

Institution: University of Reading
Unit of Assessment: 35 Film, Theatre and Television
Title of case study: Providing unique insights into the histories and production contexts of British television drama since 1955
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>University of Reading-led research projects on the histories of British post-1955 television drama have had a major impact on television producers, directors, performers and cultural institutions responsible for policy, production and the preservation of television heritage, not only through dissemination of research findings, but also through actively involving them in project interviews, seminars, conferences and contributions to published outputs. Through this collaborative approach, the researchers have influenced the professional development and practice of leading television drama producers, and policy and programmes for the public dissemination of audio-visual heritage, as well as providing specialist advice relating to television copyright and commercial marketing.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The University of Reading's Television Drama Studies Research Group, led by Professor Jonathan Bignell (at Reading between 1989 and 1999 and 2002 to date) has the strongest track record of Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded research into TV history in the UK.</p> <p>In 1996, after being awarded the first UK AHRC television research award, it commenced research into the history of British TV drama post-1955 by leading a long-term series of five major collaborative projects. The majority of these were directed by Bignell, working with partners from other universities such as Royal Holloway, Leicester and Glamorgan.</p> <p>Each project had a specific focus, from 'BBC <i>Wednesday Plays</i> and Post-War British Drama' on the 'theatricality' of formative TV fictions, to 'Spaces of Television: Production, Site and Style', which investigated how the technologies available in the TV studio and on location enabled or constrained the kinds of drama produced.</p> <p>The researchers investigated the development of British television drama since c.1955, studying the histories of domestic (and some US and European) television fiction. The research used archival documents, interviews with television practitioners and analysis of TV output to interpret, evaluate and document the changing aesthetic forms of TV programmes, their relationships with other dramatic media (especially theatre, cinema and literature), their reception by audiences and reviewers, and the technologies used in their production.</p> <p>The research produced studies of programmes (e.g., Bignell and Lacey 2005), studies of the work of individual television writers, producers and executives (e.g., Bignell and O'Day 2004, Bignell 2005), studies of genres (e.g., Bignell 2009), and studies of historical periods (e.g., Bignell, Lacey and Macmurrough-Kavanagh 2000).</p> <p>The work led the 'historical turn' in the field of television studies, with its results supporting and influencing the significant increase in academic, institutional and public interest in audio-visual heritage (as reflected in seasons of landmark television programmes screened at the British Film Institute, the production of TV and radio programmes about media history, and the availability of historic programmes on DVD, on the internet and in non-specialist book publications).</p> <p>Through the projects, the University's Department of Film, Theatre and Television developed a strategy of holding annual academia-industry seminars and conferences, featuring speakers from the TV industry (e.g., Tony Garnett of World Productions, Brian Hill of Century Films) and cultural institutions concerned with the preservation of TV heritage, such as the BBC Written Archives Centre. The projects also involved the carrying out of interviews with television producers, directors and actors, whose contribution to the research sometimes included written outputs.</p>
<p>3. References to the research</p> <p>Bignell, J. and Lacey, S. (Eds.) <i>Popular Television Drama: Critical Perspectives</i>, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005. Submitted to RAE 2008 and assessed by the unit as above 2*.</p>

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Bignell, J., Lacey, S. and Macmurrough-Kavanagh, M. (Eds.) *British Television Drama: Past Present and Future*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.

Bignell, J. and O'Day, A. *Terry Nation*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004.

Bignell, J. The police series. In Gibbs, J. and Pye, D. (eds) *Close-Up 03*, London: Wallflower, 2009, 1-66. Peer assessed and included in REF2. URL: <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/22035/>

Bignell, J. 'And the rest is history: Low Grade, creation narratives and television historiography'. In: Johnson, C. and Turnock, R. (Eds.) *ITV Cultures: Independent Television Over Fifty Years*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 2005, 57-70.

Details of research grants:

1. 'Spaces of Television: Production, Site and Style' (AHRC 2010-14, £720k FeC awarded) PI Bignell
2. 'Acting with Facts: Performance of the Real on Stage and Television' (AHRC 2007-10, £299k non-FeC awarded). PI Paget
3. 'British TV Drama and Acquired US Programmes' (AHRC 2005-8, £147k non-FeC awarded). PI Bignell
4. 'Cultures of British Television Drama' (AHRC 2002-5, £225k non-FeC awarded). PI Bignell
5. 'BBC Wednesday Plays and Post-War British Drama' (British Academy/HRB 1996-99, £101k non-FeC awarded). PI Bignell

The overall quality of the research is partially demonstrated by the Research Council's peer evaluations after completion: 'Cultures of British Television Drama' and 'British TV Drama and Acquired US Programmes' were evaluated as Outstanding. The winning of each project grant was partially dependent on the quality of research generated by its predecessors.

4. Details of the impact

The research has had a major and wide-ranging impact on individuals and companies involved and/or interested in the preservation of television heritage. The work supported or modified the actions of non-academic bodies with interests in the availability of historic TV material, the selection of audio-visual content for preservation and public access, and the commercial value of past and present TV programming.

The **principal beneficiaries** were:

- commercial media companies and publicly funded stakeholders who used University of Reading expertise;
- the staff of non-academic archives and collections who engaged with the research, influencing decisions around the preservation and dissemination of TV heritage, and
- interested members of the public who accessed the research through public-facing seminars and blogs and whose enjoyment of television was enriched.

Specific examples of impact

- **Impact on professional TV production staff**

The TV drama producer (and now Senior Commissioning Editor for Drama at BskyB) Cameron Roach (whose credits include *Casualty* and *Life on Mars* and who has worked for the BBC, Kudos, Shed Productions and Tiger Aspect) started ongoing dialogues with University of Reading researchers Bignell, Knox and Woods in October 2009. He became interested in the team's work through awareness of its published results and its web-based research dissemination. Roach's dialogues with the group enlarged his conceptual and historical understanding of the role of the TV producer in the UK in comparison to the USA, to assist him in developing his current career as a 'showrunner' (creative producer) in the UK TV industry and to develop plans for an academia-industry network around this subject. In 2013, he completed a 3,000-word chapter for a second edition of the ground-breaking academia-industry volume *British Television Drama* (2000), co-

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edited by Bignell, reflecting on his role as Executive Producer of BBC series *Waterloo Road*. He discusses spatial aesthetics in TV, prompted by the findings of the 'Spaces of Television' research project. This edition also contains contributions on spatial meaning by Phil Redmond (*Brookside*) and Tony Garnett (*Cathy Come Home*), both of which are available as impact evidence.

- **Impact on cultural institutions concerned with the preservation of TV heritage**

Many non-academics working in the field of TV heritage preservation took part in events held at the University of Reading during the course of the research. They included staff from BBC Information & Archives, the British Film Institute (BFI), the National Public Broadcasting Archives (USA) and the Netherlands Institute of Sound and Vision. This involvement led to collaborations and the seeking of expert advice from the research team.

For example, the research has played a key role in defining the selection of historic TV drama programmes in preparation for a season of screenings in early 2014 at the BFI in London, representing the changing aesthetics of British TV drama. The Reading team also provided promotional copy and are involved in introductory public talks.

- **Impact on the general public**

Evidence shows that the research had an impact on the general public, who attended project conferences and posted comments on interviews, commentaries and debates featured in blogs such as <http://www.crossroadsnetwork.co.uk/newsfm/index.php/topic.2670.0.html> and <http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/spaces-of-television/>.

As of 3 Oct 2013 the posting referred to had been read 2160 times, by non-academic visitors to this forum, which is a site made by and for fans of the Crossroads TV programme. There are many appreciative comments for the new insight provided by Smart's (Reading researcher) interview with the TV director Darrol Blake. The interview was conducted for the AHRC "Spaces of TV" research project and impacts members of the public who engage with Reading research and gain new knowledge about historic TV programmes they are interested in.

- **Impacts on business**

1) Thanks to the insights acquired through the research, in 2010-12 Bignell acted as an expert witness in a legal dispute about the interpretation of a television contract. A TV drama scheduled for broadcast was removed from the TV schedule until this dispute was resolved, and this depended on crucial wording about the types of TV production technologies used for making drama – a major area of the University of Reading's research. Bignell wrote a 12-page report to the court about the uses of different kinds of TV production technologies and this had a significant impact. A partner in the law firm concerned wrote: "As a result of your report, our barrister has prepared a defence to [deleted party's name] claim, which needs to be filed at [the High] Court next Monday. Much of the Defence incorporates the information, history, and conclusions contained in your report to refute the claim" (email to Bignell, 22 November 2011). The settlement of the case and the subsequent division of revenues for broadcast, DVD release and overseas exploitation of the TV programme were profoundly influenced by Bignell's report.

2) In 2012, Bignell worked for the TalkTalk telecoms company via its PR agency Good Relations, to plan and provide expert content on historically significant TV moments for the launch of TalkTalk's new YouView TV service. The launch featured the restaging of the moments selected by Bignell for a press audience, gaining extensive coverage for the product. Good Relations staff wrote: "The client was delighted with the launch and you may have seen some of the photos of Joanna [Lumley] re-enacting the moments as set up by us. ... Your input was really incredibly helpful and we'd love to work out a way of continuing to work with you in a tv capacity if possible" (email to Bignell, 8 October 2012).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (*) Contact details provided.

1. The public blogs cited above.
2. The report produced by Bignell for the firm of barristers that engaged him as an expert witness, and related correspondence. (This report is confidential but a redacted version can be provided upon request)
3. Public Relations executive for Good Relations* (Corroboration of the engagement of Prof.

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Jonathan Bignell as a consultant to advise and provide research information for the PR campaign surrounding the launch of the YouView television service by TalkTalk Ltd., between August 2012 and September 2012.)

4. TV Programmer at the British Film Institute* (Corroboration of discussions beginning in 2010 between Reading's "Spaces of Television" AHRC research project team and BFI programmers and archive staff, about a public season of screenings at BFI in 2014. Archive programmes were selected on the basis of the research team's findings.)
5. Senior Commissioning Editor for Drama at BskyB* (Meetings and correspondence since 2009 with Prof. Jonathan Bignell and Reading colleagues about academia-industry networking to understand the role of the "showrunner" in TV drama production, and also contribution to a book of essays by both academic and TV industry practitioners)
6. End of project reports; available upon request
7. Newspaper coverage of the TalkTalk launch, such as at http://www.goodrelations.co.uk/news/9/good_relations_launches_youview_from_talktalk