London underground, the invention of film and early scientific discourses of psychoanalysis. As a result, the London of »Ripper Street« appears as enlightened – or at least as potentially enlightened as the city becomes a hub of scientific discourse conducted in rational debates by softly-spoken scientists. The casting of relatively short, slender and quietly spoken men into the roles of good scientists – in particular Michael Donovan (Martin McCann) and the apparently benevolent psychiatrist, Dr. Karl Crabbe (Anton Lesser) – emphasises such a conviction.

However, there is also evidence of older, still medieval attitudes. Indeed, the steam of steampunk not only signifies the celebration of technology, but also ob-

scures the technology and science that marks it. And thus, the apparently benevolent psychiatrist turns out to be fundamentally evil and is incarcerated by Reid and his companions. The development of film goes along with its exploitation in the gendered violence of the snuff film, and the taming of electrical current is accompanied by spectacles in which goats are butchered in the name of science. The steampunk aesthetics, then, contributes to the depiction of a complex society where opposing attitudes and beliefs not only sit side by side of each other, but often inform each other, indicating the inherent dependency of one on the other.

Similarly, the cop show aesthetics develops a similar set of complex values. Here, the aesthetics are in themselves complex: they draw on a range of subgenres within the cop show. Regular shots of police in their »bobby« uniform remind us of the comforting safety of early British crime dramas such as »Dixon of Doc Green« (BBC 1955–1976). But as soon as we enter the police quarters, the busyness of the place, the constant coming and going and the multi-layered soundtrack remind us of »Hill Street Blues«. Finally, the scenes showing Jackson in forensic mode with their close-ups of body gore, the jump cuts and time-condensing editing are clearly borrowed from other forensic science shows such as »CSI«. The use of these multiple aesthetics draw attention to a number of attitudes towards crime and policing: they connect to a sense of nostalgia for times when law and order were clearly defined, while at the same time problematising policing by emphasising the chaos and humanity of the officers and also suggesting that there might be spaces outside of the police that do offer more clear-cut answers thanks to their groundedness in (rational) science.

Similarly, the use of aesthetics borrowed from the Western contributes to the creation of complexity. Importantly, »Ripper Street« draws less on the classic Western, than the post-9/11 televisual³ Western, and in particular »Deadwood« (HBO 2004–2006). »Deadwood« itself is a hybrid mix of styles and genres and represents a continuation of the complex television drama developed in the US (Jacobs 2012). Unusual for a Western, it is primarily set in the enclosed space of Deadwood, South Dakota, rather than the open spaces of the Black Hills. As Jacobs (2012: 16) summarises:

»When Bullock leaves the anonymous Montana town for Deadwood in order to set up, of all things, something as boring as a *hardware store* selling pots and pans, he is apparently leaving the classic genre confrontation between men of honour and corrupt capitalist evil, and in that movement the show shifts the generic axis of the Western at the same time as it further universalises it.«

Thus, »Deadwood« centrally contributes to revisioning the Western and broadening it out to encompass new tropes, just as »Ripper Street« does by placing it within the confines of London's East End.

In the case of »Deadwood«, as David Drysdale (2006) argues, such a revisioning is subtle and does not occur on an obvious level. Thus, tropes such as the lone stranger riding through open land are still referenced at the beginning of the series, but are then troubled through references to, amongst others, the Spaghetti Western which emphasised the exaggerated violence used by the hero. Drysdale argues such a mix of generic tropes from different forms of the Western allows »Deadwood« to critically examine America's relationship to international law and the »war on terror«. Similarly, »Ripper Street«'s use of tropes from the Western allows for the critical examination of England's patriarchal society and the exaggerated violence used by the police in recent years that has led to several highly criticised deaths.⁴ By drawing on parallels with »Deadwood«, particularly in the use of extreme violence in the opening scenes and at later stages, but also by using similar aesthetics in terms of colour grading, costume design and set design, as well as the crowded mise-en-scene, »Ripper Street« speaks to an audience that can recognise the style as a revision of the Western even if they might not recognise the specific parallels to »Deadwood«. As such, the style communicates the critique of traditional values, particularly those associated with heteronormative masculinities.

The use of the style of the Western, however, also facilitates something else. It creates a layering of style that is instantly recognisable as complex. As the constant reference to the developing mass media⁵ indicates, the drama's place within mass communication is clearly acknowledged. Thus, the mix of styles is meant to address a media literate audience that might not necessarily consciously unpeel the different layers of style, but will recognise – and more importantly – value the complexity. As such, it addresses an audience of media aficionados who are clearly courted as knowledgeable and sophisticated. Such an address highlights the shift that television has undergone in public opinion, particularly on the side of the industry itself. Rather than seeing television as mindless and its audience as couch potatoes, »Ripper Street« values television literacy as evidence of knowledge and education. The use of the style of Western amongst the mix of period and crime drama, then, is central to the establishment of an aesthetic that values media literacy in the audience, but perhaps more importantly, celebrates television itself.

By way of conclusion: »Ripper Street« and the semiotics of transnationalism

»Ripper Street«, then, clearly marvels in the complexity that contemporary television affords. By doing so, it also foregrounds the transnational viewing experience that audiences bring to television and reminds audiences of the normality that such a transnational experience constitutes. It is, then, perhaps, not surprising that

the drama itself is about a place that is distinctly transnational, between a multitude of nations.

As already indicated, »Ripper Street« presents Whitechapel in the East of London as a space that is separate from established, »proper« London society. This is made explicit in several episodes when we are reminded that there are other bodies of governance in London, including the Corporation of the City of London (»The King Came Calling«, 1.3) and the K Division in Limehouse (recurring in season 2). On top, different groups who claim governance operate in Whitechapel, some of which are local, such as the Whitechapel Vigilance Committee, and the Special Branch which hinders Reid in his investigations (»Tournament of Shadow«, 1.6) and some of which are international, including the British Army which is here presented as placed in Britain's vast empire, the Russian Secret Police and the American Pinkerton Detective Agency. The drama also emphasises the complex ethnic mix which includes British (locals and others), Chinese, Jewish, Russian and Irish. As a result, Whitechapel appears as a complex mix of groupings each of which demand some element of sovereignty, suggesting that governance must necessarily occur through a recognition of the transnational. It is then, perhaps, not surprising that Reid's team consists of two English and one Irish officer as well as one American.

This separateness of Whitechapel with its complex mix of ethnic groups and governing bodies suggests a space that is again comparable to Deadwood: it is outside of established hierarchies of power where people congregate in order to pursue different opportunities and where different groups jostle for dominance. As such, it may appear as outside of the national, rather than transnational. But the series is nevertheless clear that the police force of the H Division, to which Reid and his team belong, are part of an attempt of governing the area as part of the UK.

This is perhaps made clearest in »Tournament of Shadows« (1.6) when Reid is charged by one of his commanding officers to bring order to the East End in which a strike is brewing which, as Reid's commanding officer James Monro (Michael McElhatton) suggests, »must be brought to heel if social order is to prevail. And the east end is the root of it«. Monro's – and Reid's – solution is to engage a Pinkerton: Jackson. The turn to international expertise, but in the name of British society, indicates both the wish to govern Whitechapel, and the British police's inability to do so. Reid, too, requires the help of his confidante, the Jewish Miss Goren (Lucy Cohu), in order to be able to understand the hidden truth of the case.

In the process, the episode represents a number of cultures, all distinct in style and accent. There is a Jewish household that Reid visits which is presented as place of learning but within a domestic context. One of the first shot of the scene shows Reid picking up fossils which the head of the household clearly studies. We see this in close-up, suggesting a sense of intimacy and immediacy with this space.

This intimacy is continued when we are introduced to Isaac Bloom (Justin Avoth), the brother of the murdered anarchist. He is wearing the simple black and white clothes associated with his ethnic group, as well as glasses and a beard. He speaks to Reid in a soft rolling accent about mathematics, and hence is instantly introduced as educated man who hardly represents a threat. This is also true because he is clearly at home in this domestic setting: he is not wearing a jacket, and his sleeves are visible. He controls the space with the comfort of someone inhabiting it on a regular basis. In the background we hear children playing, and Reid is offered a cup of tea in a gesture that emphasises the bridging of divides and the forming of new relationships. This is also emphasised by the use of close-ups that frame the two men together.

In contrast, Reid's visit to the Russian embassy highlights the antagonism between Reid and the ambassador. The latter is a big man who is in the process of taking his tea, which he does not share with Reid. His accent is thick and here, rather than the rolling r, the guttural sounds, in particular the ch, are emphasised. This scene also starts with a close-up, but rather than emphasising the domestic (mirrors, household items including books and toys), here we see the image of the evidence (the photo) held by one hand while the other holds a piece of bread. The next shot frames the two men in front of the massive book cases. They sit opposite of each other, with a big, Napoleonic desk separating the men. The shot is taken from a low angle in order to emphasise the weight of the books in their cases, tucked away behind glass doors. Here, learning is something that you need to be granted access to. It is used in the name of professionalism, and does not permeate the domestic. It is, then, a tool of power.

The semiotics of the episode, then, adds to the representation of a space that is made a home by a multitude of groups in different ways. This can be in complete contrast to each other, suggesting a space that is open enough to allow for difference and, indeed, for the powerplay between them. It is, then, a space which is transnational: a space in which different nationalities compete and where none of which (as yet) dominates.

»Ripper Street«'s world, then, is fundamentally transnational. It re-imagines at least a part of London as a space not entirely under the jurisdiction of the British government. But considering the interconnectedness of other areas of governance with Whitechapel, it indicates the London – and potentially the UK as a whole – is situated at a place where the world meets. It recognises on a semiotic, aesthetic and ontological level that the experience of the world is no longer just governed (if it ever was) by the nation state, but that the global is there at the same time. Drawing on the Western, then, allows »Ripper Street« to develop a complex understanding of the transnational that recognises the realities of television consumption *and* production as one govern by hybridity and complexity.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank my colleague, Jenny Barrett, for her input. I would also like to thank the staff and students at Wolverhampton, as well as Kim Akass, Debra Ramsay, Susanne Eichner and Elizabeth Prommer who have all contributed, by allowing me to ramble and develop my ideas over time.
- 2 I would like to emphasise that this does not necessarily have to be the case for all period drama as Andrew Higson (1993) seems to suggest is the case with the heritage film. There have been a number of period dramas that do everything but romanticise the past (e.g. John Adams, HBO 2008, »North and South«, BBC 2004, and indeed »Ripper Street«, BBC 2012–2013). For a useful critique of Higson, see Vidal 2002.
- 3 I here use the term »televisual« both to express »being on television«, but also the more complex understanding of the term that John T. Caldwell (1995) introduced, namely the foregrounding of style and the investment into a particular aesthetics in order to stand out from the clutter of the era of plenty which brought with it an economic crisis in US television.
- 4 The most important ones were those of Ian Tomlinson, a newspaper seller, who died as a result of being hit with a baton when he passed by a group of police who were policing a student protest. The other one was the death of Steven Lawrence who was shot by police even though he himself was not armed. The latter case sparked such outrage that it led to a series of riots across the UK.
- 5 Apart from the development of film, the drama also features the returning character of Fred Best (David Dawson) as reporter. Like »Deadwood«, the drama thus draws attention to the role of mass communication in relation to the establishment of a governed society. While in »Deadwood«, this government is literal – Deadwoods negotiations to join South Dakota, in »Ripper Street« this relates to the establishment of a viable police force in the face of failure and mistrust.

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