CINEMATIZING THE BAD-LAND:
Vince Gilligan’s Breaking Bad
And the Visual Stylistic Eclecticism
Of Contemporary American Basic Cable Television Drama

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OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN BASIC CABLE TELEVISION DRAMA

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*The front cover page is a shot captured from the pilot episode of Breaking Bad (Source: Breaking Bad, The Complete First Season DVD, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2009).
Preface

The past decade has been a rich period for American television fiction. The experimentation in storytelling and the upscaling of aesthetic features of American TV dramas have led to the proliferation of the ‘television-is-better-than-movies’ meme as television scholar David Lavery would have it. A meme, as a belief or an idea that spreads throughout a culture vertically through cultural inheritance or horizontally through cultural acquisition via peers, information media and entertainment media (as defined by online Urban Dictionary), has an immediate and imminent impact in our contemporary media-saturated society. The ‘television-is-now-better-than-movies’ meme is no exception. This notion has led media critics in the popular press to defend the medium they favour insofar as engaging in the so-called medium-wars. Academics are not immune to the impact of this meme either, as the scholarly banter between two prominent American film and television scholars—David Bordwell and Jason Mittell—on the blogosphere testifies. However, when discussing the style and aesthetics of American narrative television fictions today, rarely that this particular facet (aesthetics) is reflected as a signal of intensifying convergence between television and cinema. Clearly, the ‘television-is-now-better-than-movies’ meme is an overt exaggeration, because the two mediums, despite the love-hate relationship in the formation years of television, have long conversed, competed and cross-pollinated artistically in different degrees that it is too reductive to measure one as more superior to the other. Especially when it comes to visual style, film and television have a long and complicated history in influencing each other’s schema. This thesis, therefore, can be seen as a modest effort to show the complex relation between cinema and television that is growing closer aesthetically more than we have ever thought. One of the discoveries in this research has led me to believe that it is difficult to fathom the vindication that television is better than movies these days while a great sum of contemporary narrative television forms, especially drama, have embraced the cinematic analogy (to use Michael Newman’s term) in upscaling the prestige of television in the hierarchy of popular art and culture.

This research would not have been possible without the invaluable assistance of a few people to whom I feel indebted with. First and foremost, Dr. Miklós Kiss as the first supervisor has been very helpful in narrowing down my focus and systematizing my sometimes too nebulous thoughts into clear and organized presentation of ideas, arguments and explanations. His meticulousness and attention to details have ushered me into becoming a better researcher. Dr. Susan Aasman has given me the pointers to become a better writer in this genre of academic writing, for that reason I am grateful for her direct feedback. I sincerely thank Prof. Dr. Barend van Heusden and Prof. Liesbeth Korthals Altes from the Research Master Literary and Cultural Studies program for the support and encouragement in pursuing my research and scholarly interest throughout the course of the study. I am indebted with Dr. Anna Rogers for her comments and suggestions in respect to rhetoric and language in this thesis. Moreover, I am grateful to have found Jeremy G. Butler’s pioneering works on studying television from a refined critical perspective. His *Television Style* (2010) has opened my eyes in thinking and studying the aesthetics of television and film. Ultimately, I would also like to express my gratitude to Prof. David Bordwell for the illuminating conversations about film style at the Zomerfilmcollege 2011.

Lastly, I would like to dedicate this work to my mother Ipa Iis, my partner Emma Kwee and my brother Andri Suryo for their unconditional support and affection.
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American television drama underwent significant transformations in the last decade. In comparison with primetime TV drama of the classic network era (1950s—1970s) and the post-network era (1980s—1990s), hour-long drama series/serials in the contemporary context (late 1990s-2000s) showcased some of the most intriguing formal innovations. As a result, a change in perception of television had become inevitable. What used to be deemed as the ‘cultural wasteland’ and the facile medium placed at the bottom of the cultural hierarchy is now home to a vast number of daring and intelligent television fiction filled with experimentation in theme, narrative and style. These are the visually stunning, thematically controversial and emotionally deep drama serials that range from David Chase’s *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007) to Matthew Weiner’s *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-present). As media critic Emily Nussbaum suggests, the rising emergence of these sophisticated drama serials has certainly established the notion that TV has become art.¹

As contentious as the term ‘art’ is, these television programs evidently demonstrate some novel approaches to narrative and stylistic design that garnered them the critical acclaim usually reserved for more established art forms such as literature, visual art and film. When it comes to storytelling, narrative complexity—a concept introduced by television scholar Jason Mittell—became a narrational mode that defines most of these transformative programs. Mittell sees narrative complexity as a recombinant form of storytelling procedure that balances the demands of episodic plot structure—conventionally practiced in television series—with the contingencies of long form serialized narrative architecture popularized by the soap operas.² Narrative complexity can be found across the range of dramatic genres from science fiction to police procedural; however, it is more pertinently flourishing in genre-blending dramas such as *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010), *Carnivàle* (HBO, 2003-2005), *Veronica Mars* (UPN & The CW, 2004-2007) and so forth. In terms of visual style, the cinematic inheritance gives these drama serials a distinct look and accordingly generates an inviting aesthetic appeal. Furthermore, by embracing the visual stylistic elements of cinematic arts—from mise-en-scène to cinematography—this particular development in small-screen drama obscures the aesthetic distinction between cinema and television even further. By aligning itself with the stylistic strategies associated with feature filmmaking, contemporary television drama serials have undoubtedly positioned television as an artistic medium on a par with its older moving image sibling, the cinema.

The intensified visual stylistic reconfiguration of these dramas cannot be taken out of the industrial context of American broadcasting. Indeed, what separates hour-long dramas in the classic network era and the post-network period (also referred to as TVI and TVII eras) with the media convergence age (cited as the TVIII era and roughly span from 1999-present), which is on-going and seems to be moving in a constant flux, is the production values that have increased as a result of hyper-multiplication of television channels that engendered more competitive and ferocious media industry. This political-economic reality necessitates television producers and broadcasters to aggrandize production value as brand distinction strategy. Consequently, premium cable channels (HBO & Showtime) commissioned a great number of prestigious hour-long drama serials with the Big Four networks (ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox) following their lead. Television academic Robin Nelson refers to these programs as the ‘high-end’ drama serials characterized by the ‘big budgets and the high production values associated with them, along with a “prime time” position in the schedule of a major channel.’

Extending Nelson’s claims, Trisha Dunleavy sums up the characteristics of ‘high-end’ drama serials emblematic of the contemporary TVIII time as innovative programs ‘whose episodes can cost upwards of US$3 million each,’ they are ‘conceptually adventurous and narratively complex,’ and often created by writers or hyphenates with ‘auteur’ credentials. Furthermore, she stresses the high-importance of visual quality akin to cinema as key strategy in ‘high-end’ drama serials and as a result ‘has further reduced aesthetic distinctions between television and cinema.’

Focusing on the last characteristic, film and television scholar Michael Z. Newman asserts, ‘By routinely making a cinematic analogy, television culture has been working to legitimize the medium and improve its status.’ Indeed, Newman sees the cinematization of television as an imperative textual strategy in upscaling the aesthetics of television which in turn uplifts its position in the cultural hierarchy.

However, notwithstanding the usefulness of such observations, it is never clear how the process of cinematization works within an individual program, i.e. a ‘high-end’ television drama serial? Moreover, how this cinematic analogy is engineered by the rising ‘authorial input’ in the creative side of ‘high-end’ television drama in the TVIII context? Taking its cue from these inquiries, this

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5 Ibid.
dissertation attempts to explore these two key strategic features of a ‘high-end’ drama serial in a particular case study: *Breaking Bad.*

Since it was launched on a basic cable television channel AMC in 2008, this long-form drama serial about a high school chemistry teacher who turned to illegal drugs manufacturing has been noted by critics and scholars (both film and television) to exhibit distinct ‘cinematic’ qualities, along with its AMC’s counterpart *Mad Men.* Film critic Jim Emerson expresses this assessment:

> It’s been a lousy year for feature films but "Mad Men" and Olivier Assayas's "Carlos" and "Breaking Bad" have shown that rich, creative *cinematic* work is being done for television in the long-form series and mini-series formats.7 [Emphasis original]

To a further extent, television academic David Lavery goes so far as to claim that *Breaking Bad* has its own *distinctive style* and *artistic signatures* […] tracking the sort of *inventive visual style* and dark subject matter and violence of independent cinema’s poster boys.8 Clearly, the cinematic analogy has been inscribed to *Breaking Bad* in regards to its aesthetics. Nevertheless, this notion is largely underexamined in the critical accounts of the program.9 Hence, the ‘cinematic’ and the visual stylistic quality of *Breaking Bad* are often unreflected. This has left paucity in formal criticism of the drama serial in question wherein narrative inquiries eclipse stylistic and aesthetic investigation.

This state of affairs, however, is reflective of the current climate of television studies as a field of inquiry. In the contemporary discussions of popular U.S. television drama, the term ‘cinematic’ is routinely applied to programs with high-production value; however, the questions of how ‘cinematic’ these television dramas are and by what means do they demonstrate this ‘cinematic’ quality remain unanswered.10 The term is used polemically to signify certain generic characteristics of a television drama, but it is never clear what the characteristics entail. This vagueness is due to the fact that in the academic study of these narratively complex dramas, critical inquiries that systematically investigate this particular facet of television drama, i.e. the style, and the complex

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relation it has to the aesthetics of cinema remain relatively absent. Granted, stylistic assessment of these popular dramas is hitherto cursory and partial.

This thesis, therefore, attempts to interrogate and explore that particular notion of televisual-cinematic convergence through *Breaking Bad* as a specific case study. Therefore, to narrow down the focus, in this research I would like to examine:

- How is the cinematization of television aesthetics evident in *Breaking Bad*?
- How does this cinematization strategy reflect ‘authorial input’ in the formation of *Breaking Bad* in regards to its visual aesthetics?

To establish my argument, I propose that the cinematization of television aesthetics in *Breaking Bad* is engineered for a great part by three salient stylistic strategies: the intensification of continuity system, the foregrounding of mise-en-scène components of setting and lighting composition, and the embellishment of cinematography. Furthermore, the implementation of these chief technical strategies demonstrates the creative effort of the show’s creator/writer/producer Vince Gilligan and his creative team to attain the cinematic analogy in *Breaking Bad* by drawing upon a wide range of visual stylistic frameworks associated with clusters of cinematic (sub)genre such as the *film noir* and the Westerns. Next to this, the show also installs an intensified texture of continuity in several aspects of its stylistic properties in line with the contemporary continuity style of post-1960s Hollywood cinema. By aligning the aesthetics of the show with the cinematic analogy *Breaking Bad* arguably becomes a transformative televisual work that encapsulates the contemporary development of formal innovation in American television drama, particularly in terms of visual style.

Methodologically speaking, stylistic analysis will be the primary method in this dissertation. To be concrete, I will take four episodes of *Breaking Bad*, one from season two (“Breakage”) and three from season three (“No Mas,” “Sunset,” and “Full Measures”) as the main corpus for the analysis since they crystallize the stylistic ambitions which I have argued.11 However, there will be many cases in which formal evidences from other episodes will be extracted to strengthen my points and to excavate necessary specifics. Furthermore, as a supplementary source of reference I will look into extra-textual documents such as interviews with creative agents of *Breaking Bad*—mainly the showrunner Vince Gilligan and director of photography Michael Slovis, ASC.—to provide pertinent context for the analysis. Due to the limited scope and space of the chapter, I will focus mainly on the visual style as the three salient film techniques I argue as the main stylistic components of *Breaking Bad*’s cinematization strategy (mise-en-scène, cinematography and intensified continuity) are all particles of the visual texture. Therefore, I will not tackle sound in the analysis exclusively since it needs a meticulous consideration and thorough scrutiny which is rather impossible to accomplish considering the width and breadth of this dissertation. For that

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11 Detailed information about these episodes will be provided in the Appendix B.
reason, to focus more on the visual style of the case study is a realistic
undertaking in order to achieve a more focused analysis.

As any other scholarly endeavour, the question of importance comes into
play once the researcher lays the necessary argumentative grounds and
methodological procedure. The significance of this research, therefore, can be
summed up in these following points. First of all, echoing what I have mentioned
earlier in this chapter, in light of the emergence of popular drama serials from the
U.S. that triggered critical debates in the form of publications, conferences and
other academic avenues in the field of television studies, so much scholarly
attention has been directed on narrative questions while stylistic inquiries remain
understudied. This is a gap that needs to be bridged because the stylistic
properties of these drama serials cannot be ignored for they affect our aesthetic
experience and to help us comprehending the story. Thus, studying style is
important in helping us to understand how it functions within a televisual work
and how it contributes to the overall poetic mechanism of a television narrative
fiction. Secondly, in this thesis I hope to contribute to the growing scholarly study
of television drama as an art form. And by studying the style specifically, my goal
is to add and extend the television poetics of an individual work—as a research
program paved by pioneering works such as those of Jeremy G. Butler and Greg
M. Smith12— through closely inspecting the most current type of American TV
drama, i.e. long-form serialized drama commissioned by a basic cable television,
which has not been explored in the sub-field of television poetics extensively.13

The presentation of the thesis will look as follows. In the next chapter I
will sketch out the conceptual and theoretical assumptions of film style and the
notion of auterism in cinema studies. Subsequently, I will look into the
transposition and application of this framework of film style into television
context while outlining the stylistic history of American television drama. A
specific emphasis will be placed upon the intensifying convergence of cinema and
television in the TVII post-network primetime dramas and how it evolves into the
contemporary TVIII context. By providing the context, I shall be able to situate
Breaking Bad in the continuum of American television drama before I get into
the stylistic analysis in the succeeding chapter. Finally, I will conclude the
dissertation by summarizing the findings in the last chapter.

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13 Scholarly studies on 'high-end' television dramas commissioned by premium cable channels such as HBO and Showtime are visible in the field of television studies. For instance: Gary R. Edgerton, and Jeffrey P. Jones, *The Essential HBO Reader* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008); Marc Leverette, Brian L. Ott and Cara Louise Buckley, *It's Not TV: Watching HBO in the Post-Television Era* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2008); Robin Nelson's monograph (2007) cited above also examines HBO's 'high-end' serial dramas in his analysis that include The Sopranos, Sex and the City and Carnivàle. On the other hand, scholarly research on 'high-end' drama serials commissioned by basic cable channels, especially by AMC, is still very scarce. This is perhaps due to the current emergence of the channel and the contemporaneity of this development (basic cable channel commissioning original drama series) in the American television broadcasting industry. Although the recent anthology on Mad Men, edited by Gary R. Edgerton entitled *Mad men: Dream Come True TV* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011) is a promising start for the basic cable channel drama studies.
The Context: History, Concepts and Theories of Style in Film and Television Arts

This chapter tackles some historical, conceptual and theoretical perspectives on style in the academic study of film and television arts to provide relevant contextual background for the analysis. As an overview, I will provide two conceptual strands of film style. The first one defines style as repeated formal and thematic characteristics of a group of films or a particular director's films conceived as the group style and the director's style. The second outlook takes style to be the perceptual surface of a film resulting from a deliberate patterned arrangement of audio and visual material. Departing from the second conception of film style, I will subsequently expose how this understanding of style is put to practice in a filmic work through the continuity system. In the history of narrative cinema, Hollywood classical continuity schema has dominated the style of filmic storytelling, thus, I will present concisely how this continuity schema governs the organization of stylistic elements. Next to this, I will delve into the innovative strategies that filmmakers working in the tradition of art cinema have exercised to challenge, reshape and reinvent the classical continuity mode while showing how this classical tendency has been revamped by a stylistic tendency in the contemporary Hollywood context referred to as the intensified continuity. In the latter part of this section, I will focus on the implementation of these concepts of style in television arts and how it has shaped television drama in the three historical contexts of American television broadcasting: the classic network era (TVI), the multi-channel post-network era (TVII) and the contemporary digital convergence era (TV3). Highlighting on the stylistic development of television drama in the TV3 context, I will look into the growing convergence of cinema and television aesthetics as one of the key strategies in product distinction and how it has altered in the second half of the 2000s with the rise of ‘basic’ cable TV drama from AMC: Mad Men and Breaking Bad.

2.1. Thinking About Style in the Cinematic Arts

When we discuss style in the context of the arts, we often mention the most salient characteristics of the artwork as a result of our engagement, for example, with a painting, a novel or a song. In representational arts, specifically in visual arts, it often goes without saying that certain works of art exhibit certain style(s) in representing whatever the artworks aim to represent. This notion of style points to what art historian E.H. Gombrich takes to be the normative account of style which denote a ‘desirable consistency and conspicuousness’ that make the artworks ‘stand out from a mass of “undistinguished” events or objects.’ Key words that need to be highlighted here are ‘consistency’ and ‘conspicuousness’ for

they provide us the basic understanding of style as attributes that are perceptible (conspicuous) and put together in such a way via a patterning fashion that shows repeatedness (consistency). Characteristics, attributes, recurring patterns and other nouns that we attach to this sense of style are constructed by techniques developed in a particular artistic medium and the tradition wherein the artists work. Thus, to discuss style as perceptual attributes and repeated patterns is to discuss techniques and how they are exploited to achieve the consistency and conspicuousness that Gombrich suggested.

Discussing film and television as art forms, style is one of the central aspects of critical scrutiny. It is understood that in thinking and talking about style, techniques of presentation—in this case filmmaking techniques—are always present in the discourse. As I have mentioned earlier, it is somewhat impossible to think and talk about style without referencing the techniques invented and developed in the medium proper. In the context of film art, the medium’s techniques are broadly comprised of mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing and sound.15

In the domain of film criticism, however, the discourse on style is more complicated than simply the examination of techniques. The meaning of style fluctuates at different levels contingent upon the context of the discussion. The range of conceptions of film style encapsulates this complexity. Despite the conceptual plurality, the idea of style in the critical study of film can be summarized into two overarching viewpoints. What follows is the articulation of these two perspectives.

2.1.1 The General Concept of Film Style: Group Style and Director’s Style

Film style as conceptualized in this first perspective refers to the repeated and salient uses of film techniques characteristic of a single director’s film(s) or a group of films.16 In other words, this definition points to the common usage of style as the director’s style and the group style. The director’s style is considered to indicate the idiosyncrasies of formal choices that the filmmaker opted for in his/her body of work (oeuvre). Therefore, for instance, in this sense, we may think of conceptual editing as a defining attribute of Sergei Eisenstein’s Montage approach to editing style or the salient uses of sound as an important quality of Robert Bresson’s style; this attribute appeared consistently in their oeuvre. The group style, on the other hand, as a classificatory concept is aimed at contrasting one group of motion pictures or directors with other groups. Film theorist Noël Caroll summarizes several prominent uses of this concept of group style into several categories: schools and movements (e.g., Italian Neo-Realism, the French New Wave, Structural Film, Dogme 95 Film); period motion picture making (e.g.,

15For definition of technical terms derived from filmmaking techniques, consult the Glossary of Film Techniques in the Appendix C. As a note, every first mention of these technical terms in the text will be in bold print while subsequent citations will be in normal print.

the International Style of Silent Filmmaking); genre style (e.g., slasher films, spy thrillers, musicals); national styles (e.g., Hong Kong Cinema, Bollywood). These categories could inevitably overlap and intersect one another since the style of a single director could also be a part of a larger film movement or a genre. Nevertheless, the group style can be useful, for instance, as markers for periodization in film history and to introduce fruitfully different traditions of filmmaking.

While grouping several films into one stylistic group can be effective and useful from time to time, the overlap can be too great that the first meaning of style—the director's style—may override the group style as a pertinent critical category. This conception of style as a director's identity is probably the most commonly perceived idea of style in filmmaking culture, as the American twin-pair filmmakers Joel and Ethan Coen articulate:

[...] what you call style in retrospect only at the point of actually making the movie, it's just about making individual choices about the best way to tell the story, scene by scene. You make specific choices that you think are appropriate, compelling, or interesting for that particular scene. Then, at the end of the day, you put it all together and somebody looks at it and, if there's some consistency to it, they say 'Well, that's their style.'

In the realm of film inquiry, the consistent particularities of stylistic disposition as the outcome of a director's formal choice-making capacity, just as how the Coens deliberated, has been one of the pivotal topics in film criticism. This is the idea of film authorship, best known as the auteur theory or auteurism.

### 2.1.2 Director's Style and the Auteur Theory

One of the most influential ideas in cinema history is the notion that a director is most principally accountable for a film's form and style. This is the idea of authorship (will be referred to as auteurism from here on). In this line of thought, a film director is analogous to an artist or a novelist to whom the artworks are conceived as a manifestation of his/her vision. Needless to say, the underlying assertion of auteurism rests upon the notion of director as the author of the film—the active agent who writes the film(s). This assumption has been made by film historians and critics since at least the 1920s, but it was deeply pondered,

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17 Caroll also lists one director’s oeuvre as a group style. However, for the purpose of this chapter, I will consider a filmmaker’s collection of works as part of the director’s style rather than a group style, considering it as the manifestation of a director’s vision rather than several filmmakers’ creations—notwithstanding the large number of films a director can make in his/her career. I believe it is more useful to use singularity or collectivity in agency as a focal point for distinguishing style. See Noël Caroll, “Style,” in The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Film, edited by Paisley Livingston and Carl R. Plantinga, 268-278 (London: Routledge, 2009), 268.


19 Joel Coen, director/writer, Ibid.
examined and articulated with such intellectual rigor in post-world war II European film culture. More specifically in Paris, France, after the war ended, writing and theorizing about the arts of cinema underwent a revival. One important idea that arose in this film culture was the belief that the aesthetics of film actually owed less to theatre than to literature. An important statement of this line of thought was Alexandre Astruc’s 1948 essay on *la camera-stylo* (“the camera-pen”). Astruc saw that the cinema had achieved maturity and would attract serious artists who would use film as a medium to express their outlook and feelings. Astruc wrote, "The filmmaker—author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen."\(^{20}\)

One critic who further advanced this idea of film director as a novelist or an artist and subsequently provided the climate for auteurist criticism was André Bazin. Already writing for the film journal *Revue du cinema* in 1946, Bazin had already claimed that the director was the main source of a film’s value as he championed maverick Hollywood directors like Orson Welles and William Wyler. In 1951, Bazin joined the newly founded magazine *Cahiers du Cinema* ("Cinema Notebooks"), established by Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, and he immediately became one of its most respected critics. Bazin revolutionized film criticism by his detailed analyses of how editing, cinematography, and deep-space staging offered expressive possibilities to the filmmaker. He was specifically alert and keen to examine how filmic storytelling could create ellipses and could shift point of view.\(^{21}\) In addition, by assuming the filmmaker to be a novelist—on—film, the auteurist critic could inspect even a popular film as the vehicle of a personal vision. From there on debates about whether the filmmaker could be considered an *auteur* of his works surfaced.\(^{22}\)

The debate was sharpened when a younger *Cahiers’* critic and a future filmmaker, François Truffaut, published the polemical essay “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema” in 1954. In this forthrightly written essay, he sets forth the ‘policy of the *auteur*’ by strongly arguing that what he and his co-critics value the most from cinema is actually the product of a unified and organizing vision of a director. Paramount to this argument is the idea that certain director—imbued with this visionary outlook—can act much like an author or an artist even if they are working within the commercially-bound film industry. They are film *auteurs* precisely for they could transcend the constraints of the industrial practices, or ‘the genius of the system,’ and make films which explored recurrent preoccupations based on their organizing vision in distinctive ways. Consequently, Truffaut could only grant certain directors the exalted status of film *auteur*: Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau, Jacques Tati, and others who wrote their own stories and dialogue. Fulfilling Astruc’s dream of the


camera-stylo, these directors were true "men of the cinema," according to Truffaut.\footnote{Bordwell and Thompson, \textit{Film History: An Introduction}, 415-438.}

This ‘policy of the auteur’ subsequently opened the gate of critical acclamation for Hollywood directors who had worked in the most consolidated film industry in the world yet had never been esteemed that highly because of the popular entertainment status ascribed to Hollywood cinema. As an implication, the notion of the film auteur catapulted Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles, Howard Hawks, John Ford, Nicholas Ray and so forth into the pantheon of the great cinematic geniuses. A fellow Cahier critic and filmmaker of Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard expresses this sentiment, "We won the day in having it acknowledged in principle that a film by Hitchcock, for example, is as important as a book by Aragon. Film auteurs, thanks to us, have finally entered the history of art."\footnote{Bordwell and Thompson, \textit{Film Art: An Introduction}, 461.} And indeed, thanks to the auteur theory, many of the Hollywood directors venerated by Truffaut, Godard and other auteurist critics have become acknowledged as true legitimate artists with mastery of style.

Welles, for instance, is recognized as a true artist for reinventing the use of depth of field in a filmic sequence. Bazin in his seminal text, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” cites \textit{Citizen Kane} (1941) as a testament to Welles’ innovative gesture because through manipulating the depth of field Welles was able to generate dramaturgical effects without relying on the heavily practiced montage technique.\footnote{André Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” from \textit{What Is Cinema? in Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings}, 2nd Ed., edited by Gerald Mast & Marshall Cohen, 155-167 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 162.} By covering the whole scene in one take, aided with director of photography Gregg Toland’s technical contribution of deep focus as a cinematographic apparatus, now the dramaturgy can be preserved with one shot in great depth and thus freed from the interruption of cuts (\textbf{Fig. 2.1}).\footnote{Jonathan Brady explains how Toland devised this technique: ‘Photographically speaking, Toland achieved this deep focus shot by using a wide-angle lens to create a large depth-of-field. When this was not possible, he would shoot the scene with the foreground fully lit and the background in darkness. Then, he would rewind the film and shoot the scene over again, with the background in focus and fully lit and the foreground in complete darkness. This is called an in-camera matte shot, which can also be seen other scenes in \textit{Citizen Kane} such as the scene where we find Susan Alexander passed out on her bed. We see the sleeping medicine front and centered in the foreground. This immediately brings our eye to it. We then see Susan Alexander lying in her bed, appearing to be sleeping. Then in the background we see her door, and we hear Kane trying to force his way in.’ See Jonathan Brady, “Artistic Photography in \textit{Citizen Kane},” in \textit{Take Great Pictures} website, \url{http://www.takegreatpictures.com/photo-tips/tgp-choice/artistic-photography-in-cinema-citizen-kane} (accessed July 15, 2011).} Of course, as Bazin aptly pointed out, in-depth shot is not Welles’ invention. In fact, shooting in depth was already a part of the filmic vocabulary of the ‘pioneers’ like Jean Renoir. Deep focus as a photographic mean was also used in several films prior to \textit{Kane}, including William Wyler’s \textit{Dead End} (1937), John Ford's \textit{The Long Voyage Home} (1940), and Hitchcock's \textit{Rebecca} (1940).\footnote{Film Site Movie Review, \textit{Citizen Kane} (1941), \url{http://www.filmsite.org/citi.html} (accessed July 15, 2011).} However, what is groundbreaking about deep-focus shots in \textit{Citizen Kane}—taking its cue from

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
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\bibitem{} Bordwell and Thompson, \textit{Film History: An Introduction}, 415-438.
\bibitem{} Bordwell and Thompson, \textit{Film Art: An Introduction}, 461.
\bibitem{} Jonathan Brady explains how Toland devised this technique: ‘Photographically speaking, Toland achieved this deep focus shot by using a wide-angle lens to create a large depth-of-field. When this was not possible, he would shoot the scene with the foreground fully lit and the background in darkness. Then, he would rewind the film and shoot the scene over again, with the background in focus and fully lit and the foreground in complete darkness. This is called an in-camera matte shot, which can also be seen other scenes in \textit{Citizen Kane} such as the scene where we find Susan Alexander passed out on her bed. We see the sleeping medicine front and centered in the foreground. This immediately brings our eye to it. We then see Susan Alexander lying in her bed, appearing to be sleeping. Then in the background we see her door, and we hear Kane trying to force his way in.’ See Jonathan Brady, “Artistic Photography in \textit{Citizen Kane},” in \textit{Take Great Pictures} website, \url{http://www.takegreatpictures.com/photo-tips/tgp-choice/artistic-photography-in-cinema-citizen-kane} (accessed July 15, 2011).
\bibitem{} Film Site Movie Review, \textit{Citizen Kane} (1941), \url{http://www.filmsite.org/citi.html} (accessed July 15, 2011).
\end{thebibliography}
Renoir’s mastery in *La Grande Illusion* (1937) and *La Règle du jeu* (1939)—is that they are not mere ‘purely passive recording of an action shot within the same framing,’ but they are the results of ‘a positive action’ that conserves and respect the continuity of dramatic space and time which ‘are far superior to anything that could be achieved by the classical “cut,”’ as Bazin asserted.\(^28\)

Several years after Truffaut’s audacious declaration of the policy of the auteur, an American film scholar Andrew Sarris introduced this notion to the North American cinephiles via his “Notes on the Auteur Theory,” published in the journal *Film Culture* in 1962. He supplanted the term *policy* with *theory* that became known since. Sarris emphasized style more than anything as an overriding constituent of the director’s authorship stature. He contends, “Over a group of films a director must exhibit certain recurring characteristics of style which serve as his signature.”\(^29\) In this respect, style is the prerequisite criterion of judgment before moving on to plot and theme as parameters of auteurism. More specifically, Sarris takes visual style as the auteur’s reflection of personal vision and the manifestation of his individual sensibility.

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\(^{28}\) Bazin, “Evolution,” 162-163.

2.1.3 The Narrower Concept of Film Style: Style as the Perceptual Surface of a Film

In much narrower scope, the second perspective takes a minimal approach to defining film style. From this point of view, as a product of human labour, every film has its style. Therefore, style is considered to be the basic particles of a film; it is one formal system that interacts with the other formal system, i.e. the narrative. Together they constitute the overall film form. This definition of film style seems to have a Formalist ring to it, which is not too far off as it is also advocated by prolific film scholars imbued by Neo-formalism—David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson. In their seminal textbook on film study, *Film Art: An Introduction*, they contend:

[Style]...we are using the term descriptively. From our perspective, all films have style, because all films make some *use of the techniques of the medium*, and those techniques will necessarily be organized in some way.\(^{30}\) [Emphasis mine]

Due to this Neo-formalist paradigm, style is then considered the tangible perceptual surface of a film. David Bordwell succinctly expresses this conception of style in his *On the History of Film Style*:

In the narrowest sense, I take style to be a film’s systematic and significant use of techniques of the medium. Those techniques fall into broad domains: mise-en-scène (staging, lighting, performance and setting); framing, focus, control of color values, and other aspects of cinematography; editing; and sound. Style is, minimally, the *texture of the film’s images and sounds*, the result of choices made by the filmmaker(s) in particular historical circumstances.\(^{31}\) [Emphasis mine]

From this statement we can see that when conceptualizing style Bordwell zeroes in on the foundational elements that make film a moving image art form: images and sounds. These two components are irreplaceable because they form the texture of the film. What viewers remember the most from seeing a film, other than the story, is how it looks and sounds.

Therefore, Bordwell insists that style comes first before anything else that viewers regularly take as the essence or *content* of a film:

Film style matters because what people call *content* comes to us in and through the patterned use of the medium’s techniques. Style is the tangible texture of a film, the perceptual surface we encounter as we watch and listen, and that surface is our point of departure before moving on to plot, theme, feeling—everything else that matters to us.\(^{32}\)

\(^{30}\)Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 136.


Furthermore, he stresses the significance of style as the texture of the film because it provides the central access to the narrative and thematic exploration:

However much the spectator may be engaged by plot or genre, subject matter or thematic implication, the texture of the film experience depends centrally upon the moving images and the sound that accompanies them. The audience gains access to story or theme only through that tissue of sensory materials.33 [Emphasis mine]

What is fascinating, this ‘tissue of sensory materials’ that Bordwell suggests, most often goes unreflected by the audiences during their engagement with narrative films. This is due to the fact that filmic storytelling for most of its time has been dominated by one particular mode of narration, that is the classical Hollywood narration. In this cinematic storytelling manner, style or ‘tissue of sensory materials’ as Bordwell calls it, is aimed at simulating the continuous flow of reality; style is constructed to create the illusion of reality. But scrutinized meticulously, the illusory nature of this stylistic mechanism can be deconstructed and logically explained via examining the organizing principle that ties these stylistic components together. In filmmaking practices as well as in the scholarly enterprise of film criticism, this organizing principle is called the continuity system.

2.1.4 Putting the Stylistic Elements Together in the Continuity System

Continuity system is an organizing principle that filmmakers employ to manage spatial and temporal relations within the narrative of the film. This continuity method coordinates stylistic elements such as editing, staging, acting, camerawork, lighting and sound to work together in order to achieve narrative clarity. The flow of continuity is necessary in narrative films because without it space and time are not going to be structured according to logical coherence. If spatial and temporal relations are not coherently managed, the aim for creating the illusion of reality will fail as viewers might only obtain confusion instead of comprehension.

2.1.4.1 Classical Continuity as the Dominant Mode of Stylistic Schema

In the history of narrative cinema, fictional filmmaking has tended to be dominated by a single tradition of narrative form, i.e. the "classical Hollywood cinema."34 As early as 1904, as American filmmaking became oriented towards longer storytelling with series of shots, filmmakers were faced with the challenge of comprehensibility and began to wonder how techniques of editing,

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33Bordwell, On the History of Film Style, 7.
34Bordwell and Thompson rationalize the term: “This mode is "classical" because of its lengthy, stable, and influential history, and "Hollywood" because the mode assumed its most elaborate shape in American studio films.” Bordwell and Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction, 231.
camerawork, acting and lighting be combined so as to clarify what is happening in a film? In essence, these filmic storytellers were concerned with the problem of how the spectators could grasp where and when the action was taking place. The most effective management of spatial and temporal relation was needed, as coherence in causality became the salient goal of the classical narrative. As Hollywood became a more stable studio system, certain craft-practices emerged as solutions to these problems of story comprehensibility. These craft-practices eventually formed some type of conventions to accompany the mode of causally defined storytelling that classical Hollywood cinema is recognized for. These conventions became the schema of continuity and became the standard of Hollywood filmmaking roughly since 1917.35

This continuity paradigm, in essence, is the practice of breaking a scene into matched shots in order to highlight character action and reaction.36 These matched shots are organized in some form of principles that constituted the classical continuity schema which comprise of the organization of editing, camerawork and acting into series of technical procedures such as screen direction, the axis of action or the 180° line, match-on-action, eye-line match, establishing shot, shot/reverse-shot and transitional markers such as dissolves, wipes and so forth.37 These technical procedures govern shots into a coherent flow of action and reaction that aim toward consistency in spatial and temporal relation between these shots. Overall, classical continuity as a stylistic schema is engineered to convey narrative information.

Due to this purposive function, a prominent feature of classical continuity editing resides in the fact that every shot should always be motivated by the logic of storytelling. As a result, framing as a form of cinematographic element is composed to suggest emotional intensity of characters, but most of all to punctuate pivotal narrative material that have implications for the direction of the plot. In other words, certain framings are constructed by the demand of dramaturgical effects based on the crucial importance of the storytelling data. For instance, during a conversation sequence of two characters, after a back and forth exchange of shot/reverse-shots (commonly used for presenting a one-on-one dialogue) and point of view shots, an important narrative information is revealed by character A, an information conveyed by the dialogue that functions as a turning point in the narrative’s architecture. Motivated by the significance of the information, the character’s emotional state also needs to be conveyed, whether sad, happy or dismay, this needs to be directed to our attention. Subsequently, close-up as a particular kind of framing will be inserted to punctuate the emotional intensity or the important narrative information that will change the direction of the plot.

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37 For a concrete demonstration of how these technical procedures govern the shots in a sequence see Chapter 6 (“Continuity Editing”) of Bordwell and Thompson’s *Film Art: An Introduction*, 231-234. See Glossary of Film Techniques in Appendix C for descriptions of these technical terms.
It is important to stress here that classical continuity developed in the classical Hollywood cinema is aimed at narrating the story as seamlessly as possible without any interruption, moreover from stylistic interruption. Thus, it is a stylistic schema that is very rarely calls attention to itself. Henceforth, classical continuity is referred as the ‘invisible’ continuity schema whereby stylistic elements should be downplayed and serve the storytelling flow, woven together to create the illusion of continuity. Due to its effectiveness in conveying narrative clarity, the classical continuity schema became the dominant form of stylistic organization. Yet, there are also instances of alternative renditions and reinventions to this dominant form, more prominently exercised in the filmmaking mode of art cinema.

2.1.4.2 Art Cinema and the Reinventions of the Classical Continuity Schema

In the decade of the 1950s and 1960s, the idea of auteurism that Bazin, Truffaut and Sarris championed, integrated smoothly with practices of filmmaking that engendered the growing presence of art cinema. Names such as Ingmar Bergman, Federico Fellini, Akira Kurosawa, Michelangelo Antonioni, Robert Bresson, Jacques Tati and Satyajit Ray became the household names of modernist art films and were celebrated in the film festival circuits. They all pursued distinctive themes and stylistic choices in film after film. But some of these prestigious directors also flourished in the commercial context; Antonioni, Tati and Kurosawa became “brand names” for their distinctive filmic works and differentiating themselves from the generic population of conventional cinema. Such personal brand name recognition could bring a film to penetrate the foreign markets. Besides these visionary directors, an important emergence of art cinema in this period had actually come from the internal organs of the Cahiers du Cinema. Eager to make their own films, assertive critics like Truffaut and Godard put the auteur policy to practice, and along with their Cahiers’ cohorts—Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer, and Jacques Rivette—they made some of the most interesting art films between the year 1959—1964. Together they became known as the nouvelle vague or the French New Wave.

In spite of the fact that the French New Wave directors worked independently from the art cinema auteurs mentioned above, one thing that they have in common is how they offered alternatives to classical continuity schema by reinventing and innovating some of its conventional stylistic devices. Some of the alternatives to the classical continuity rest upon the violation of the continuity rules, i.e. the conventions of spatial, temporal, and graphic continuity. Jean-Luc Godard is famous for violating these conventions by pioneering the use of the jump cut techniques. The consequence of using such violating technique is that the style becomes noticeable. Godard’s implementation of the jump cuts work mainly to distract the attention of the viewers immersed in the storytelling flow; to step outside of the diegetic immersion for a few minutes and instead shift this attention to the stylistic foregrounding. Clearly, these jump cuts function to

38Bordwell and Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction, 254.
distantiate viewers from the filmic fictional universe in a Brechtian fashion of
distantiation.39

Godard’s jump cuts may come as strikingly self-conscious as he is
exploiting the medium’s technique. And it may loosen the tightness of narrative
continuity of the classical stylistic schema, but it does not distort the legibility of
the narrative information. It may call our attention to the medium’s techniques
but it does not completely jettison our comprehension. In other words, we can
still follow the narrative.

This is only one example of many of the violations of the classical
continuity rules in art cinema. However, example like this could only conform
that the classical continuity system is one dominant form that filmmakers cannot
avoid in order to tell a story. However, what filmmakers can do—as typified by art
cineasts—is to create a wiggle room in this schema and reinvent some techniques
to concoct invigorating forms that are still aimed at comprehensibility. In the
next section, we will look at this development in refurbishing the classical
continuity principle in the commercial context of New Hollywood cinema.

2.1.4.3 Intensified Continuity Schema as an Upgrade of the
Classical Continuity

A significant shift occurred gradually in Hollywood cinema between late 1960s—
early 1970s when directors were beginning to revamp the classical continuity
system. The revamping was even more apparent in the mid 1970s when
blockbuster pictures raised to prominence, and it continued to permeate the
moviemaking practices in the 1980s and 1990s. This tendency to amp up
continuity is identified by David Bordwell as the intensified continuity schema.

As an important feature of his assertion, Bordwell sees the intensified
continuity style not as a total deviation from the ‘invisible’ classical continuity
system. Rather, it is a stylistic overhaul of the classical continuity into a pumped-
up hyperbolic form, which can be excessive yet instantaneously exciting.

In a Film Quarterly journal article in which he firstly introduced this
concept, he powerfully argues that while many scholars in film studies observe
the narrative incoherence and stylistic fragmentation as symptomatic features of
contemporary blockbuster hits or the post-classical cinema characteristics, when
scrutinized closely, however, these films actually follow the principles of classical
filmmaking. In their representation of time, space, causal narrative logic and
parallels, characters introduction and development, exposition, and evidently
visual style it is more or less still conforming to the classical continuity norms.
That being said, it is not to say that stylistic presentation has not changed in the
last 40 years, Bordwell maintains. As a matter a fact, it has, but not in a radical
and revolutionary manner. Rather, it is continually exaggerated and “intensified,”
as Bordwell argues:

“[F]ar from rejecting traditional continuity in the name of fragmentation
and incoherence, the new style amounts to an intensification of established
techniques. Intensified continuity is traditional continuity amped up, raised

39 Ibid., 254-255.
to a higher pitch of emphasis. It is the dominant style of American mass-
audience films today.”40 [Emphasis mine]

So, what are the strategies involved in intensifying the established techniques? Bordwell identifies several stylistic characteristics that fall on two salient formal aspects of film art: cinematography and editing. Bordwell outlines the strategies of the intensified continuity system as follows:

- The trend for rapid cutting;
- Use of bi-polar extreme lens lengths;
- Reliance on close shots;
- Wide-ranging camera movements41

Bordwell explains that this growing trend in form and style had been precipitated by a number of factors. Among other things, the megapicture mentality of Hollywood producers demanded filmmakers to have scripts with tight plot structure. The ‘three act’ or ‘four act’ narrative structure as Kristin Thompson asserts in her *Storytelling in the New Hollywood* (1999) was almost obligatory, while avoiding plot holes became an imperative in scriptwriting practices. As a result, Hollywood filmmakers in this period established the rigid storytelling conventions with a tendency to give the main character an arc, hence the preponderance of ‘drama of improvement’ that mark Hollywood movies from the 1980s.42

However, the consequence of this narrative stiffness prescribed filmmakers to treat their movies as dazzling spectacles. One key strategy in intensifying the continuity is to cut faster. Barry Salt pioneered the Average Shot Length (ASL) as a system to measure the editing rhythm and framing frequency that is useful to indicate how fast the movie is cut. Bordwell extended this system to analyze the tendency for rapid cutting in the so-called New Hollywood films. He discovered that throughout the history of Hollywood filmmaking the cutting pace has increased faster, resulting shorter ASLs from 8-11 seconds in the period of 1930s—1960s to 6-8 seconds in the mid 1960s. In the 1970s, ASLs dropped to 5-8 seconds and drastically decreased to 4-5 or even 3-4 seconds in the 1980s; not only in action films like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *Lethal Weapon* (1987) but also in dramas like *Stand by Me* (1983), *The Right Stuff* (1983), *Amadeus* (1984) and *The Breakfast Club* (1985).43 Bordwell and Thompson in their *Film History* textbook mentioned two additional factors that precipitated the fast editing rhythm in the 1980s, adjacent to the high-concept megapicture mentality of Hollywood executives as mentioned above. They are the emergence of MTV

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42 Bordwell and Thompson, *Film History*, 672.
music videos and cable television, and more importantly the growing pervasiveness of video.\(^{44}\) This is no more apparent than in the music video-influenced films like *Road Warrior* (1981) and *Top Gun* (1986).

The second strategy is to use extreme lens lengths and consequently side-lining the use of normal lenses (35-50mm) that were the mainstay of Hollywood filmmaking from the 1930s until roughly the mid 1960s. With the influence of the first generation of the New Hollywood films like *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) wherein Arthur Penn employed 9.8mm to 400mm lenses, the bipolar lens lengths from wide angle ones to the zoom lens became the ‘hallmark’ of intensified continuity style from the 1960s onward.\(^{45}\) The artistic possibilities provided by the use of bipolar extreme lens lengths is palpable in the emergence of the **racking focus** technique where focal planes can be altered to and fro to foreground two different objects or characters in the frame in isolation.\(^{46}\)

Continuing the strategy of intensified continuity schema is the reliance on close shots or close framing especially in the dialogue scenes. While filmmakers in the studio years up until the 1960s opted for the *plan américain* framing system to capture stretched out scenes that mainly involve two shots, in the late 1960s this tendency was supplanted by the use of ‘singles’ that concentrate on single players framed in close ups or medium shots.\(^{47}\).

This tendency for close framing had an impact on the last strategy that marks the intensified continuity style that is the free-ranging camera movement. Instead of applying lens movement with a zoom lens, in the intensified continuity schema camera movement is favored to acquire close ups or what the practitioners call as a ‘push-in’. Other dynamic camera movements also flourished in the intensified continuity system such as the long **tracking shot** and the **crane shot**. Although these techniques were also employed in the classical era, they were used occasionally to punctuate the film’s dramatic high point. However, in the intensified continuity schema it is used for casual embellishment to ‘enliven montage sequence’ and reveal ‘expository moments.’\(^{48}\) Another tendency of the free ranging camera movement is to have spiraling camera movement for capturing a dining table sequence as evident in films like *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) in its diner opening sequence or even earlier with *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1985) which contained a long take of circling shots in the sisters’ luncheon scene.\(^{49}\)

The manifestation of the intensified continuity strategies can also be found in how mobile framing is used extensively to capture conversation in a sequence. Bordwell and Thompson explain that the faster cutting, character movement and

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\(^{44}\)Bordwell and Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction*, 687-8.

\(^{45}\)Bordwell, “Intensified Continuity,” 18.

\(^{46}\)Ibid.

\(^{47}\)Plan américain: A framing in which the scale of the object shown is moderately small; the human figure seen from the shins to the head would fill most of the screen. This is sometimes referred to as a medium long shot, especially when human figures are not shown (Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 480).


\(^{49}\)Ibid.
camera movement in the intensified continuity stylized films function to accentuate the film’s action and images as if they were in constant motion. Due to this mandate, staging technique has shifted from having actors move around the set in fairly full shots, while saving close-ups for high dramatic moments, to the stand-and-deliver staging method. This latter method is typified by actors that seldom move around the set and have their dialogue broken down into several close shots of the speaker and the listener while a full establishing shot is provided only at the beginning or at the end of the scene or at both points. Crucially, when actors did move freely, directors usually presented the action through an alternative method called the walk-and-talk whereby the actors stride along the street or a passageway followed in a lengthy travelling shot accommodated by light cameras and flexible Steadicam equipment.

Taken together these strategies work collaboratively in shaping the intensified continuity style. Tighter framing in close shots permits faster cutting, long lenses pick out figures for one-on-one editing, and so does racking focus in creating intra-shot cuts similar to what the actual cutting does between shots.

One may conclude then, that despite the sustained use of classical filmmaking repertoire, this stylistic paradigm for intensifying continuity does give some aesthetic implications to the overall texture of contemporary films. For one, as Bordwell observes, we find more incoherent action scenes, more jump-cut montage sequences—overall to depict untraditional moments. Bordwell then finalizes his thought by claiming that intensified continuity ‘represents a significant shift in the history of moviemaking.’ By this, he means that the rapid cutting or the intensified continuity style is deployed for generating a greater moment-by-moment detail. Significantly, the stylistic devices used by Hollywood filmmakers in the 1940s for pulling out suspense, shock and surprise, are now used more often even scene-by-scene. Key to this conclusion is that rapid editing obliges viewers to assemble scattered narrative pieces of information—‘if you look away, you miss a point’. Thus, the intensification of continuity provokes a sense of fast-paced flood of information.

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50 Bordwell and Thompson, *Film History: An Introduction*, 674.
51 Ibid.
52 Bordwell, “Intensified Continuity,” 24-25.
2.2. Style in Television Arts

In the context of American fictional narrative television programs, particularly in the province of television drama, style has gradually evolved from a multi-camera live-transmitted production mode—fluenced by radio and theatre—to the single camera production mode adopting the techniques of motion pictures. In the last decade, the cinematic aspiration has intensified in the production of long-form drama serials. Craft practices of feature filmmaking are now the norm in shaping the style of these drama serials. While cable television HBO pioneered this shift for television drama to look more like ‘cinema’ as a branding strategy and thus positioned itself as the market leader in delivering ‘high-end’ drama serials that look and sound ‘Not TV’, this strategy for upscaling the prestige of television through the ‘cinematization of television aesthetics’\(^5\) is currently visible in the other domains of American TV: networks and ‘basic’ cable TV drama.

This section will provide a brief survey on the stylistic evolvement of television drama in the American broadcasting context. It is intended to show how the continuity and change transformed the aesthetics of television drama in the three periods of television history in the United States. In grouping the periodization, I adopt Robin Nelson’s categories of the TVI as the classic network era, the TVII as the post-network multi-channel era and the TVIII\(^\text{54}\) as the contemporary era, which is still on-going and has been identified variously by television academics as the post-television era or the digital and media convergence era.\(^\text{55}\) To avoid confusion, I will use Nelson’s terms (TVI, TVII, TV3) more often, although occasionally I will also use these terms, e.g. the classic network era, the post-network era and the digital convergence era, interchangeably with those of Nelson’s.


2.2.1 The Classical Continuity Style and the Prime Time Dramas in the Classic Network Era

With the exception of live-transmitted anthology drama in the 1940s and 1950s, American television drama for the large part followed the classical continuity system found in the classical Hollywood cinema. This employment of classical continuity is carried out very prominently in prime time dramas of the classic network era, roughly since the late 1950s. This mode of continuity became the dominant form of TV drama style and culminated in the prime time programs in the 1960s and the 1970s. One of the most apt representatives of these prime time dramas is *Dallas*.

*Dallas* was probably the most popular fictional programming that set the standard for the classic network system. *Dallas* was a high-rating program in the national context and one of the biggest American TV exports to this day. It was classified as a soap opera; however, if we look closely at the stylistic features of *Dallas*, it was hardly a straightforward confirmation of the regular soap opera convention. First of all, *Dallas* is a prime time program, contrary to the rest of the soap operas that commonly fill up daytime programming. Secondly, while soap operas utilized a proscenium-like stage in a controlled environment of a studio with a multi-camera set up to capture the performances, *Dallas* on the other hand employed a single camera film technique in lieu of the telefilm tradition that embraced the *attenuated* continuity style in telling its narrative.

Television scholar Jeremy G. Butler introduced the term *attenuated* to refer to the continuity system in television drama that adheres to the Hollywood’s

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56 The style of television drama in these embryonic years of American television industry conformed to the characteristics of radio transmission with the visual aid provided by the New York theatre plays. The outcome of this merger is visible in the popularity of the anthology drama in the 1940s and early 1950s. Teleplays such as *Twelve Angry Men*, *Requiem for a Heavyweight* and *Days of Wine and Roses* eventually marked the first golden age of American television (Thompson 1996). These 60-90 minute plays were broadcast live from New York and staged in a proscenium arch-style theatre. Television cameras captured the performance on the spot for the live broadcast with editing done on the go. Due to the association with highbrow New York theatre and the immediacy of live transmission, these televised plays became the darlings of television critics. Economically, however, the production of these anthology dramas took up a lot of resources since they had to rely on cumbersome production mechanism and inferior broadcasting technology. This confluence of limitations impeded these televised dramas to bring out pristine visual aesthetic quality. Additionally, due to the unavailability of reliable recording device, the visual aesthetics of these TV dramas were not as crisp as those recorded on videotape, let alone on 35mm films. Soon enough these televised dramas began to be replaced by pre-filmed television series and the telefilms. For a detailed survey of television drama in these periods, see Madelyn Ritrosky-Winslow, “Anthology Drama” entry on The Museums of Broadcast Communications website, http://www.museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=anthologydra, (accessed March 22, 2011).


58 Ibid.

59 For a detailed analysis of a *Dallas* sequence that confirms this attenuated continuity schema following the classical continuity system of Hollywood cinema, see Jeremy G. Butler, *Television Style* (London: Routledge, 2010), 83-87.
classical filmmaking style pre-1941. As the terms suggests, *attenuated* basically means *reduced* or *subdued* in order to serve the narrative purpose. In the nomenclature of film studies, the *attenuated* continuity style echoes the ‘invisible’ characteristic of the classical continuity schema which its function is primarily to serve the causal, temporal and spatial continuity of the narrative; style here is engineered to install the storytelling mechanics as seamlessly as possible. Therefore, the artifice of film techniques should be *minimized* or *attenuated* for it might intrude the narrative progression had it been left otherwise. As we know from the previous section of this chapter, the overall purpose of the classical continuity schema is to tell the stories through audio-visual arrangement as unobtrusively as possible. Stylistic flourish is almost a sin in this continuity system, for every stylistic decision—from staging to editing—has to serve the purpose of propelling the narrative forward.

This goal for narrative clarity implicates a number of conventions in standard craft practices of television drama in the classic network era and *Dallas* embodies them in its stylistic design. For instance, camera movement is rarely practiced if not disallowed when there is no actor or a character that moves around the set; deep-space staging is avoided and instead the director arrays the actors in a perpendicular fashion; shots are captured by normal lenses with 50mm focal length; high-key lighting is used to illuminate the geography of the scene evenly. The low contrast effect of the key lighting in *Dallas* is representative of the classical method for lighting the sequences in many classical Hollywood films prior to the emergence of *film noir*. Moreover, a scene in *Dallas* is not broken down into series of shots that may include medium close-ups or close-ups from different camera angles and instead opted for the spartan visual style whereby one shot would be sufficient to convey the narrative information from this particular scene (Fig. 2.2). In short, *Dallas*’ unobtrusive stylization conforms to the craft practices similar to the classical Hollywood cinema before 1941 whereby production took place in a sound-stage or a studio back lot — even for “exterior shots” — where characters are captured in ‘aquarium style’ stage and illuminated with high-key lighting that produces low contrast in its pictorial quality. Medium shots and zoom-in/zoom-out characterize the framing and composition with no tracking shots or true close ups executed.

60 Butler, *Television Style*, 82.
61 Ibid., 84-86.
62 Ibid., 86.
By employing these techniques, *Dallas* and its prime time television drama contemporaries in the classic network age (*Dynasty*, ABC 1981-1989; *Knots Landing*, CBS 1979-1993; *Falcon Crest*, CBS 1981-1993) which dominated television fiction programming at the time would tell their stories in a ‘safe’ way without any experimentation and excesses in style since the purpose of the attenuated continuity style is to focus on the narrative and the dramatic elements of the show that restrict any possibilities for giving the style a life of its own. It is unsurprisingly that primetime television drama in this period is described by film and television scholars as television with ‘zero-degree’ style where “conventional production orthodoxy” reigns, according to John T. Caldwell.63

### 2.2.2 The Intensified Continuity Style and the Demographic-oriented Prime Time Dramas in the Multi-channel TV² Era

The American television industry entered a transitional period in the 1980s as television broadcasting shifted from being dominated by the national network channels to being challenged by new technologies of cable and satellite programming. The availability of subscription-based channels via cable and satellite technology and the addition of the fourth network Fox in 1986 created a multi-channel environment which was unthinkable for the Big Three (ABC, CBS

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and NBC) networks that had reigned for three decades prior. The dynamics of the multi-channel landscape certainly changed the way in which television channels approached the audiences and the programming. During the TV1 era, audiences were considered an undifferentiated mass; in the multi-channel environment of the TV2 era mass audiences were supplanted by demographically defined market segments, as channels emerged to reach a wide range of target audiences under a system often termed narrowcasting. A different outlook on programming was embraced as network channels began to cater to these specialized demographics by offering ‘boutique’ televised products.

Film and television scholar John Thornton Caldwell contends that with the ‘spirit of experimentation’ that network channels cautiously embraced in this transitional period, a paradigm shift occurred in the creation of dramatic programming as a result of the narrowcasting strategy:

“[American television in the 1980s] moved from a framework that approached broadcasting primarily as a form of word-based rhetoric and transmission ... to a visually based mythology, framework, and aesthetic based on an extreme consciousness of style”64 [Emphasis mine].

In this context, one dramatic program that truly illustrated the ‘visually-based mythology’, ‘framework’ and ‘aesthetic’ buttressing on an ‘extreme consciousness of style’ in the TVII post-network era that Caldwell asserts was Miami Vice. The television series that revolves around the biracial pairing of detectives Sonny Crockett (Don Johnson) and Ricardo Tubbs (Phillip Michael Thomas) on a drug investigation in Miami, answered all the challenges of the ever shifting dynamics of industrial, cultural and aesthetic forces in television broadcasting of the TV2 era.

From the outset, Miami Vice caught media specialists’ and critics’ attention because of its stylistic features of visual and sound. Writing about Miami Vice in his influential work Television Culture (1987), John Fiske notes ‘[t]he look, the style of Miami Vice is its character, the spectacle is the source of its pleasure.’65 The vibrancy of its style, especially the visual, propels inattentive viewers including film specialists to gaze closely at Miami Vice. So much so that even film exclusivists that normally disdain television could not evade the Vice’s striking stylistic ornamentation that seemed to be too ‘cinematic’ for television as notable film magazine Film Comment’s writer Richard T. Jameson declares: “It’s hard to forbear saying, every five minutes or so, ‘I can’t believe this was shot for television!’”66 But what does it actually mean when comments like ‘too cinematic for television’ are used to characterize a televisual text? In Miami Vice case, the assertion seems to rest upon elemental techniques of filmmaking employed for a small-screen fiction: mise-en-scène, mise-en-shot and sound.

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64 Caldwell, Televisuality, 4. (cited in Lyons 2010: 15)
Miami Vice subscribes to the strategies of intensified continuity (faster cutting rate; bipolar extreme lens length; reliance on close shots; free-ranging camera movement, etc.) although with a few notable differences. The cutting rates of Miami Vice’s episodes fall in the range of shorter ASL. Breaking down the episodes into several sequences, media and television theorist John Fiske timed the shot lengths of two music-video sequences of Miami Vice episode and yielded ASL close to 3 seconds. Additionally, when Jeremy Butler conducted his own ASL research for an episode of Miami Vice (“Calderone’s Demise”), he found even shorter ASL of 2.27 seconds. These two ASLs corroborate the notion that Miami Vice’s editing rhythm aspires to the intensified continuity system, and as Fiske discovered that the music-video montage in Miami Vice’s episode is cut quicker from the rest of the sequences in the episode to disrupt narrative progression, Miami Vice supplies a different kind of pleasure as it signals the demand for an attentive viewer’s gaze.

The manifestation of the intensified continuity strategies can also be found in how mobile framing is used extensively to capture conversation in a sequence. Bordwell and Thompson explain that the faster cutting, character movement and camera movement in the intensified continuity stylized films function to accentuate the film’s action and images as if they were in constant motion. Due to this mandate, staging technique has shifted from having actors move around the set in fairly full shots while saving close-ups for high dramatic moments to the stand-and-deliver staging method where actors seldom move around the set and have their dialogue broken down into several close shots of the speaker and the listener while a full establishing shot is provided only at the beginning or at the end of the scene or at both points. Crucially, when actors did move freely, directors usually presented the action through an alternative method called the walk-and-talk whereby the actors stride along the street or a passageway followed in a lengthy travelling shot accommodated by light cameras and flexible Steadicam equipment. The walk-and-talk staging is visible in Miami Vice’s episodes, for instance in the second season opener entitled “Prodigal Son” originally aired on September 27, 1985 (Fig. 2.3)

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67Fiske, Television Culture, 117.
68Butler, Television Style, 98.
69Bordwell and Thompson, Film History, 674.
Figure 2.3. The walk-and-talk staging technique demonstrated in the beginning of the episode “Prodigal Son” in the second season of Miami Vice (Source: Miami Vice - Season Two DVD, NBC, 2005).

On top of the stylistic flourishes that Miami Vice demonstrates through employing cinematic techniques, a newly established televsional form has also donated a large sum of its aesthetics onto the show’s anti-traditional style: music videos. As Bordwell and Thompson asserted, the influence of music videos primarily shown on MTV in intensifying the continuity and the aesthetic presentation of feature films cannot be minimized. Miami Vice without a doubt showcases the infiltration of the ‘MTV aesthetics’ into televsional forms that produced “excessive” style.70

The influence of MTV-styled music clips had on Miami Vice —hence the often heard tag “MTV Cops” to describe the show—can be distinguished two aspects:

a. The use of popular music mostly hit songs on MTV and Jan Hammer’s (the show’s music composer) own original contemporary score as the show’s soundtrack; and

70 MTV went on the air for the first time on August 21rst, 1981 with the first music video ever broadcast on the channel, Video Killed the Radio Stars by The Buggles. It became the first television station that was solely dedicated to music by airing pop videos as promotional tools for 24 hours straight. The early 1980s saw the proliferation of video technology, and the outlet of MTV inspired the use of video processing effects. Due to the commercial value of music videos, music majors began to invest more on the production value of the music videos. This increase in production value implicated the aesthetic upgrading of these music video clips that it formed its own stylistic routines: shots of the band members (performing or not); little additional sound beyond the song to which the performers often lip synced; “excessive” cinematography; faster cutting and almost all of the clips are designated for lyric-based songs rather than for instrumental tracks (Butler 2010: 96).
b. The presentation of certain sequences in the show is carried out using music-video's stylistic strategies.

By combining these two strategies imbued by MTV aesthetics, critics have noted that this is what made the style of *Miami Vice* innovative.

All things considered, *Miami Vice*’s formal architecture of *mise-en-scène*, *mise-en-shot* and editing, plus its stress on music launched it as a hallmark of network television to be reckoned with. Its influence stretched across genres and periods. More important, *Miami Vice* broke the division that split television with cinematic arts. From this moment on, the divide between cinema and television became even fuzzier, especially when cable television rises to the high-echelon of quality programming in the late 1990s and 2000s.

### 2.2.3 The Cinematization of Television Aesthetics and the ‘High-End’ TV Drama in the Contemporary TV3 Era

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, in the last decade American television drama underwent major transformations in narrative and style. Critics and scholars esteem several TV dramas in the 2000s as television fiction with literary and cinematic ambitions. Yet, this sounded hardly novel since aspiration to more established art forms like cinema and literature has been demonstrated captivatingly by earlier televisial texts in the 1980s like *Miami Vice* and *Hill Street Blues*. Therefore, we need to inspect this polemic with the question: what is it that actually makes TV drama in the 2000s unique?

In terms of narrative design and narrational strategy, TV dramas like *The Sopranos*, *Six Feet Under*, *The West Wing*, *The Wire*, *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010) and several others have blurred the long-standing dichotomy of television storytelling modes that British film and TV scholar John Ellis identifies as the series and the serial—illustrating what Jason Mittell usefully calls narrative complexity in televisual forms. Even though the roots of televisial narrative complexity can be traced back to the network narrative schema showcased by the soap operas, and the interweaving multi-threaded plotlines pioneered by *Hill Street Blues*, the contemporary narratively complex television dramas push the boundaries even further. One of the ways in which these contemporary drama serials intriguingly test the limits of television’s textual boundaries is to demonstrate daring presentations of rarely explored and at times controversial subject matter in television drama, complex characters with unpredictable psychology and moral ambiguity, explicit sexuality, profanity, and most significantly, extravagant aesthetic qualities that are closer in resembling the cinematic features than television.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Robin Nelson points to these programs as the ‘high-end’ drama serials which recognized as TV drama with ‘big budgets and

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71 This notion is held by many in the contemporary debate on American ‘Quality TV’. See for instance Kim Akass and Janet McCabe, eds., *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond* (London and New York: IB Tauris& Co Ltd., 2007).

72 Ibid.

73 Jason Mittell, *Narrative Complexity*. 
the high production values associated with them, along with a “prime time” position in the schedule of a major channel. 74 Trisha Dunleavy further encapsulates the characteristics of 'high-end' drama serials emblematic of contemporary TV3 era as innovative programs 'whose episodes can cost upwards of US$3 million each and are conceptually adventurous and narratively complex.' 75 Moreover, they are 'often created by writers or hyphenates with 'auteur' credentials, and uses 35mm film (or its digital equivalent) to achieve a cinematic quality.' 76 Some of the innovative strategies that these 'high-end' drama serials are deploying in the 2000s include:

- Inventive ‘generic mixing’ in concept design;
- The profiling of ‘authorial’ input;
- Increasing ‘narrative complexity’; 77
- The use of serial narration to foster a ‘must-see’ allure; 78 and
- The pursuit of a visual quality that has further reduced aesthetic distinctions between television and cinema.

Focusing on the two strategies— ‘the profiling of ‘authorial input’ and ‘the pursuit of a visual quality that has further reduced aesthetic distinctions between television and cinema’— I would like to delve deeper into this development in the relatively current and understudied province of television drama, i.e. basic cable television’s ‘high-end’ drama serials, to see how far these two strategies have been expanded and inflated in the late 2000s. Could there be a transformative shift occurring in the post-Sopranos age of ‘high-end’ drama serials? More especially, in stylistic and aesthetic terms? As stated implicitly in my introduction, the core of the research is to answer those inquiries. And in arriving at new findings in this relatively unexplored area of television studies I would like to use the serialized drama Breaking Bad as a case study for the research.

74 Nelson, State of Play, 2.
76 Ibid.
77 The concepts of ‘generic mixing’ and ‘narrative complexity’ were first explored and introduced by Jason Mittell (2004: 153-7; 2006: 29-31).
78 The idea and objectives of ‘must-see’ allure in drama were first examined by Mark Jancovich and James Lyons (2003:2-3).
In this chapter I explore the question of how the cinematization of television aesthetics is evident in *Breaking Bad* and how it contributes to shape the idiosyncrasy of its visual style. Beneath the fold, I intend to see how the idea of auteurism is explored and yet at the same time problematized in the formation of *Breaking Bad*.

As I have argued in the first chapter, *Breaking Bad* is an aesthetically transformative work that encapsulates the contemporary development of formal innovation in American television drama, particularly in respect to visual style. One of the ways in which showrunner Vince Gilligan and his creative team aim to achieve this formal innovation is by aligning the aesthetics of the show with the cinematic analogy through drawing upon a wide range of visual stylistic frameworks associated with clusters of cinematic (sub)genres such as *film noir* and Westerns. Next to this, the show also installs an intensified texture of continuity in several aspects of its stylistic properties in line with the contemporary continuity style of post-1960s Hollywood cinema.

To give a clear analytic orientation, I propose that the cinematization of television aesthetics in *Breaking Bad* is engineered for a large part by three salient stylistic strategies: the intensification of the continuity system, the foregrounding of mise-en-scène components of setting and lighting composition, and the embellishment of cinematography. These key stylistic approaches correspond with the visual stylistic temperaments associated with the aforementioned clusters of cinematic (sub)genres; hence, they are integral to *Breaking Bad*’s approximation to the cinematic analogy. In doing so, *Breaking Bad* concocts an idiosyncratic visual style that epitomizes further innovation in the aesthetics of American television drama where eclecticism becomes a centrally arresting feature. Methodically speaking, close stylistic analysis of the three stylistic strategies will be carried out to generate textual evidences that will substantiate the articulated thesis.

First and foremost, brief descriptions of the case study *Breaking Bad* and the show runner Vince Gilligan will be outlined to provide pertinent contextual background for the analysis.
3.1. The Curious Case of *Breaking Bad*: Inception and Reception

When I got called for the show, the first contact I had with anybody from *Breaking Bad* was from AMC, and the two executive producers (Vince Gilligan and Mark Johnson) got on the phone to me and they said “We have this show, and we’d like you to consider it, and we really want to develop a look for it, we want it ‘cinematic.’ It’s a dark show; we want you to help take this character to this dark place. We want it to be very much in the style of 1960s early 1970s films, many more wider shots than what is currently on television, much less coverage, more interest in blocking, and the actual desert and the city of Albuquerque are key characters to what we’re trying to do here, we’d like to see them more.” I said to them “Do you know what you’re asking here?” Because what they’re really asking is a much more cinematic approach than many standard television programs!—Michael Slovis, ASC., continuing Director of Photography for *Breaking Bad*.79

*Breaking Bad* premiered on January 20, 2008 on the basic cable channel AMC as a production of Sony Pictures Television. It is conceived, developed and produced by Vince Gilligan (1967—). Gilligan’s curriculum vitae as a television writer, producer and director consists of the hit network TV series *The X Files* (Fox, 1993—2002) and *The Lone Gunmen* (Fox, 2001). He is credited with three cinematic features as writer and co-writer of *Hancock* (Peter Berg, 2008), *Home Fries* (Dean Parisot, 1998), which he wrote during his filmmaking education at Tisch School of the Arts at NYU in 1989, and *Wilder Napalm* (Glen Gordon Caron, 1991). During his years on *The X-Files*, Gilligan received two Golden Globe Awards in 1996 and 1997 for Best Dramatic Series and Emmy Award nominations in 1997 for Outstanding Drama Series.80 However, other than these titles his résumé as a filmmaker and television creator is far from extensive. Indeed, *Breaking Bad* is his first breakthrough as a television showrunner.81

Gilligan uses the title ‘Breaking Bad’ as an idiomatic catchphrase to describe the premise of the show: a guy who starts out being a moral-abiding passionate man of his profession gradually turns into a violent law-defying architect of calamity. As Gilligan fondly puts it, it is the story of a man transforming little by

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81 Showrunner is a term used commonly in the television industry to refer to the person who is responsible for the day-to-day development of television series. Showrunner generally functions as the show’s producer, writer and executive producer. It is often the case that showrunner can also direct episode(s) of the show.
little from being ‘Mr. Chips to Scarface.’ Indeed, the phrase ‘breaking bad’ is a Southern colloquialism for ‘raising hell.’

Once he had the concept materialized for *Breaking Bad*, he pitched it to two preeminent premium cable channels HBO and Showtime with no intention of offering it to the Big Four networks (ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox) considering that the show could be too grim and explicit for these national broadcasters. However, HBO and Showtime declined the proposal for a number of reasons with the strongest objection being that the show is ‘too dark and depressing.’ Nevertheless, after another hit of refusal, Gilligan was approached by a newly refurbished basic cable channel, AMC, with a desire to expand its original programming line-up shortly after gaining critical success with *Mad Men*. The newly made-over channel, which was previously known for its lowbrow action movie marathons, was now eager to embrace edgy drama serial that would fit their new branding profile. As a result, they green-lighted the production of the pilot episode—written and directed by Gilligan; hence, the show was picked up for the first season and since then has been renewed for three subsequent seasons.

*Breaking Bad* had already attracted positive criticism in this first season, but it was not until the second season that it garnered evaluative praises from the critical community of TV critics and academics. Jason Mittell esteems *Breaking Bad* as one of the best dramatic programs of the 2000s, meanwhile renowned television critic Todd VanDerWerff admires the show for being ‘better than almost any series on right now at ramping up tension in almost completely organic ways.’ In a similar tone, accounts written in the popular press put

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82 Mr. Chips is the main character from *Goodbye, Mr Chips*, a 1939 British film based on the novel of the same name by James Hilton and directed by Sam Wood. Later the film is adapted to a musical by Herbert Ross in 1969. Scarface is a reference to the character Tony Montana (Al Pacino) in Brian de Palma’s *Scarface* (1983). Although there is the Howard Hawk’s and Richard Rosson’s version of *Scarface* (1932), Gilligan refers to the former rather than the latter, possibly for the more brutal and maniacal portrayal of the main character Tony.

83 Vince Gilligan, Interview at the American Film Institute Harold Lloyd Master Seminar in Los Angeles (2010), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9572UEEa530 (accessed July 13, 2010).

84 Vince Gilligan, Interview by AMC Shootout, in *Breaking Bad* The Complete First Season DVD (Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2008).


86 Vince Gilligan, Interview by AMC Shootout.


*Breaking Bad* on a pedestal as a high watermark for television’s artistic achievement.\(^89\)

Many of these evaluative claims mention the style of *Breaking Bad* as one of its captivating characteristics. Actors’ performance, which recognized by many as a compelling feature of *Breaking Bad*, has given Bryan Cranston three consecutive Emmy Awards in the category of Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series for his stellar portrayal of the main character Walter White.\(^90\) Another recurring point of acclaim emphasizes the visual style as *Breaking Bad*’s appealing attribute. This view is expressed for instance by Mittell: “No show I’ve ever seen is more effective in its use of visual style.”\(^91\) Mittell’s assertion situates *Breaking Bad*’s visual stylistic propensity as a marker of the show’s formal quality standing next to character complexity and storytelling depth. A more specific account of *Breaking Bad*’s visual stylistic features comes from television scholar David Lavery. He writes:

> *Breaking Bad* has its own distinctive style and artistic signatures [...] television breaking not in the direction of a Showtime black comedy about the drug culture but tracking the sort of inventive visual style and dark subject matter and violence of independent cinema's poster boys.\(^92\) [Emphasis mine]

Although the last part of his claims warrant further reflection, Lavery’s assertion seems to be hitting at the core of *Breaking Bad*’s distinct aesthetic property. However, like Mittell, Lavery is more interested in examining *Breaking Bad* from narrative and thematic standpoints.\(^93\) Lavery’s cursory scrutiny of *Breaking Bad*’s style reverberates many critical writings on the show wherein stylistic

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\(^93\) Ibid.
issues are relegated as subsidiaries to the narrative questions. For that reason, in this chapter I aim to fill this gap of scholarly criticism by advancing the critical examination of a television drama serial that is much praised for its visual style yet has not been studied systematically from this critical angle.

3.2. Argumentation, Hypothesis and Method of Analysis

In order to provide a clear motivation for selecting *Breaking Bad* as a case study in this research, presently I will outline the rationale for this methodological decision.

There are a number of reasons why *Breaking Bad* warrants closer inspection as a televisual work. Firstly, *Breaking Bad* pivotally represents some of the further developments of American television drama in the TV3 era. Moreover, in the province of ‘high-end’ drama serials wherein basic cable television channel AMC is emerging as an alternative and contender to the dominance of premium cable TV channels like HBO and Showtime, which have supplied a great number of ‘high-end’ TV dramas in the last decade. Secondly, the relationship between the creative force behind *Breaking Bad* and AMC epitomizes a significantly different approach and attitude to developing television drama in the TV3 age. This unorthodox relationship between creators and television institution crystallizes a healthy framework in developing *Breaking Bad* as a long form serialized TV fiction. As a result, Gilligan and his core creative team (will be referred to as Gilligan et. al from here on) consisting of director of photography (DoP), director(s), writers and production designers, can exercise a greater creative liberty in shaping the aesthetics of the show under the guidance of Gilligan’s overall vision. This high degree of creative privilege is certainly not exclusive to *Breaking Bad*; however, it is not a dominant trend in the TV3 context of American television. Given the aforementioned reasons, *Breaking Bad* becomes a curiously interesting case for studying contemporary television aesthetics because it does not simply exemplify the two prominent strategies of television drama making in the TV3 period—cinematization of television aesthetics and the rising authorial input in televisual creation—but it inflates and modifies these strategies to concoct an arresting aura of stylistic eclecticism.

To give a clearer methodological picture, I will take four episodes of *Breaking Bad*, one from season two (“Breakage”) and three from season three (“No Mas,” “Sunset,” and “Full Measures”) as the main corpus for they crystallize...
the stylistic ambitions that I have suggested throughout this dissertation. However, there will be some cases where I will draw examples from other episodes in order to strengthen the arguments and to excavate necessary specifics. Furthermore, as a supplementary source of reference I will look into extra-textual documents such as interviews with creative agents of Breaking Bad—mainly Vince Gilligan and director of photography Michael Slovis, ASC.—to provide relevant contexts for the analysis. As I have explained in the preceding chapter, I will focus exclusively on the visual style as the three salient film techniques I argue as the main stylistic components of Breaking Bad's cinematization strategy (mise-en-scène, cinematography and intensified continuity) are all components of the visual texture. Before I get into the visual stylistic analysis, since Breaking Bad is a narrative televisual fiction, it is imperative to firstly delineate how the show is organized narratively.

3.3. Chemistry, Crystal Meth and Crisis: Plot Summary and Narrative Design

Breaking Bad follows the character Walter White (Bryan Cranston), a chemistry teacher living in the suburb of Albuquerque, New Mexico with his wife Skylar (Anna Gunn) and teenage son Walter, Jr. (RJ Mitte). Walt is diagnosed with Stage III lung cancer and given a prognosis of two years left to live. With a new sense of fearlessness based on his medical prognosis, and a desire to safeguard his family's financial security, he chooses to enter a dangerous world of drugs and crime and ascends to power in this world. The show explores how a fatal diagnosis such as Walt's, releases a typical man from the daily concerns and constraints of normal society and follows his transformation from mild family man into a kingpin of the drug trade. This concise plot summary is translated into the following grand-scale narrative design, narrational mode and thematic exploration.

Walt is an overqualified middle-aged chemistry teacher going through a severe existential crisis. Earning very little from his job, he is forced to work a second job at a car wash owned by a ruthless Romanian émigré. At this point in his life, he feels as if he is an unmitigated underachiever with no future prospect in steering life-changing turning points in career and family life. With a nagging wife, a son with cerebral palsy and an unplanned baby on the way, he is faced not only with emotional insecurities but also with financial depravity. On top of that, lung cancer at a critical stage weakens his mental and physical strength. He has two years before the cancer will take him out completely.

In this respect, here a problem is imposed upon the character early in the narrative development as conveyed in the pilot episode: How can he still provide for his family and leave them with sufficient financial security before he dies?

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96 Detailed information about these episodes will be provided in the Appendix B.
This problem cultivates desire and motivation for Walt to get as much money as possible within a short amount of time.

By some chain of events, he finds himself witnessing his own former student, Jesse Pinkman (Aaron Paul), fleeing from a DEA drug bust: a crystal meth lab seizure in the outskirt of Albuquerque. Walt is there because his brother in-law, DEA agent Hank Schrader (Dean Norris), invites him to come along. Walt is gobsmacked as he finds his former student hustling and possibly using illegal drugs. Walt becomes speechless but decides not to tell Hank. However, it is at this moment that a plausible solution to his problem surfaces. Tracking Jesse down to his hideout, Walt then offers Jesse a business partnership that involves producing and selling crystal methamphetamine. With his impeccable qualifications and superb expertise in crystallography, he believes that he can create the purest crystal meth that has ever been produced. This narrative moment is encapsulated by Walt’s infamous line: “You know the business, and I know the chemistry.” Jesse, nonetheless, declines the proposition. Walt then threatens to turn him in to the DEA if he insists on turning down the deal. Jesse has no other option but to reluctantly accept it.

Once this risky partnership is established, Walt’s goal becomes solidified: to produce the most chemically superior crystal meth in the market in order to generate a large amount of profit so that his family will be financially secured when he dies. This well-defined goal becomes a crucial storytelling device that propels Breaking Bad’s narrative forward. Walt then cooks the crystal meth, but the distribution is a lot harder than the production. Even though they are able to sell some out and manage to obtain revenues, they perpetually run into painstaking ordeals and setbacks in marketing the crystals. Profit accumulation is nowhere in sight.

This series of goal-oriented actions, the ordeals that complicate the accomplishing of the goals and the re-actions taken by Walt and Jesse to resolve these ordeals depict the grand-scale design of Breaking Bad’s narrative architecture. This grand-scale scheme is ultimately discerned in the organization of storylines and plotlines. At this point we have established that Walt’s activities with Jesse (the crystal meth joint venture) form the main storyline that serves as the premise of the show. This is not, however, the only narrative thread. There are several others that run parallel to this. These include the relationship between Walt and Skylar, Walt and his son Walter, Jr., the DEA agent Hank’s pursuit of this pure ‘blue’ crystal meth manufacturer whom he is yet to discover that it is actually his own brother in-law, the relationship between Jesse and his parents, drug-addict friends and girlfriend-in-rehab Jane (Krysten Ritter), Hank’s personal struggle as a DEA officer and his waning relationship with his wife Marie (Betsy Brandt) and Marie’s fluctuating relationship with her sister Skylar. Nevertheless, despite the multiplicity of storylines, in the end they will intersect because whatever happens in the main storyline (Walt and Jesse’s business), the other storylines will get impacted and will, in turn, cyclically affect Walt and Jesse’s relation and actions. Hence, if viewed from the top, these intersecting
storylines concoct a delicate web of network narrative complicity. As a consequence, this network narrative form applies the omniscient narrational mode where we get to see developing plotlines from many characters’ point of views, not exclusively from Walt’s. As a consequence, we are given narrative knowledge that Walt does not even know.

Nevertheless, notwithstanding the complexity of the narrative construction, the temporality of the storytelling mechanism itself is less complicated. With the exception of the pilot episode, namely the opening sequence that involves a flashforward, the rest of the episodes are told in chronological order following a linear progression. There are no narrational acrobatics in terms of temporality. Neither flashbacks nor flashforwards are planted in the main episodes. Although the opening teasers at times play around with these temporal-narrational devices, they do not have direct impact on the featured plotlines within the episodes. For instance, the ambiguous cold opens in four episodes of season two are devised to operate as some type of narrative premonition. They are fragmented slices of future events that we could only witness as a whole toward the end of the season. Yet, the main storylines are kept linearly progressing without any interruption from these deformed flash-forwards. In conclusion, if we look at some of the narrative devices planted in the narrative structure, such as the ones I mentioned in the beginning of this section—Walt’s goals, deadlines (two years to live before cancer takes him out) and complicating actions (ordeals)—it is sufficient to say that classical Hollywood narration is evident in Breaking Bad.

However, does this mean that Breaking Bad’s narrational classicism is conveyed and accompanied by the traditional organization of film style found in

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98 Seen this way, Breaking Bad seems to lay out a network narrative design which has its roots in early multi-protagonist Hollywood films in the 1930s such as The Grand Hotel (Edmund Goulding, 1939) and later on amplified in the 1970s by the New Hollywood director Robert Altman in M*A*S*H (1970) Nashville (1975). But another source of this network narrative complexity stems from television’s own form of heavily serialized fiction, the soap opera. Subsequently, serialized mode of storytelling in television became really fashionable in television drama in the 1980s, starting with Hill Street Blues and the prime time soaps such as Dallas and Dynasty. As Mittell argues, the serialized format has been reinvented and modified in the 2000s in complex narrative television fictions which is not only present in hour-long dramas but across the board including sit-coms (see Mittell, “Narrative Complexity” (2006)). I am not going into the details of the debate on narrative complexity in television, as it is not my intention in this research. My purpose here is to give an idea of Breaking Bad’s sources and family tree of storytelling design. In conclusion, Breaking Bad follows the tradition of serial storytelling without combining it with episodic treatment like Mittell characterizes of television narrative complexity in the TV3 era as in the case of The Sopranos or Lost.

99 Cold open is an alternative term for opening teaser. It has been popularized in the 1950s and 1960s to open television series in an inviting way. Television scholar Lisa Coulthard defines cold open as ‘pre-credit teaser that is not necessarily or directly tied to the action of the episode itself, but is rather an attraction on its own terms aimed at catching an audience quickly and convincing them to stay.’ Lisa Coulthard, “The Hotness of Cold Opens: Breaking Bad and the Serial Narrative as Puzzle,” in Flow Online Journal, November 12, 2010, http://flowtv.org/2010/11/the-hotness-of-cold-opens/, (accessed January 8, 2011).

100 For a systematic account of storytelling modes in television and the influence of classical Hollywood narration, see Kristin Thompson, Storytelling in Film and Television (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).
classical Hollywood cinema and primetime dramas of the classic network era? More importantly, is story comprehensibility and plausibility that classical narrative system put heavy emphasis on dictates an attenuated approach to stylistic system in *Breaking Bad*? In order to answer these questions, I will embark on the first analytic assignment that tries to demonstrate the first strategy of stylistic engineering that reveals *Breaking Bad’s* approximation to the cinematic analogy: the intensification of the continuity system.

### 3.4. Intensifying the Continuity System As A Visual Stylistic Strategy

Globally speaking, the channelling of narrative information in *Breaking Bad* shows a great amount of textual evidences of the intensified continuity system. However, this does not automatically presuppose that principles of continuity derived from the classical schema are totally absent. A cluster of classical continuity principles appears in many sequences of *Breaking Bad’s* episodes.101 For instance, as regards to editing, there are two features of continuity that provide signs of conformity to Hollywood’s classicism: the maximum clarity of spatio-temporal relation between shots and the cutting rate.

For the large part, shots in *Breaking Bad* are governed by rules derived from the classical continuity. As an example, if we take a conversation sequence as a useful sample to scrutinize continuity in an individual work, the following fragment from the pilot episode demonstrates the classical conformity. In this pilot episode, significant story information that involves the main character(s) needs to be imparted in order to answer the ‘who, where, what, and why’ questions early on. Since Walt is a central character, narrative data about who he is, what kind of family he has, where they live, what causes him to drive the narrative forward and other relevant contexts need to be established in the exposition phase or in what Kristin Thompson calls the *setup*.102 Once the opening teaser and the title sequence are presented, we cut to an exterior shot of a middle-sized house in a suburban environment which functions as an establishing shot (Fig. 3.1).103 After a series of expository shots cuing us to infer that the man we see in these images is Walter White as conveyed by a medium close up of the man followed by a point of view shot providing us a tight close up of a Nobel Prize recognition for a research project that states “Walter H. White” as the recipient. However, there is nothing remarkable about his living

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101 With the exception of the opening teasers or the ambiguous *cold opens* in season two I mentioned previously. Nevertheless, as I have explained, these *cold opens* do not interfere with the actual body of the main episodes. Therefore, even if the spatio-temporal presentations in these *cold opens* are made unclear and fractured, our comprehensibility of the constructed fabula of the show will not be distorted.


103 All visual illustrations accompanying the analysis in this chapter will be provided in Appendix A.
circumstances as previous shots conveyed his frugal living condition and lethargic physical mobility.

As soon as this is established, the next sequence covers the conversation between him and his family members in the following morning. A master shot, which functions as a new establishing shot, soon followed to present the visual of the diegetic geography, i.e. the dining room, and the characters in it. Walt and presumably his wife Skylar are in the room as we listen to her saying, “that is veggie bacon, with low cholesterol, you won’t taste the difference,” responding to Walt’s perplexed reaction of what he sees on his plate. After two subsequent medium close ups of Walt and Skyler, another character enters the space as another master shot acting as a re-establishing shot capture the three characters in a medium shot framing (Fig. 3.2). Now we have three characters around the dining table. The third character is apparently their son, Walter, Jr. First, the conversation involves Walter, Jr. and Skylar as she criticizes him for being late again for breakfast. Apparently this is not the first time. He complains that it is all because the hot water heater is dysfunctional so he could not take a shower. In conveying this exchange of lines, we get a ‘single’ shot of Skyler in medium close up (Fig. 3.3), then we cut to a reverse shot of Walter, Jr. (Fig. 3.4) with Skylar’s right side of her head at the lower left of the frame. Skylar suggests that he should get up early so he can take hot shower while a ‘single’ of Walt is inserted denoting his deadpan irresponsiveness104 (Fig. 3.5) before another ‘single’ of Skylar cuts in (Fig. 3.6). Walt Jr. insists that it is far better to purchase a new hot water heater instead—visualized by a reverse shot in an over-the-shoulder framing (Fig. 3.7). Further relevant narrative information about Walt will be given in the proceeding shots where we cut to a medium close up of Walt coughing painfully, soon to be followed by a medium shot of Skylar asking if he had taken some medication. Walt replies “Yes, I think it’s getting better” as we see him in another medium close up registering his suppressed chest pain. The scene is wrapped up by a dialogue exchange between Walt and Walter Jr. as the son mockingly asks his dad what it feels like to be ‘old’ on his birthday. This is presented by an over-the-shoulder shot taken from another continuity line (Fig. 3.8). Finally, additional ‘singles’ conclude the sequence as Walt Jr. complains about the suspicious-looking veggie bacon (Figs. 3.9-3.10).

As we have observed, the relation between these shots and the way they are put together lead us to conclude that the classical continuity principle is upheld in narrating story information within a dialogue sequence. First, we have a clear establishing shot of the house where Walt and his family reside, then, we get a master shot establishing where the characters are once the conversation around the dining table begins between Walt and Skylar. We get a re-establishing shot when Walt Jr. joins the breakfast. These establishing shots and re-establishing shot are imperative in determining the locale, but more importantly, to clarify the spatial relations between the characters in the scene. Additionally, this spatial relation is maintained by positioning the camera within the axis of action or the 180° line consistently. The over-the-shoulder shots between Skylar

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104 A ‘single’ points to medium-shot or close-up showing only one player as opposed to the ‘two shot’ that handles two characters in a rather roomy framing.
and Walt Jr., are taken methodically from one side of the axis, which is the right side of the dining table if we take the master shot as our vantage point (Fig. 3.2). Next to this, the eye-line matches as continuity parameters are constructed accordingly to the proper screen direction. For example, when Walt responds to his son’s cynical remark about becoming ‘old’ in his birthday, Walt looks to the left indicating Walter, Jr.’s position in his left side (Fig. 3.9). This is confirmed by the next shot as it frames Walter, Jr. on the right side of the frame matching Walt’s point of view (Fig. 3.10). Furthermore, match-on-action is indicated when characters are transitioning from standing around the table to sitting down (Figs. 3.2, 3.4 and 3.7).

Another sign of proclivity to classical continuity in Breaking Bad is the editing pace. If we take cutting rate to be the first criterion of an intensified continuity style, Breaking Bad runs against the hyper accelerated editing speed that contemporary Hollywood cinema and post-network television dramas employ. To supply verifiable empirical data in supporting this claim, I incorporated the Cinemetrics ASL (Average Shot Length) measurement software developed by film scholars Yuri Tsivian and Barry Salt into my analysis of Breaking Bad’s cutting rate by examining five episodes as analytic samples: the pilot episode, “Breakage” (Season 2, Episode 5), “Sunset” (Season 3, Episode 6), “Half Measures” (Season 3, Episode 12) and “Full Measures” (Season 3, Episode 13).

The results of the measurement yield that the ASLs of these episodes indicate that Breaking Bad is cut at a medium length rate. The pilot episode stands at 6.2 seconds. Meanwhile “Sunset” and “Breakage” clock in at 5.7 and 6.2 seconds respectively. “No Mas” is cut a little lengthier at 7.1 seconds, and “Full Measures” represents the lengthiest ASL of these four episodes as it clocks in at 9 seconds. Therefore, the overall mean ASL of the 5 episodes is 6.84 seconds.106

Comparatively, Breaking Bad’s cutting pace is relatively sedate when juxtaposed against its televisial contemporaries of similar format, i.e. long-form serialized primetime dramas, such as Lost (ASL 3.4 seconds), Mad Men (ASL 4.8 seconds) and The Wire (ASL 3.9). It is indicative that the show opted for a calmer approach to editing rhythm.107 This medium level cutting rate consequently puts Breaking Bad within the range of attenuated-continuity programs of the 1980s as represented by Dallas with the mean ASL of 6.6 seconds.108 However, this rate is also not far from the ASL range of the pioneering intensified continuity-aspired televisial drama, Miami Vice. As Jeremy G. Butler and John Fiske have shown, despite the fact that music video-influenced montage in Miami Vice is cut faster

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105 This software can be accessed on http://www.cinemetrics.lv/
than its whole episode,\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Miami Vice} is cut at medium pace as its mean ASL (5.75 seconds) designate.\textsuperscript{110} In comparison with the cinematic features, \textit{Breaking Bad}'s mean ASL reside in the editing tempo of feature-length Hollywood films in the 1970s and 1980s, which according to Bordwell falls between 5 and 8 seconds although films (especially 'music-videos'-inspired ones) clocking under 4 seconds were not that uncommon.\textsuperscript{111} In sum, \textit{Breaking Bad}, in respect to editing rate, is not cut as rapidly as one would expect from a contemporary televiisual work. It does not subscribe to the current trend of fast-paced editing tempo. Instead, it chooses a medium-range rate that gives less impression of a bustling and frenetic shot-to-shot shift that contemporary television drama and major Hollywood cinematic features project.

Yet, in spite of the medium-sized cutting rapidity and the compliance with continuity rules, there are other dimensions of intensified continuity that \textit{Breaking Bad} exhibits. As discussed previously, according to Bordwell, there are three other strategies besides cutting rate that can be identified from an intensified continuity schema. These are the reliance on closer shots in dialogue scenes, the utilization of extremely long and extremely short focal lengths and hyperactive camera movement. Let us consider the breakfast conversation sequence one more time. Notwithstanding the consistent implementation of the continuity principles—adherence to 180° line, screen direction, eye-line match, match-on-action, etc.—the way the scene is laid out into a great amount of closer shots corroborates the assumption that intensified continuity has prominence over attenuated stylistic schema. In this particular scene, once all the characters are in the dining room, we get one master shot in \textbf{Fig. 3.2} that also functions as an establishing shot. However, as soon as this is given, a series of tighter framings take over. In an attenuated continuity schema-driven show that derives from classical Hollywood style prior to 1960s, this type of conversation sequence would have been typically staged and presented by static and roomy framings such as insistant master shot(s) or two-shots. As Bordwell points out, this practice led to stretches of scenes being played out in a \textit{plan américain}, which cut off actors around the knees or mid-thighs. This framing also allowed for lengthy two-shots favoring players’ bodies.\textsuperscript{112} In television drama of the classic network era, a conversation scene such as this one might have been shot in distant framing capturing the action in one shot as the \textit{Dallas} “Digger” sequence visualizes in the previous chapter (\textbf{Fig. 2.2}). However, in films imbued by the intensified continuity schema, this procedure has been replaced by the preponderance of ‘singles’ and over-the-shoulder shots. Vince Gilligan in directing this episode elects exactly this dynamic closer shots method. Gilligan breaks the scene down to 33 shots that yields 2.9 seconds ASL.\textsuperscript{113} Of all these 33 shots, 13 of them are

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{109} Butler found that music video styled segment in \textit{Miami Vice} is cut at 2.27 seconds ASL (Butler, \textit{Television Style}, 98) while Fiske found them cut close to three seconds (Fiske, “Miami Vice, Miami Pleasure,” 113-115).
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Butler, \textit{Television Style}, 97.
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Bordwell, \textit{Intensified Continuity}, 17; Bordwell, \textit{The Way Hollywood Tells It}, 122.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Bordwell, \textit{The Way Hollywood Tells It}, 130.
  \item \textsuperscript{113} ASL measurement conducted on August 14, 2011. Data available on the Cinemetrics website: http://www.cinemetrics.lv/movie.php?movie_ID=8699
\end{itemize}
“singles” and 16 are over-the-shoulder shots. There are only two master shots and one close up of the veggie bacon and a two shot. Thus, judging from the number of closer shots and the scarcity of plan américain framings, Gilligan overhauls the conversation sequence to a more lively and energetic flow that gives the scene an upgraded feel and thus evokes an intensified moment-by-moment detail that we find in post-1960s (New) Hollywood cinema and beyond. Additionally, the fact that the sequence is cut faster (2.9 seconds ASL) than the whole episode (6.2 seconds ASL) indicates the dynamism of an intensified continuity of a conversation sequence, which is one of the obligatory sequences that almost always present in narrative film and television program.

While the conversation scene illustrates the reliance on closer shots as a dimension of the intensified continuity framework, the following sequence taken from the Emmy Award winning episode “No Mas” (Season 3, Episode 1) further demonstrates the two other chief parameters: bi-polar use of extreme length lens and hyperactive camera movement. In the opening teaser, since narration is carried out omnisciently in Breaking Bad, we get to be introduced to the mysterious twin brothers who work as hit men for the Mexican drug cartel Juárez—a ruthless and dangerous drug trafficking organization based in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Mexico. At this particular moment, the twins, referred to as the ‘Cousins’, are on their way to enter the United States to seek revenge for the loss of their cousin Tuco Salamanca. This vengeance is motivated by the fact that Tuco was killed in a shootout. They are convinced that Walt killed Tuco, while in reality it was actually Hank who shot Tuco in a shootout. The Cousins are nonetheless determined to find and kill Walt. Walt has not the slightest inkling of this predicament. What is extraordinary about this opening teaser is that we get to be introduced to the Cousins in a fairly cryptic and bizarre fashion. Moreover, the way it is presented conspicuously testifies that the elements of intensified continuity pervade in this sequence.

The sequence contains 34 shots. It lasts for 3.55 minutes and it is cut at a medium-range ASL of 6.3 seconds.\footnote{ASL measurement conducted on August 1, 2011. Data available on the Cinemetrics website: http://www.cinemetrics.lv/movie.php?movie_ID=8620} It opens with a fade-in to an extreme long shot of the vast desert tilting down from the clouded sky toward the miniscule village that is barely seen at the lower part of the frame (Fig. 3.11). Next, we get some establishing shots that situate us in the locale where the plot is taking place. Although it does not tell us explicitly, we can infer that this must be outside of the United States, presumably a small village in Mexico since the second establishing shot cues us to make this presumption: a long shot of the dusty road with a man wearing a Mexican farmer hat leading a donkey by the hand. Once the locale is established, albeit inexplicitly, we cut to a tight close-up of a hand in a yellow glove. The hand apparently belongs to an aged longhared man who is for some inexplicable reason crawling on the ground. The following shot perplexes us even further as we see this man, conveyed by a wide-angled shot, crawling toward a particular destination while a passer-by enters the frame from the left as he is walking toward the door of a house (Fig. 3.12). However, this shot prompts us to wonder: Why is the passer-by not surprised by the peculiarity of the crawling
man? As if it suggests to us that it is an ordinary sight for him. We soon learn that the crawling man is not alone. There are other people following his lead. Bystanders and villagers, bizarrely enough, do not seem to care about this as the two shots (Figs. 3.13-3.14) present us a re-establishing shot with the wide angle view of the diegetic geography: we see these people crawling while other villagers dine and drink on the left side of the pathway. Who are these crawling people, we might ask? Moreover, where are they heading?

Once we are exposed to the crawling men and women in the supposedly rural Mexican village, we now have an extreme long shot of the desert as we are noticing a car heading toward our point of view. Normal-length lenses with 50mm focal length cannot achieve this shot, therefore a telephoto lens is used to flatten the image in order to capture an action or an object that is too far away to obtain. Several shots show us that this car is entering the village where we have seen the crawling men and women continuing this perplexing activity (Fig. 3.15). In the meantime, the non-crawling villagers are curious to see who the people in the car are as medium shots of the villagers looking left off-screen followed by the eye-line matched shot of the car coming into the village threshold going through the crawling people. Soon enough the car pulls in on the side of the road as we obtain a closer look of the car. Through a wide shot, we can see that it is a Mercedes Benz, suggesting us that the people in it are not just the ordinary villagers; they could be someone important or affluent. This shot is made possible by the utilization of a wide-angle lens with the focal length ranging from 9.8mm to 35mm photographically distorting the objects represented so that they can all be in one frame. However, the utilization of such a wide-angle lens can also function to exaggerate characters’ presence. In this case, it is to dramatize the arrival of the mysterious twin brothers as conveyed to us by a series of extreme close ups from their getting out off the car to the macro shot of their skull-tipped leather boots (Fig. 3.16). In this context, the narrative significance of these extreme close ups resides in their capacity to invoke mystery by isolating our attention restrictively to parts of the characters’ body rather than showing us everything at once. It is there to withhold narrative information. Again, to provoke us with questions instead of straightforward revelations as the faces of these twins are still concealed. Nevertheless, the proceeding shot begins to answer the questions.

What is significant about the latter part of this sequence is that it illustrates the other strategies of intensified continuity that Bordwell indicates: mobile framing and dynamic camera movement. It begins with a sweeping rightward hand-held tracking shot moving fluidly from a slightly below the eye-level framing that gives us the encompassing visual of the crawling men until it settles on a medium shot of the two men in suit who are getting out off the Mercedes Benz. Subsequently, the camera seamlessly focuses on one of the two men standing in the foreground of the plane observing the environment (Figs. 3.17-3.19). With the cunning employment of the racking focus technique, the framing shifts focus to the other men-in-suit standing adjacently (Fig. 3.20), giving us a visual clue that they are actually identical twins. Next, the focus field shifts back to the first man as he is rotating his head as if he is making sure that it is the right time to make a move (Fig. 3.21). It is important to note here that rack focus is
used to preserve the instantaneity of the action by refusing to cut in a traditional manner (e.g., close up of the first cousin then followed by a straight cut of the other one in similar framing). This rather self-conscious play of focus, which came to prominence in the 1960s, is orchestrated to create ‘shifting compositions in depth.’\textsuperscript{115} By shifting us from the closer plane to the distant one, the rack focus exemplifies the opposite pole of the lens length, which is the telephoto lens that could be up to 400mm.

However, the juxtaposition of shots taken by an extreme wide-angle lens with the telephoto lens is further pronounced in the shots following the last one. Soon enough the two brothers kneel down, descend to the ground, and begin to crawl like the rest (Fig. 3.22). As the twins crawl further, conveyed to us by another hand-held tracking shot (Fig. 3.23), we now get another re-establishing shot through a wide-angle lens as the endpoint of the crawling journey is in sight. Apparently, they are all headed for a shrine decorated with mystical accessories in its exterior. In this shot, below-eye level framing accompanying the wide shot captures the twins reaching toward this supposedly sacred space (Fig. 3.24). Conversely, the shot now reveals a reverse angle of the previous shot through a flattened image of the crawlers with the desert in the distant plane, made possible by the employment of long focal-length lenses (Fig. 3.25) as we cut back to a wide-angle enabled shot presenting the two cousins reaching the entrance of the shrine (Fig. 3.26). This immediate juxtaposition of long shots and wide-angled shots and the orchestration of racking focus signal how dynamic and stylized this opening sequence is. Furthermore, equipped with fluid tracking shots—hand-held instead of using a dolly track—the mobile camera movement in this sequence additionally contributes to the invocation of intensified texture that stresses moment-by-moment visual detail.

In regards to all these expositions, evidently, classical continuity principles are maintained in the two analyzed sequences. Nevertheless, the presentations of these sequences do not typify the supposedly ‘invisible’ or attenuated continuity schema that classical Hollywood cinema and primetime TV dramas of the classic network era exercised. On the contrary, elements of classical techniques in \textit{Breaking Bad} are conspicuously revamped, thus intensifying the flow of continuity in a lively manner. However, not all of the stylistic criteria of the intensified continuity as proposed by Bordwell are demonstrated in \textit{Breaking Bad}. Fast editing speed, as one of the indicators of continuity intensification, is not embraced in \textit{Breaking Bad} as the medium-length mean ASL, taken from the analysis of the five episodes, verifies. On the other hand, wide-ranging camera movement and mobile framing, the use of extreme lens-lengths from wide-angle to telephoto lenses and the dividing up of a typical dialogue scene into an array of tighter and closer shots show that continuity in \textit{Breaking Bad} is far from subdued or toned down. Perhaps we may conceptualize this strategy as ‘selective intensification’ where some stylistic elements are pumped up while others remain tempered down. As a stylistic framework, the intensification of continuity is key to give the general texture of the show a more dynamic and exuberant feel. This conception is widely held among filmmakers and cinematographers of

\textsuperscript{115} Bordwell, \textit{The Way Hollywood Tells It}, 127.
contemporary Hollywood cinema. Therefore, it is not too far-fetched to argue here that Gilligan et al. aim to bring this framework of vibrant stylization to television drama. However, classical continuity principles at the same time are imperative to maintain because the balance between narrational efficacy and visual stylistic hyperbolization needs to be sustained. After all, what Gilligan et al. set to do in *Breaking Bad* is to tell the story as efficaciously as possible yet presenting it in a non-static fashion. Ultimately, as Bordwell has suggested, intensified continuity does not necessarily defy the classical techniques altogether. Rather, there is a heightened implementation of these techniques where we see them being pumped up to a hyperbolic degree.

3.5. Foregrounding the Mise-en-scène Through Setting and Lighting

While intensifying the continuity serves as a vital strategy in stylizing a televisual drama to accomplish the cinematic analogy, this approach is not unique to *Breaking Bad*. As Jeremy G. Butler maintains in his analysis of the stylistic crossover of film to television in the post-network TVII age, the intensified continuity schema was already evident in *Miami Vice* (1986). Much more in the TV3 context, dramatic forms such as police procedural and crime dramas like *CSI* (CBS, 2000—present), *The Shield* (FX, 2002—2008), *Dexter* (Showtime, 2006—present) and so forth illustrate the implementation of intensified forms of continuity. Not to mention the generically-mixed serialized dramas such as *Lost* (ABC, 2004—2010), *Fringe* (Fox, 2008—present), *Veronica Mars* (UPN & The CW, 2004—2007) and others which are recognized for their high production values. Thus, despite the unavailability of detailed study on the TV3 dramas’ visual style equivalent to Bordwell’s “Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in the Contemporary Film” (2002), we can safely assume that intensified continuity is now the norm in American television drama. For that reason, in order to distinguish itself from the rest of the televisual pack, *Breaking Bad* employs other strategies that are just as salient as continuity intensification. One of the ways in which *Breaking Bad* does this is to foreground other element of film style, i.e. the mise-en-scène. In this subchapter, I will focus on how this strategy is evident in the way Gilligan et al. engineer two salient mise-en-scène components— setting and lighting— to shape the distinct visual stylistic of the show.

3.5.1 Setting

As one of the building blocks of the narrative system, one crucial element of the mise-en-scène is the setting. In narrative films and television programs, setting is typically constructed out of two sources: studio sets and existing locales. In the stylistic history of American television, two modes of set designs have characterized certain fictional genres and formats. Multi-camera soap operas and

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116 It is reported that Newton Thomas Sigel combined creeping zooms and push-ins for *The Usual Suspects*, and thereby, in one writer’s words, “added subtle energy to scenes despite cramped practical locations and short shooting schedules” (David E. Williams, “Unusual Suspects,” American Cinematographer 81, no. 7 [July 2000]: 38 (cited in Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, 262).

sitcoms tend to shoot indoor in a studio set due to narrative, technological and economic constraints.\textsuperscript{118} On the other hand, hour-long TV dramas and telefilms have historically utilized both the controlled environment of built sets and on-location shooting, even though many primetime dramas in the classic network era used studio sets to simulate exterior settings.\textsuperscript{119}

To shape \textit{Breaking Bad}'s diegetic spaces, as well as to create one of its distinct visual characteristics, Gilligan et al. make use of these two avenues of setting-making at the utmost level. Constructed sets are utilized prominently for recurring key interior settings in the story. Meanwhile, existing locales are vitally exploited to foreground quintessential exterior settings that play narrative importance in \textit{Breaking Bad}. Although existing locales are simultaneously chosen for representing other interior settings, they do not stand out as much as its application for principal exterior settings in the diegesis. Taken together, these combined approaches to setting contribute greatly to the show's overall visual stylistic identity.

\subsection*{3.5.1.1 Constructed Sets for Recurring Key Interior Settings}

The main functions of interior settings are clearly to house characters engaged in the story. To facilitate the characters’ interaction and actions \textit{Breaking Bad} uses some recurring sets repetitively in many of its episodes. Walt's home is one that is almost always present throughout the three seasons. Through the craftsmanship of production designers Robb Wilson King and Mark Freeborn with the creative approval of Vince Gilligan, the representation of home in the interior scenes is constructed to establish a high degree of verisimilitude. The deep space construction of the interior of the house not only functions as a narrative context but it also signifies the aesthetic aspiration that Gilligan is aiming at, which among other things is to break away from the traditional attenuated stylistic schema of space representation in television drama. Traditionally speaking, studio sets in television production are typically wider and shallower than they are deep. They are more rectangular rather than square. For that reason, actors' movement are limited to move laterally side-by-side rather than forward and backward as the Digger's bedroom sequence in \textit{Dallas} illustrates (Fig. 2.2).

Conversely, by making use of the sound stage facility, Gilligan and his production designers exaggerate the depth of the space, thus allowing the actors to move to the front and back of the interior flexibly (Figs. 3.27-3.28).

However, besides aesthetic implication, in \textit{Breaking Bad} the construction of the house's interior spaces plays crucial dramatic significance. As Walt is dragged further and deeper into the dark 'meth' world, his relationship with his family is crumbling down. Moreover, Walt is getting into a more tenuous relationship with Skylar and consequently loosing the affection of his disabled son. For instance, the living room as a central familial space for many American dramatic television programs is characterized in \textit{Breaking Bad} as cold vacant space with no soulful interaction. The ways in which this emptiness is signified is


\textsuperscript{119} Butler, \textit{Television Style}, 86-87.
through the aggrandized deep space construction to imply the aura of desolation. The hallway is long and narrow as the below eye-level wide angled Wellesian shot conveys (Fig. 3.29) while the main room is wide and spacious (Fig. 3.30). Yet, the distance between each part of the house to the others seems long. When Walt and Skylar are engaged in a conversation, they seem to stand in two far-parted zones in the house whereas in fact they are actually in between the living room and the kitchen (Fig. 3.31). This is functionally constructed to imply their deteriorating marital relationship and the crisis of trust between them.

The use of depth in set design is further amplified in one of the most important diegetic spaces in *Breaking Bad*, which ultimately functions as a motif than a mere setting. This is the recreational vehicle (RV) that Walt and Jesse converted into a mobile meth-lab (Fig. 3.32). In reality, the spatial dimension of a camping van may not be too accommodating for such an intensive and space-consuming procedure as manufacturing methamphetamine at a large scale. However, through the exploit of set construction, the interior geography of the RV can be widened, heightened and deepened to allow flexibility not only for the characters to move around but also for giving room for the production unit, camera placement and other technical details to record the scene in a controlled fashion. Had this been shot in an actual RV, the camerawork might be too restricted as the only feasible solution is to do it hand held. But in this instance, the constructed interior of the RV allowed variable ways of camera placement to capture the scene in a methodically stylized fashion. For example, the shot from a lower angle may be chosen to suggest the tall height of the RV as the visible ceiling signifies (Fig. 3.33) and in a different manner a medium shot that denotes the implied depth of the RV from a reverse angle could be deployed as well (Fig. 3.34).

Besides the aesthetic implication, the exaggerated interior dimension of the RV, and the RV in general, has vital narrative functions. Firstly, to facilitate the long and dreadful decision-making processes that Walt and Jesse have to make without the presence of other people. Most of these decisions are narratively crucial since they could bring fortunes and ordeals instantaneously; nevertheless, the RV metaphorically becomes a silent witness to their incriminating conversations and tactical planning. Secondly, the RV becomes the only setting where Walt and Jesse could actually get to know each other better as presented in one of the most memorable episode in season two ("4 Days Out") where they are out in the desert ‘cooking’, but due to some technical mishap (mostly caused by Jesse’s lack of experience) they cannot return to the city and are therefore stuck with each other for four days straight. It is inside of the RV that they share personal stories, get into quarrels, call each other names and come up with ideas to resolve the technical problem. For that reason, the simulated spaciousness of the RV interior is required to facilitate the characters’ relation and development (Fig. 3.5). However, since the RV is a source of evidence that the DEA could use against them, as Hank is beginning to suspect something, they need to get rid of the RV. When it is being demolished in the episode “Sunset,” it is presented as if a character is leaving the story since the sequence is orchestrated in an operatic grandeur resembling a funeral (Figs. 3.36-3.38). At the end of the day, the RV that initially functioned as a context
for the characters to deepen the story complexity and their relation gradually transformed to a motif and arguably to a ‘silent’ recurring character that may not have said a word but has always been there all along for Walt and Jesse.

3.5.1.2 Existing Locales for Principal Exterior Settings

On an equal weight, the use of existing locales for principal exterior settings in the story contribute to the shaping of Breaking Bad’s distinct visual features. Far from the glamorous vibe of the sunny west coast and the cosmopolitanism of New York City, Breaking Bad breaks away from the traditional setting of an American television drama by situating its diegetic universe in the Southwest, precisely in the city of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

The vast landscapes of the New Mexico desert and dry vegetation have become the visual signature of the show that recur time and time again as the opening sequence of the pilot episode established early on (Fig. 3.39). The exterior shots of the desert are routinely showcased in the opening teasers, acting both as establishing shots as well as a reminder that we are back in the storyworld of Breaking Bad which is taking place in a particular part of the United States that people hardly associate with crime drama or television drama in general (Figs. 3.40-3.41).

David Lavery maintains that, in this case, Breaking Bad is one of the few contemporary TV dramas that brings in the local feel and particularities of regional atmosphere of the United States. This strategy is along the line of the emerging “local color” movement that a small number of TV3 American dramas have picked up since The Sopranos. By choosing actual locales, albeit small and unpopular, Breaking Bad and a few others are echoing the local color movement of the 19th century literary school, according to Lavery. While I am not prepared to substantiate the comparison that Lavery has made, as it needs further critical substantiations, nevertheless, I share his following observation:

Not since The Sopranos—set and filmed in New Jersey—however, has location, location, location been more integral to a dramatic series than in Breaking Bad, which turns Albuquerque and the American Southwest into a setting that functions as both text and context.122

[Emphasis mine]

Indeed, as Gilligan explains in an interview, “The big skies and stark beauty of New Mexico have become characters all their own,” confirming the function of the exterior spaces of the setting as elements that support the distinct visual

120 Some of the shows that emulate the ‘local color’ of the U.S. include Middle (ABC, 2009-) set in Orson, Indiana; Justified (FX, 2010-) set in Lexington, Kentucky; Big Love (HBO, 2006-) set in Salt Lake City, Utah (cited in Lavery, “Bad Quality: Breaking Bad as Basic Cable Quality TV”).
121 It has bigger possibility that a similar form of “local color” movement in cinematic arts influenced television more than literature. However, there needs to be a further study to substantiate this claim.
122 Lavery, “Bad Quality: Breaking Bad as Basic Cable Quality TV.”
ambition of Breaking Bad. However, as Gilligan has stated, these New Mexico imageries have become “characters all their own,” and this is where narrative functions take over visual exhibitionism.

The New Mexico deserts are narratively crucial because they are perpetually represented as unrestrained open diegetic spaces wherein high dramatic actions take place. They facilitate incriminating appointments (Fig. 3.42), they are a safe haven for illegal activities such as the murder, drug trade and ‘meth cooking’ (Fig. 3.43), and more important, the desert becomes the space where innocent people implicated by Walt’s actions are undeservingly hit by tragic calamities. To cite an example, Walt’s brother in law Hank is sent by his office to bust a drug transaction. They have an insider working for them, a snitch named Tortuga (Danny Trejo). Tortuga is sent by the DEA as bait for getting the Juárez drug cartel to transact a drug deal in the U.S. territory in the outer rim of the desert so that they can apprehend the cartel’s cronies (Fig. 3.44). Hank is anxious to complete this mission. Little does he, however, that Tortuga is already killed by the cartel by the twin Cousins. By a great sense of detail and the mastery of the production designer and art direction, we see Turtoga’s head decapitated and placed atop a living tortoise (Fig. 3.45). The DEA agents are shocked when they discover this, while Hank is nauseated from witnessing this cruel and grotesque event. Therefore, he moves away from the tortoise and starts vomiting. While his colleagues are mocking his disgusted reaction, an unexpected explosion occurs (Fig. 3.46). Apparently, the tortoise acts as a booby trap. The DEA agents are severely injured; one of them loses his leg while others die on the spot (Fig. 3.47). Hank is unharmed but this event scars him psychologically for the rest of the story, as we will see him crumbling down mentally and physically as well. By setting this highly storyboarded sequence, the desert facilitates not only one of the most tense and horrid moments in Breaking Bad, but it also serves as recurring spatial personage that the show could not do without. It is crucial for accentuating the visual identity of the show but also to enhance dramatic significances, thus functioning both as context and text as Lavery would have it.

3.5.2 Not Afraid of the Dark: Lighting and Mood Sculpting

‘Dark’ is a descriptive word that appears quite often when viewers and critics characterize Breaking Bad. However, in many circumstances, they pick this adjective to figuratively identify the thematic feature and character development in the show. Thus, a frequently expressed comment such as “It’s a really dark show” points to the tragic and painful unfolding of Walt’s metamorphosis from a high-school chemistry teacher, or Mr. Chips, to the cold-blooded ambitious drug kingpin who is becoming more morally ambivalent and not hesitant to lie, manipulate and kill. He indeed has gradually turned into a present day Scarface as Gilligan fondly put it. On a stylistic level, lighting design plays a foundational role in engendering this narrative and thematic characterization. One of the

crucial ways in which ‘dark’ mood is created in *Breaking Bad* is through rejecting the conventional three point lighting and high key lighting style. Instead, it applies salient non-classical lighting design, direction and quality. This approach is translated into the application of low-key lighting style, side lighting and hard lighting techniques to a tremendous extent.

In *Breaking Bad*, low-key lighting style—achieved by intensive hard lighting while lessening or eliminating fill light altogether—is consistently applied to interior scenes. The living room of the Whites’ residence is permeated with solemn darkness, even though an establishing shot informs us that the scene is occurring in a relatively bright sunny day (Fig. 3.48). In the second season premiere entitled “737,” Walt had just returned to the house after a rough day dealing with difficult situation caused by the drug lord Tuco Salamanca. Tuco had killed one of his sidekicks during a meeting which Walt and Jesse attended but they did not do anything to stop it. He is anguished and agitated after witnessing such horrifying carnage. When he arrives at the house, he turns on the television set and continuously starts channel zapping as we cut to a tight close up of his face lit unevenly (Fig. 3.49). Skylar comes out to greet him but Walt does not respond (Fig. 3.50). In a parallel mode, when we cut to Jesse’s house in the proceeding sequence, we obtain a similar presentation of high contrast lighting quality, notwithstanding the fact that the plot is unfolding at a bright afternoon, again conveyed by an establishing shot (Fig. 3.51). In this scene we see Walt and Jesse devising the next strategy to get rid of Tuco since they are currently witnesses to Tuco’s manslaughter. The conversation is set in the kitchen and the only source of illumination is the window overlooking the garage. As a result, we merely see silhouetted images of the two characters in conversation (Fig. 3.52). When the scene occurs at night, these settings are represented even darker, accentuating the bright and dark areas of the geography, as illustrated by the sequence that involves Walt receiving a visitor at night named Mike. The lighting is extremely minimal to such an extent that we can barely catch sight of Mike on the left side of the frame until he leaves and opens the door (Fig. 3.53).

124 Technological improvements in the production and reception context of cinema and television have allowed this extreme minimum lighting scheme to be achievable and acceptable. The increased high sensitivity of film stock had permitted filmmakers to shoot in extreme low-key lighting procedure as well as using realistic illumination sources on-location such as street lamps, city lights, etc. Since the 1980s, this technical possibility in lighting schema enabled by technological refinement has been explored by filmmakers aiming to emulate and expand the *noir* visual atmosphere in the contemporary cinematic context as exemplified for instance by Ridley Scott’s cyberpunk sci-fi *Blade Runner* (1982). In addition to film stock, as Bordwell and Thompson observe, in terms of viewing and reception, the usage of more powerful projection lamps in movie theatres could bring out extreme details in the shadow areas of the shots, therefore encouraging directors and cinematographers to apply low-key lighting on many occasions (*Film History: An Introduction*, 687-688). Correspondingly, in television context, the widespread acceptance of widescreen digital HDTV and the BluRay DVD formats which project higher image resolution than the analog standard definition TV and video formats (Betamax or VHS), permitted home viewers to gaze at darkly-lit and deep-shadowed films and television shows in miniscule details. As a result, television makers are no longer afraid to shoot in a tremendously minimally-lit setting as opposed to the previous eras in television production where television cameras were insensitive to light that required the setting to be lit evenly and brightly.
These high-contrast pictorial imageries evidently have narrative consequences. For one thing, it functions to suggest foreboding mood and a gloomy atmosphere—a self-evident facet of this anti-traditional lighting design. Secondly, it points to the idea that the feeling of warm jovial home does not exist in the diegetic universe of *Breaking Bad* as Walt is drifting away from his family and transforming into an architect of crime, ironically, under the pretext of providing for his family.

Side lighting as a particular technique of lighting direction achieved by employing a single key light without any fill on an actor’s face is also utilized in many episodes of *Breaking Bad*. As illustrated in Fig. 3.49, Walt’s face is lit half from the right side by radiating a strong key light. This creates a stark contrast between the shadow on his left side of the face and the illuminated half of the face. In television dramas that adhere to the attenuated continuity style, this choice of lighting is often avoided as characters’ faces should be brightly lit just as much as the spatial setting, again referring back to *Dallas*’ example (Fig. 2.2). Although there are certain moments in primetime dramas of the classic network era when this type of lighting is chosen to support the narrative demands. For instance, when a sinister character or a villain is introduced. But in the case of *Breaking Bad*, side lighting is maintained to imply the solemnity of character traits and to evoke a sense of pessimism and despondency as Fig. 3.54 exemplifies.

In addition to low-key lighting style and side lighting technique as signals of non-conformity toward conventional three point lighting principle, hard lighting quality is adequately visible throughout many of episodes in *Breaking Bad*. Most notably, in exterior shots that use direct sunlight as the source of illumination, light is undiffused and consequently casts harsh and distinct shadows (Fig. 3.55). At night time, hard lighting becomes the pictorial tool for sculpting character’s feelings as illustrated in the scene in which Walt comes out unexpectedly to save Jesse from being assassinated by two rival Latino drug dealers. Walt crushes the two gangsters with his car at full speed and eventually shoots one of them right in the head with a handgun (Fig. 3.56). Consequently, Walt feels perversely virile and mighty as he has done something he could not have pictured doing in his previous life. This feelingful quality is portrayed quite appropriately by the hard lighting texture suggestively beamed by the street lamps as the low angle framing supports the shot (Fig. 3.57).

In this particular context, one can suggest that it is through the foregrounding of low-key lighting as a component of mise-en-scène that *Breaking Bad* reveals one of its cinematic influences: the film noir. In spite of the continual scholarly debate concerning the genre status of film noir in cinema studies, some identifiable characteristics of the noir movies are accepted as unifying threads. One of these threads concerns the visual style. Film critic and screenwriter Paul Schrader goes so far as to claim that film noir is not actually a genre per se but rather an attitude as he argues, “Film noir is not a genre...It is not defined, as are the Western and gangster genres, by conventions of setting and conflict, but rather by the more subtle qualities of tone and mood.” To produce the chorus of subtle ‘tone and mood’, low-key lighting procedure also

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125 Paul Schrader, “Notes on Film Noir,” *Film Comment*, spring 1972, 8.
known as the *chiaroscuro* style becomes an integral part of that process. This idea is reverberated by a preeminent cinematographer Vilmos Zsigmond, ASC., in his attempt to emulate the film noir style in Brian de Palma’s *The Black Dahlia* (2006): “Film noir is an abstract form of art that uses *light* and *shadows* to set the moods for stories.” [Emphasis mine]

In that sense, the dark *chiaroscuro* visual look in film noir has pertinent narrative implications. It is not designed merely for aesthetic motivation. For the most part, as explained previously, the *chiaroscuro* effect is employed to invoke the sombre atmospheric mood of the noir storyworld. J.A. Place and L.S. Peterson in “Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir” contend that the characteristic noir moods as suggested by the *chiaroscuro* type lighting may include ‘claustrophobia, paranoia, despair, and nihilism,’ and these recurring themes constitute an instable world view that according to them is ‘expressed not through the films’ terse, elliptical dialogue, nor through their confusing, often insoluble plots, but ultimately through their remarkable style.’ If we take one notable noir example, (*Ernest Hemingway’s*) *The Killers* (Robert Siodmak, 1946) as a filmic summation of noir ingredients, this pessimistic world view and foreboding mood is clearly illustrated in the opening sequence involving the protagonist, referred to as The Swede (Burt Lancaster), who is about to get ambushed by two gun men in his apartment. The dreadful brooding atmosphere of the impending tragedy and the paranoia is aptly represented by the high contrast pictorial quality precipitated by the extreme minimal lighting, suggesting us of unsafe and volatile circumstances. In *Breaking Bad*, the narrative functions of the low-key lighting style also runs on similar intentions, generating the brooding gloomy mood of the show as the characters run into dangers, ordeals, murders and betrayals. Although there are clear differences between *Breaking Bad* and a great deal of film noirs concerning narrative and thematic preoccupations, it is compelling to say that low-key

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126 David Bordwell at Zomerfilmcollege 2011 explains that even the complex and often convoluted storytelling structures that we often associate with film noir are existing on a broader range of genre and themes in the 1940s Hollywood cinema not only detection-centered crime films but also in comedy and melodrama such as *Letter to Three Wives* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1949) and *Daisy Kenyon* (Otto Preminger, 1947). Yet, a dominant tendency that ties these films together reside more on the visual style where high contrast between darkness and brightness are accentuated excessively by the low key lighting technique is repetitively applied. David Bordwell, “Seeking and Seeing: Lessons from E.H. Gombrich in Examining the Visual Style of the 1940s Hollywood Cinema,” Zomerfilmcollege lecture in Antwerp, Belgium, 24 July 2011.


129 This notion is suggested by David Bordwell at the “Seeking and Seeing: Lessons from E.H. Gombrich in Examining the Visual Style of the 1940s Hollywood Cinema,” Zomerfilmcollege lecture in Antwerp, Belgium, 24 July 2011. Of course, there are other films that could sum up elements that would constitute a film noir. Nevertheless, Bordwell considers *The Killers* to contain a lot more elements than other ‘dark film’ in 1940s in regards to visual stylization.
lighting plays function to the visual look of the show just as it does to many examples of film noir.

Once more, this is not to claim that low-key lighting and noir visual style are unique to Breaking Bad in the stylistic history of American TV drama. There are many narrative TV shows prior to Breaking Bad that have imported this style of lighting. American television history has seen the transposition of film noir to television screen with detective-driven series such as Peter Gunn (NBC, 1958—1961) and the short lived Johnny Staccato (NBC, 1959—1960) in which elements of noir visual style, low key lighting in particular, were visibly displayed. Other narrative television genres that may not necessarily fall under the umbrella of TV noir, such as police procedural and crime drama, supernatural fiction and horror have routinely utilized low-key chiaroscuro lighting in their episodes. In the post-Miami Vice period, The X Files and Buffy the Vampire Slayer (WB & UPN, 1997—2003) for instance are noted to apply low-key lighting from time to time to generate mystery. In other drama series, low-key lighting is implemented to suggest urban deviance and social rupture such as in Homicide: Life on the Streets (NBC, 1993—1999) and NYPD Blue (ABC, 1993—2005).

In the TV3 context, low-key lighting is not uncommon in many dramatic programs that have thematic elements of crime, police detection and supernatural phenomena. CSI (Crime Scene Investigation), Dexter, The Wire and Veronica Mars employ a chiaroscuro lighting style from time to time. Nevertheless, Breaking Bad pushes the convention further to some level of extremities and varieties. The application of very low-key lighting in Breaking Bad extends to scenes that may not involve high dramatic point as a result of a tragic occurrence or does not involve the main characters (Figs. 3.61-3.62). Subsidiary characters are lit in a low-key fashion as well. For instance, in the last episode of season 3 entitled “Full Measures,” Gale, Walt’s lab assistant is visited by Gus Fring—a businessman who owns Albuquerque’s largest fast food chain. In this scene, Gale’s apartment is lit extremely minimally so that we barely see the characters’ faces (Fig. 3.63). Only until we get to see them in close-ups we are shown Gus and Gale sitting down facing each other in the centre of the room. At other times, darkness characterizes the gigantic meth-cooking super lab that Walt and Gale work in, notwithstanding the fact that they are jovially getting to know each other better in this particular moment (Fig. 3.64).

Viewed this way, despite the fact that low-key lighting techniques are apparent in various television dramas in the TV3 context, it is in Breaking Bad that this stylistic component is pushed to the forefront insofar as it not only performs narrative functions—establishing foreboding mood, character’s feeling

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130 In the post-1940s American cinematic domain, the low-key chiaroscuro visual style of the 1940s Hollywood has been revamped in the resurging body of films under the loosely defined umbrella of the neo-noir. Some of the notable examples are The Long Goodbye (Robert Altman, 1973), Chinatown (Roman Polanski, 1974), Body Heat (Lawrence Kasdan, 1981), Blade Runner (Ridley Scott, 1982), Manhunter (Michael Mann, 1986), Black Rain (Ridley Scott, 1989) and so forth. For a detailed study of neo-noir, particularly in the 1980s, see Robert Arnett, “Eighties Noir: the Dissenting Voice in Reagan’s America,” Journal of Popular Film and Television 34, no.3 (Fall 2006): 127.

131 James Ursini, “Angst at Sixty Fields per Second,” in Film Noir Reader, eds. Alain Silver and James Ursini (New York: Limelight, 1996), 276 (cited in Butler, Television Style, 100).
and unsafe circumstances—but it also adds an expressive textural layering to the show’s ‘dark and depressing’ quality. Conclusively, it is not necessarily erroneous to say that *Breaking Bad* is ‘a really dark show’ because at the very least on a stylistic level Gilligan and his core creative team are not afraid to bring extreme darkness to the show’s visual aesthetics to the extent that it contributes to the distinctiveness of *Breaking Bad*’s stylistic attributes.

### 3.6. Embellishing Cinematographic Properties

*Do you notice cinematography on TV? Perhaps if you are a cinematographer. And yet you can’t not talk about it when you watch Breaking Bad—and particularly in its third season.*”—Mike Flaherty of *New York Magazine*.132

The third key strategy in cinematizing the aesthetics of *Breaking Bad* involves the embellishment of cinematographic properties. More importantly, three cinematographic components—composition, color and framing—demonstrate *Breaking Bad*’s stylistic ambitions to attain the cinematic analogy.

#### 3.6.1. Basic Cinematic Apparatus

First and foremost, one of the important ingredients to construct the visual cinematic analogy that *Breaking Bad* embraces is to record its images on celluloid films. While single-camera primetime television dramas have historically adopted 35mm films since the beginning of the 1950s and continued to provide the visual style of many hour-long series and telefilms in the 1980s and beyond, in recent years, however, many primetime programs have switched to HD video, thus replacing film as the storage medium and visual presentation. Furthermore, with the rising emergence of top-line Digital Single Lens Reflex (DSLR) camera represented by Canon EOS 5D Mark II, it is not unusual for a narrative television program to be captured entirely on this consumer type photo camera.133 *Breaking Bad* deliberately aspires to the ‘film look’ by insistently shooting on 35mm film stock,134 continuing the ‘high-end’ production value of TV3 hour-long dramas along the line of HBO original programming such as *The

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134 Technical details of *Breaking Bad*’s cinematographic apparatus include: Camera: ArriCam LT; Lenses: Cooke S4; Film negative format (mm): 35mm (Fuji Eterna 250D 8563, Eterna 500T 8573, Reala 500D 8592). Source: IMDB, [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0903747/technical] (accessed August 5, 2011).
3.6.2 Composition

To achieve the analogy of cinematic composition, *Breaking Bad* chooses the widescreen television format in 1.78:1 aspect ratio. Narrative television programs for many decades were broadcasted on academy aspect ratio of 1.33:1 or the standard 4:3 dimensions as television technology in those eras dictated it. Not until the innovation of high-definition television that widescreen 16:9 dimensions became the default setting. This 1.78:1 aspect ratio for widescreen TV is a compromise between the North American standard in 35mm filmmaking and projection format (1.85:1) with the conventional television 1.33:1 (4:3) aspect ratio. Because of this technological improvement in television reception, Gilligan and his cinematographer Michael Slovis, ASC., strategically compose the shots in *Breaking Bad* on 16:9 to simulate the widescreen dimension of contemporary cinema. Although with the rising usability of HDTV with 16:9 dimensions for viewing television shows, not only the original broadcast but also on DVD platforms, this type of aspect ratio is now the norm in the production of ‘high-end’ televisual drama. Thus, there has to be an extra dimension to the widescreen composition that *Breaking Bad* practices to attest its cinematic aspiration.

For that reason, the advantage of projecting on the widescreen 1.78:1 format gives *Breaking Bad*’s cinematographer the capacity to compose shots in accordance with the craft practices of cinematic visual sculpting by applying the principle of thirds to television screen. This pictorial rule-of-thumb, derived from the art of photography and fundamentally practiced by feature film cinematographers, dictates that the most expressive layout places the subject not

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135 Technical specifications of these shows on IMDB confirm this: 
*The Sopranos* (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0141842/technical); 
*Six Feet Under* (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0248654/technical); 
*The Wire* (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0306414/technical); 
*Lost* (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0411008/technical); 
*CSI* (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0247082/technical); 

136 Prior to the introduction of widescreen (1.78: 1) HD television, the attempt to simulate the widescreen impression of the cinema has been engineered through the letterboxing—the two black bars placed at the top and bottom of the standard 4:3 TV screen. In narrative television forms, the hospital drama *E.R.* (NBC, 1994-2009) pioneered the use of letterboxing in its seventh season (November 2000) and became the first NBC’s first program to air in a widescreen-like format. Michael Z. Newman, “Upscaling Television Aesthetics,” 3.

137 Despite the intensified continuity schema, even the ‘most cinematic’ television show *Miami Vice* was presented in 4:3 scale (1.33:1 aspect ratio) due to the standard television format at the time in the mid-1980s. This is quite a contrast to the show’s executive producer Michael Mann’s own cinematic feature around the same time as *Miami Vice, Manhunter* (1986), which was presented on 2.35:1 aspect ratio. Source: IMDB, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0091474/technical & http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0086759/technical (accessed August 8, 2011).

in the frame’s center but at one of the nine-parts grids’ intersecting points. With the spacious width offered by widescreen television format, Gilligan and his director of photography are able to place the subject(s) of the shots, whether characters or objects, either at the right or at the left third of the frame. By doing so, they avoid the dead-center compositions characteristics of the attenuated continuity styled primetime dramas of the classic network era. For instance, if we look at one of the iconic shots in Breaking Bad’s pilot episode, where Walt is seen standing in the middle of the desert road with the gun in his hand, we could examine closely that he is not precisely placed exactly in the middle of the road (Fig. 3.65). In actuality, he is situated off-center in the frame. As we could see, Walt is staged to fill in the two intersections on the right frame rather than placed dead center as most visual composition in classical attenuated continuity-induced TV dramas prescribed. Moreover, by composing the shot this wide, the majestic vistas of the New Mexico desert can be more accentuated for it plays crucial role in the story of Breaking Bad as I have established previously.

This aesthetic implication generated from taking full advantage of the widescreen format in Breaking Bad correspond with cinematographic strategies found in the narrative cinematic genres that place heavy emphasis on exterior spectacles. Although these may include anything from the musicals to historical epics, one particular genre that bears many correlations with widescreen compositions found in Breaking Bad is the Western.

Widescreen projections became available in Hollywood in the early 1950s as a tactical move to lure audiences—already swayed by the immediacy and domesticity of television—back to the movie theatres. Various widescreen dimensions were introduced such as the Cinerama, Cinemascope and Vista Vision. From the outset, the innovation of the widescreen was motivated generically. As Bordwell describes in The Classical Hollywood Cinema, the new expanded format was designated to accommodate ‘spectacle’ films, from the travelogue (This is Cinerama [1952]) to the historical pageant (The Robe [1953]). Nevertheless, one spectacle-oriented genre that finds widescreen format extremely suitable and accommodating was the Western. Cahiers’ founding father Bazin even mentioned this notion in his account, ‘Like a fish in the biggest aquarium, the cowboy is most at ease on the wide screen.’ The visual vistas characterizing many classic Western movies in the Golden Age of Hollywood studio could now be pushed to another level thanks to the sweeping expansiveness of the Cinemascope and Vista Vision developed by 20th Century Fox and Paramount respectively. Beginning with George Steven’s Shane (1953), an adaptation of Jack Schaefer’s novel from 1949, the film was featured to be the

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139 Due to the limited screen space of television aspect ratio in that period and the broad application of normal focal lens length, dead-center compositions were favoured over expressive framing based on the principle of the thirds. Other than technological reasons, dead-center compositions were chosen to eliminate narrative delaying as we have established that in the attenuated continuity style, visual expressiveness is eschewed to optimize narrative efficacy. See Jeremy G. Butler, Television Style, 93.

140 Bordwell et al., The Classical Hollywood Cinema, 602.


142 Bordwell and Thompson, Film History: An Introduction, 329.
first Western movie projected in a ‘flat’ widescreen format of 1.66:1. Soon, veteran and new generation directors upgraded the Western genre visually by turning to widescreen format for exploring other possibilities of staging. Otto Preminger’s take on this genre, *The River of No Return* (1954) was championed by post-war film critics, from Bazin to the *Movie* critics, as the ‘locus classicus of widescreen aesthetics’ for the virtuous exploit of mise-en-scène provided by the capacious CinemaScope (2.55:1 aspect ratio) format. Another high-watermark for widescreen Westerns came from the alumni director of the Hollywood studio system John Ford. In the post-war Hollywood period, notwithstanding his distinguished evocative drama *How Green Was My Valley* (1941) and his first Technicolor drama-comedy *The Quiet Man* (1952), the bulk of Ford’s films was in the Western genre, ranging from *My Darling Clementine* (1946) to *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962). With *The Searchers* (1956), Ford was able to inflate some of his distinctive ‘Fordian’ deep space composition through doorway framings that became recognizable motif in the film. More important, thanks to the lateral generosity of Vista Vision’s width, Ford could now raise the magnitude of the iconic exterior of the West, as embodied by the Monument Valley, with plains and deserts towering and dwarfing settlers, soldiers, Native Americans and men on horseback, presenting us the ‘mythic vision’ of the untamed and boundless American West, as film historian Peter Cowie would have it.

On another note, the move to widescreen composition in television drama, and for *Breaking Bad* in particular, is to further enhance the upscaling of the cultural legitimacy of the medium by contrasting it with the anachronistic 4:3 scale while aligning it with the cinematic connotation of the 16:9 format. This somehow echoes the upscaling of the Western’s genre in terms of its visual splendour from the constricted limitation of the 1.33:1 Academy format to the colossal proportion of the widescreen aspect ratio in the 1950s. Narrating Ford’s insistence for widescreen projection of his last western movie, *Chayenne Autumn*, Peter Cowie describes:

> Ford waited until he was in his late sixties and directing his final Western, *Chayenne Autumn*, to present Monument Valley in its full glory. The Immensity of the 70mm (Super Panavision) image releases the majestic proportions of the area from the confines of the old, squarer, so-called Academy format. [Emphasis mine]

Indeed, for television drama, the widescreen does not only offer a greater latitude for creative possibilities, such as the rule of thirds-induced visual composition, but it also works to uplift the cultural legitimacy of the television medium by positioning it with the association of a more prestigious medium and simultaneously counter-positioning itself with the medium’s own history. Michael Z. Newman sees this as the ‘contest of connotation’ where the distinction

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146 Ibid., 194.
between the 16:9 composition with the 4:3 scale reside in the perception of the mediums’ status in our visually-attuned contemporary society. He asserts:

\[T\]he old, boxy image is televisual; the new, expansive one is cinematic. Cinematic here means classy, artistic, and sophisticated. Although there is nothing inherently better or worse about either ratio, in the discourse surrounding the move to widescreen TV, one rarely hears a kind word about 4:3.147

With that said, Gilligan’s use of the widescreen format is not only crucial for him to transpose the horizontal compositions of the widescreen Western movies on to the television screen, now technologically made possible to view on 16:9 HD television, but it also works to contrast the show with the long standing association of television visual composition with the restricted box-like 4:3 dimension. Furthermore, because of the narrative significance of the New Mexico desert, widescreen format became an imperative choice to facilitate the high-dramatic actions that take place in this monstrous part of the American Southwest. Ultimately, the capacity offered by widescreen format is unsurpassed in releasing the majestic spectacle of the area, and like Ford, Gilligan is taking full advantage of this creative opportunity to represent Breaking Bad’s own ‘Monument Valley’.

3.6.3. Color

Characteristically, the color tonality of Breaking Bad images is bleached out and desaturated. This goes against the traditional primetime dramas in the TVI and the TVII era where vibrant strong colors populated the small screen. This choice of color tonality, nonetheless, is in tune with many contemporary dramatic programs where we hardly see the exuberant strong colored drama series that identified the 1970s and the 1980s in the last decade. New Hollywood cinema, along with the intensified continuity system, had a great impact in streamlining this color characterization. Bordwell and Thompson describe that this shift in color tonality became dominant in Hollywood in the 1980s where muted earth tones color and drab palette were given to drama, science fiction, action films and even comedies.148 Gilligan and the executive producer Mark Johnson from early on aimed for this tonality of color in Breaking Bad. However, Gilligan is very specific that he mandated his director of photography to emulate the very early New Hollywood films of late 1960s and early 1970s with direct references to William Friedkin’s The French Connection (1971) and The Godfather (Francis Ford Coppolla, 1972). In an interview with the American Cinematographer magazine, Michael Slovis, ASC., recalls the conversation he had with Gilligan and the executives at AMC when he was asked to become the DoP for the show:

148 Bordwell and Thompson, Film History: An Introduction, 687.
[...] the first movie that Vince [Gilligan] told me to go look at was The French Connection when we were talking about the style of the show, and he said “this is the movie I love, I love everything about this movie,” so all the movies he was referencing to me was totally in-sync with what AMC was talking about. So there was a fairly clear picture. So, our job was to contemporize that! Our job was to bring that style into the 21st century.\textsuperscript{149}

In order to ‘bring that style’ to Breaking Bad, a wide range of high-end film stocks is chosen to create the muted color reproduction. Slovis explains his reasoning:

Everything is shot on film; everything is shot on Kodak film. We carry three stocks and we carry the 5201, which is the ASA 50 stock which is for the all of the day exterior in the desserts, that’s for a bunch of reasons. One is because the color reproduction on that stock is, I think, unsurpassed.\textsuperscript{150}

Nevertheless, Gilligan and Slovis are aware that they do not aim for a direct mimicry to the early New Hollywood color tonality. Therefore, an addition to the desaturated color they mark the visual ambiance by grading the exterior shots with a variety of color filtrations that yield some distinct pictorial veneer. For example, in the episode “737” where Walt and Jesse are dealing with the Latino drug dealer Tuco, since all of the shots in the sequence are exterior shots, the sky is graded by a photographic filter so that it projects earth-tone color tonality (Fig. 3.66).

Significantly, in Breaking Bad the desert palette has become salient color motifs wherein browns and earth tones stand out quite prominently, more especially in season two (Fig. 3.67). In season three, however, stronger color effects such as yellow and golden replace the earth tones and browns. To go back to our earlier sequence in this chapter, the opening of “No Mas” in which we see the crawlers in a small rural Mexican village, all of the exterior shots in this cryptic sequence are presented in golden tone, hence providing some memorable visual marker (Fig. 3.15—3.39). Nevertheless, this type of color filtration is not randomly selected for decorative motive; it has narrative purposes. In that particular sequence, we are introduced to the Cousins who are on their way to assassinate Walt as a revenge for the loss of their cousin Tuco. This color scheme is chosen to mark their ominous presence and the sheer murderous instinct that they harbour. Granted, this golden-filtered visual presentation is repeated in many occasions in which we see the Cousins. For instance, toward the end of “No Mas,” the Cousins are crossing the U.S.—Mexican border via El Paso, Texas. To avoid suspicion and identification, they decided to hop along an illegal smuggler truck carrying Mexican trespassers. So far no one have noticed that they are working for the drug cartel Juarez, until one guy spots the skull-tipped boots that the Cousins are wearing that indicate the drug cartel iconography. Without


\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
thinking any further, the Cousins ambush all of the passengers in the truck and managed to kill the driver as well (Figs. 3.68—3.69). As graphic and violent this sequence is the color scheme once again embraces golden yellowish tone, countering the content of the plot, i.e. sadistic human slaughter, with the color composition that is often associated with optimism and rebirth. Slovis, with the approval of Gilligan, discusses this premeditated formal choice as a mechanism to contradict what is happening in the plot with the visual tonality that is considered incongruous: ‘I will often counterpoint what is going on narratively [...] It is ironically pretty.’ 151 Indeed, five episodes after “No Mas,” the golden yellow tone returns when we are back with the Cousins again in the opening sequence. This time, one of the twins kills a police officer after ruthlessly slaying an old man whose house they invaded once they have crossed the border (Fig. 3.70).

In sum, the deliberate scheme for color muting and filtration is a salient and narratively motivated cinematographic strategy for Breaking Bad to distinguish itself from the television tradition of highly saturated vibrant colors. Moreover, this strategy is an integral part of the cinematization of Breaking Bad’s aesthetics to emulate the subtle color tonality that New Hollywood films exhibited. Although with the cunning use of color filtration to counterpoint narrative happenings, which is an ingenious take on color manipulation, Breaking Bad’s cinematography contributes to the enrichment of formal vocabulary of contemporary American television drama concerning visual style.

3.6.4 Framing

Finally, the visibility of cinematic analogy in Breaking Bad through cinematographic embellishment is demonstrated by attention-grabbing framings and other expressive camera techniques.

By nature of television production, many guest directors are invited to work on several episodes, in addition to the in-house directors. In-house directors here refer to those who are part of the core creative team of Breaking Bad—ranging from the show creator/producer Vince Gilligan, executive producer Michelle MacLaren, director Adam Bernstein, main actor Bryan Cranston and director of photography Michael Slovis, ASC. Each of them has directed at least two episodes on the show with the exception of Slovis who directed one so far. Guest directors include filmmakers such as Rian Johnson, Johan Renck, John Dahl and several others. 152 As a result of this television production system, each director aims to contribute his/her directorial skills to which the episode is assigned. Therefore, there is a wide variety of directing approaches that ultimately yield diverse techniques of staging, e.g. camera placement, actor movement, etc. This goes to the framing options in cinematography as well. Yet, it does not mean that every director could alter and arrange this cinematographic

element the way they please. There is an in-house style of cinematography that directors must uphold, especially incoming directors that are invited to the show. Slovis once again shares his thought on this curious feature of *Breaking Bad*’s stylistic maintenance:

There is an overall tenor to *Breaking Bad* that we like to maintain, sort of a *vocabulary* that we’re working on, but within that vocabulary, directors and myself are free to write as many *interesting sentences* and *paragraphs* as we care to. There are definitely ways that we tell the story on *Breaking Bad* but it’s *more expanding* and *open* than it is constricting and limited.\(^{153}\)

This ‘overall tenor’ or ‘stylistic vocabulary’ of *Breaking Bad* as Slovis put it are being translated into two salient cinematographic strategies: wider framings and eclectic juxtaposition of a variety of shot scales.

Some of the salient framings in *Breaking Bad* include extensive wide shots, deep focus shots, extreme long shots and extreme close-ups. Wide shots enabled by the wide-angle lens (25mm focal length and less) are constructed to get full shots of actions taking place in closely confined settings as many examples of Walt and Jesse ‘cooking’ meth inside the RV illustrate (Figs. 3.33-3.35). Furthermore, wide shots are applied during intense moments where Walt and Jesse are in the middle of the action so it necessitates a full framing of the event, even though the setting may not necessarily be a cramped space. More often, these aggressive below eye-level wide-angled shots are assigned for tensed moments when Walt and Jesse are in peril as repercussions of their actions. For instance, in the episode “Grilled,” the drug kingpin Tuco kidnapped Walt and Jesse and put them inside the trunk of Jesse’s car. Tuco plans to kill them both. They are trying to alleviate the situation by calming Tuco down meanwhile figuring out a way to escape. But the plan falters and Tuco is now even madder and threats to shoot them with an M16. Wide-angled shot is implemented here to generate expressive effect by exaggerating Walt’s fearful reaction toward Tuco’s mean demeanor and of course the fear of getting shot. In a parallel fashion, when Hank shot Tuco to death, a wide-angle lens represents aggressive foregrounding of Tuco’s body facing up (Fig. 3.71-3.72). In other instances, wide shots are chosen to encapsulate the vast New Mexico landscape in which the actions are about to take place (Fig. 3.43-3.44).

Another advantage of exploiting the wide-angle lens is to be able to shoot two actions in two planes in one shot by the deep focus technique. One of the cunning examples of the deep focus method in *Breaking Bad* is in the episode entitled “Down” (Season 2, Episode 4). In this sequence, Jesse is trying to break in to a garage where the RV is parked on a daily basis when he and Walt are not using it for meth cooking. But Jesse had not paid the garage owner the parking fee, so he (the owner) confiscated the RV and intended on selling it without Jesse’s approval. In an attempt to steal back the RV, Jesse is climbing the fence

while the garage owner is talking on the phone (Fig. 3.73). Ironically, he is calling someone to ask how much money he could get for the RV, while Jesse manages to get inside the lot and rushes to the RV and drives through the fence (Fig. 3.74). Deep focus here is cleverly used for a slight ironic humour as the joke is on the garage owner who wants to take advantage of the situation and yet caught off guard by Jesse’s sneaky trespassing technique. Extreme long shots are also appearing quite often in *Breaking Bad*. Thanks to the telephoto lens, now an object in a very long distance can be captured effortlessly as Fig. 3.15 in “No Mas” shows the Cousins’ car coming into the village from such a far distance. To bring another example, once Jesse and Walt managed to escape from Tuco, as DEA agent Hank shot him, they are finding ways to get back into the city. In this shot, they are depicted walking along the desert, albeit in such small scale as if they were two ants marching along a path (Fig. 3.75).

The extensive use of wide-angle lens and telephoto lenses in these instances are part of the intensified continuity style to which bi-polar extreme lens length is implemented. In other words, it gives a sense of stylized shot, instead of the classical attenuated shot whereby normal lenses (35-50 mm focal length) is fundamentally exploited as the standard. However, a more profound signal of *Breaking Bad*’s cinematic analogy approximation stems from the implementation of a non-traditional shots-structure.\(^{154}\) *Breaking Bad* eschews standard television shots-structure and instead imports the cinematic intensified continuity-induced shots-structure whereby a wide range of framings is juxtaposed against each other concocting visual dynamism. To cite an example, in the beginning of “Full Measures” (Season 3, Episode 13) Walt is going to meet the biggest crystal meth wholesaler and the most shrewd businessman in Albuquerque who is also employing him at the time, Gus Fring. This appointment is set in the desert outside of Albuquerque. The sequence opens with a couple of close shots of the objects around the desert but immediately followed by an extreme long shot of the desert’s horizon (Fig. 3.76) as it cuts to an extreme close up of Walt’s face (Fig. 3.77). Walt is edgy and nervous as he awaits Gus Fring and his two right hand men because of a terrible mistake Walt had orchestrated in the previous episode that involves a killing of one of Gus’ drug dealer in order to save Jesse from getting shot (Fig. 3.56-3.57). Therefore, meeting Gus is an intense moment for Walt, as he suspects that they are going to kill him right there and then. After a few minutes of close shots of Walt in his car, an extreme long shot of a vehicle approaching cuts in (Fig. 3.78). A phone call rings; Gus’ muscle man Mike orders Walt to step out of the car. Walt gets off and starts walking toward Mike as hand-held following shot accompanying him (Fig. 3.79) while we then cut to a reverse shot framing Walt in medium close up (Fig. 3.80). Walt and Mike address each other in a wide shot with the desert as the

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\(^{154}\) Shots-structure is the practitioners’ term for the arrangement of shots in a sequence according to their framing characteristics. In film studies, this is recognized as the schema of relation from shot to shot. A classical shot structure may involve the presentation of a sequence according to the principle of continuity: master-shot>medium-shot>close up. Filmmakers and television practitioners also refer to this process as ‘coverage’ taking during production. Source: Nicholas T. Proferes, *Film Directing Fundamentals: See Your Film Before Shooting* (Amsterdam: Focal Press, 2005), 41-42.
vast backdrop as if they were going to engage in a showdown (Fig. 3.81-3.82). However, instead of shooting him down, Mike searches Walt and they proceed to approach Gus’ vehicle. Gus comes out and warns Walt of his mistake, but Walt starts proposing a new deal for their meth cooking and distribution agreement instead (Figs. 3.83—3.84). After a serious exchange of bargaining, the new deal is reached, Walt returns to his car as another wide shot presents this moment with a spectacle grandeur of the New Mexico desert dwarfing Walt as he ponders what ordeal is going to come next (Fig. 3.85).

This structure of visual presentation reveals an affinity with a cinematic variant of the Western genre made by Italian directors in the 1960s. This sub-genre, known as the ‘spaghetti Western’, is represented quite prominently in film history by its most successful practitioner Sergio Leone. Leone’s signature style springs from his flamboyant handling of framings, juxtaposing extreme long shots of vast desert landscape with widescreen close ups of eyes and hands. One of the most memorable sequences in his widely acclaimed The Good, The Bad and The Ugly (1966) involves the opening shots that juxtapose extreme long shot of the desert with striking extreme close up of the One-armed Bounty Hunter’s face (Al Mulock) who later on in the sequence will be shot by Tuco Benedicto aka The Ugly (Eli Wallach) (Figs. 3.86—3.87). Indeed, according to Bordwell and Thompson, through this re-shuffling of shot-structure, instead of obeying the master-shot>medium-shot>close up structure of classical Hollywood schema, Leone displays visual operatic grandeur and flamboyance that pushes the Western conventions to the level of formal ceremony.155

In a parallel mode, Gilligan et al. reject the formulaic television shots-structure of the attenuated classical continuity whereby long shot—medium shot—close up schema is a dominant practice. Slovis describes this routine in television production:

Television, because of the schedule and whatnot, and because of the desire for the producers to be able to control what was going on and how they want to tell their story in the end, was very much shot in a wide-shot, medium-shot and close up scenario, it’s very formulaic, if you look back at a lot of earlier dramas, they really did, they followed that kind of pattern.156

By employing shots-structure that works against television traditional schema and instead imported a variation of the intensified continuity in regards to cinematography, Gilligan et al. place great importance in visualization in storytelling rather than relying greatly on dialogue and sound which television had been recognized for many decades. Like Leone, Gilligan and his team aiming toward the visual splendour as a testament to formal ceremony that spaghetti Westerns—particularly Leone’s—often hold.

155 Bordwell and Thompson, Film History: An Introduction, 454.
3.6.5. Contribution to An Intensified Continuity Schema

Despite the prolonging practice of an intensified continuity schema in Breaking Bad, there is a glimpse of formal contribution to this continuity style. This has come from a slight innovation in cinematographic technique which appears frequently and consistently in many episodes of Breaking Bad. It is perhaps less impressive to illustrate this inventive technique with still images, nevertheless, I will attempt to describe and propose the function in this sub-chapter.

This type of shots, which thus far has no specific term, although Gilligan and his creative team refer to this as the ‘Breaking Bad shot,’ involves an extreme low angle framing of the characters obstructed by intermediate objects to which the characters are doing something to them. For instance, as early as episode three in the first season (“...And the Bag’s in the River”) we are positioned at a point of view where we could see that there are hands cleaning up the screen. As it progresses the screen becomes clearer and we see some type of cleaning product poured onto the screen obstructing our vision. As the next shot reveals, it turns out that it is Walt who is cleaning up the mess on the floor, sweeping the remnants of dismembered body parts of a guy that they had to kill by using hydrochloric acid (Fig. 3.88). The similar technique opens another episode (“Bit By A Dead Bee” [Season 2, Episode 3]) as it begins pitch black that we initially assume as a fade-in. However, a few seconds later this blackness is revealed as ground soil that two pair of hands are trying to dig deeper, and we as viewers are positioned just below the soil. Again, the next shot shows that this was actually Walt and Jesse digging the soil to bury the handgun that they have been carrying when Tuco was holding them hostage (Fig. 3.89). In other instance, this technique is used to present the process of crystal meth manufacturing (Fig. 3.90). But at other times, this shot appears in sequences that may not involve the main characters at all, such as in the episode “I See You” (Season 3, Episode 7) that involves a beer-grabbing motion inside of a cooler (Fig. 3.91) and one that situates our point of view from a fast-food chain fryer (Fig. 3.92).

The closest relatives of this ‘Breaking Bad shot’ include the low angle shot from the point of view of an object that we so often see in contemporary cinema. Although it has also been the mainstay of classical Hollywood cinema as a frantic rehearsal montage in Blues in the Night (1941) where we see shots from the “viewpoint” of a piano keyboard exemplify (Fig. 3.93). Another compelling lineage comes from the innovative trunk shot popularized by Quentin Tarantino in Reservoir Dogs (1992) (Fig. 3.94). These two types of shots also populate many episodes of Breaking Bad as the trunk shot and the money blowing dryer shot in the pilot episode attest (Figs. 3.95-3.96). However, a clear distinction between the object’s point of view shot, the trunk shot and the ‘Breaking Bad shot’ I have mentioned resides in the fact that in the latter cinematographic technique there is an obstructing prop or object, fluid or solid, that is placed or permeated in between the camera lens and the actors, thus suggesting our

position as if we are below this object rather than on top as we could see through it while the actors are working with it or trying to clean it.

Based on this observation, it is tempting to conceptualize this inventive cinematographic element as purely playing decorative function. While it is palpable that the technique used here is calling attention to itself, nevertheless, I propose that the function is more geared toward expressive effect rather than for manifesting the style-for-style-sake credo since this technique has denotative task as well to intensify the continuity where narrative clarity remains to be the ultimate goal. The way these ‘Breaking Bad’ shots are placed in the sequences reveal a recurring pattern. These shots are mostly inserted in the beginning of a sequence, many times during the opening teaser, thus they are not sporadically placed. In this context, this unusual framing is a substitute to the master shot or an establishing that conventionally opens a sequence.158 As director and actor of the show Bryan Cranston put it: “These cool and unique shots have to be germane to the story. If it’s too cool that it pops you out of what is going on, we’ve lost.”159

Having said that, by inserting these glimpses of unconventional cinematic technique, Gilligan and his creative team is aiming to stamp a glitch of their own stylistic handprinting that may not necessarily be radical or revolutionary, however, it offers the audience a viewing pleasure, a cinematic gaze inside of a television medium which has always been known as a medium with ‘zero-degree’ style.160 With this sort of formal innovation, it is hardly a revelation that television has been aesthetically upscaled and overhauled.

158 A compelling proposal for the additional stylistic function of these ‘Breaking Bad shots’ comes from the author’s thesis supervisor Dr. Miklós Kiss who suggests that these highly produced shots may work as ‘diegetic dissolves’ that bridge one sequence to the other in a rather suspenseful and visually-provoking ways compared with the conventional dissolves that are more ephemeral and certainly non-diegetic. Clearly, there is more research to be done in order to generate cogent explanations to this attention-calling visual device in Breaking Bad. However, ideas and opinions offered here by Dr. Kiss and I will hopefully lay a promising ground for future research undertaking on this curious facet of Breaking Bad’s visual style.

Dr. Miklós Kiss, personal communication, August 19, 2011.

159 Breaking Bad, Insider podcast, Season 4 Episode 3 “Open House,”

160 John Thornton Caldwell, Televisuality, 56.
3.7. Style and Authorial Input in *Breaking Bad*

After considering the formal choices and aesthetic strategies that Gilligan and his team made to shape *Breaking Bad*, the fact that a distinct style exists cannot be understated. Referring back to the narrowest definition of film style conceptualized by Bordwell as mentioned in the previous chapter in which style is discerned as the repeated salient techniques chosen by a filmmaker or a group of filmmakers within particular historical circumstances. Correspondingly, style is the systematic and significant use of the medium’s techniques that weave certain texture and surface of the film.161 Seen through this conceptual telescope, style can reside in an individual filmic work, or in this case a televisual work. By foregrounding salient techniques of mise-en-scène, cinematography and continuity intensification derived from a range of modern cinematic sources and additionally by contributing innovative cinematographic gestures, albeit moderately, *Breaking Bad* discloses a propensity for visual stylistic eclecticism. This eclectic stylistic tendency is not a widespread phenomenon in the aesthetic realm of TV3 American television drama. Therefore, one can assert that efficacious use of film style and the eclecticism that goes with it powerfully contribute to the idiosyncrasy of *Breaking Bad*. In this regard, *Breaking Bad* does own a distinct style as a televisual drama. But should we attribute this stylistic idiosyncrasy to an author responsible for making this happen? Or perhaps a better-phrased question would be: Is there an auteur behind *Breaking Bad*?

While discussion of style as systematic use of techniques and basic visual-audio elements of a film or television program can come without profound challenges as long as formal evidences can be extracted from the work itself, debating style as a personalized expression of an individual author on the other hand can be tricky. Moreover, to transpose the notion of auteurism to television domain can pose some substantive challenges.162

In *Television Style* (2010), Jeremy G. Butler mentions several points that hampered the study of style in television inquiry. Besides the strong currency of the television-as-transmission concept, auteurism or auteur theory played a part in impeding stylistic analysis of narrative televisual creation. He suggests:

Auteurism, shot through with romantic notions of the artist, views style as a manifestation of the individual’s unique “vision.” When Francois Truffaut and his colleagues at *Cahiers du Cinema* launched the auteur theory in the mid—1950s, they never thought to unearth auteurs within the television industry, because the medium was seen to be aesthetically

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161 Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, 4.
162 Partially, this is also engendered by the fact that academic research on television auteurism has not been galvanized, thus resulting a minimum output on detailed study of auteurism in television. Thus far we have not seen any equivalent of Andrew Sarris’ *The America Cinema: Directors and Directions, 1929-1968*, whereby auteur theory is imported to study individual directors. David Lavery has begun to work on a research project named *Television Auteurs: 100 Small Screen Creators* which will hopefully crystallizing into a book publication. Yet, it is not sure when it will be published. Source: http://davidlavery.net/TA100SSC/
stunted and an industrial product—even more so that the Hollywood film studio system’s products. In 1953, the year before Truffaut issued auteurism’s manifesto, Andre Bazin predicted, “the television picture will always retain its mediocre legibility.” How could it possibly aspire to the art of the cinema? Moreover, Truffaut et al. were aspiring directors themselves and so they looked for the auteur’s signature in a cinematic aspect that directors control: principally, elements of visual style. In television, then as now, a single director seldom controls the visual style of a program. Over the course of a program’s season, ten or 20 directors might be called upon. The auteur of a television program is most likely to be the producer and the producer is more likely to be a screenwriter than a director. Thus, auteurists have been frustrated in their limited attempts to find auteurs in television and, in their view, there can be no style without an auteur.163

Reflecting upon the auteurist argument and style based upon the analysis of Breaking Bad, I offer some critical thoughts concerning the polemic.

### 3.7.1. Conceptual Conflation: Director’s Style and Style as Filmic Texture

First of all, while I agree with Butler’s point that auteur theorist had found it unfathomable that an auteur can exist in such a technologically immature (at the time) and commercialized mass-produced entertainment as television. Therefore, the analysis of television style had been relegated due to this assumption. However, and this is where I depart from Butler’s point of view, the problem does not necessarily lie in the difficulty of finding director-as-auteur in television, which in the eyes of the auteur theory’s proponents (among other Bazin, Truffaut and Sarris) holds the central key to the form of the work. Clearly, if persistently viewed from this angle, narrative television arts will never have auteurs due to the nature of institutionalized television production where directors are simply “guests” rather than principle decision makers. They come and go depending on the result of their jobs in the particular television creation. If the showrunner finds the job satisfactory and serving the overall tenor of show, then it is quite likely that the director will be invited again. Thus, one that owns keys to the creative decision is the showrunner. Hence, can a showrunner be considered an auteur replacing the director in feature film context? Yet, in the process of developing a program, showrunner does not hold all of the creative cards in televisual creation if there is a “vision” that he/she desires to maintain. Network decision-makers, institutional constraints and the economic logic of television broadcast often limit showrunners to impose their “vision.” So, the problem ostensibly resides in how much control and degree of creative decision making a show creator/writer/producer or a showrunner can exert and retain to build the show according to his initial design or “vision”? Historically speaking, in the context of American television of the classic network era and throughout the

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163 Butler, Television Style, 2.
post-network era the showrunner’s degree of control and creative imposition is restrictively meager. Steven Bochco, considered to be one of the first television auteurs by critics, even had to fight tooth and nail to sustain *Hill Street Blues* the way he envisioned it. Alas, his fight was to no avail and the network NBC prevailed as Bochco preferred to resign and *Hill Street Blues* moved on without him.\(^\text{164}\)

However, one might protest, “Hasn’t this changed in the last decade with the prevalence of premium cable channels like HBO and Showtime that arguably gave much more freedom to the showrunner?” It is undisputable that in the TVIII age where channels are multiplied exponentially, television creators are given much leeway to come up with innovative programs that fit with the brand distinction strategy of the network or cable channel.\(^\text{165}\) Thus, we have seen the recognition of showrunners such as David Chase, Alan Ball, Josh Whedon, Damon Lindelof, Larry David, Matthew Weiner and so forth as television auteurs.\(^\text{166}\) Not to mention filmmakers/screenwriters-turn-showrunners who have been noted to stamp their signatures on hour-long television drama series such as Barry Levinson, Michael Mann, David Lynch, Aaron Sorkin, and so on. But we run into a theoretical problem once we suggest that these showrunners are auteurs in the TVII and TVIII age simply because they have been given a greater dosage of creative freedom by the network and cable channels.

### 3.7.2. Television Auteur, Oeuvre and Vince Gilligan’s Position

Encapsulating the notion of director-as-auteur from the ideas introduced by Bazin, Truffaut and the *Cahiers* comrade, Sarris posits that in order to be an auteur, “Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature.”\(^\text{167}\) In his view, stylistic signature must emerge in a recurring manner, meaning that it cannot be a one-off phenomenon; therefore, a number of films or an *oeuvre* of a director should function as a precondition for the criterion of judgment. In other words, a director’s group of films is the ferment source of evidences to indicate whether stylistic impulse appears systematically throughout these films as the director’s individualized response to a directorial problem in staging, cinematography, sound or other techniques. Transferring this critical feature of the auteur theory into television context, how can we resourcefully identify a showrunner’s *oeuvre*?

To make matters murkier, most of the television auteurs in the American television industry mentioned above, have one or two shows in their pockets that they maintained from first to the last season, while most of the resumé come from writing, producing or directing for other shows before running their own.\(^\text{168}\) Nevertheless, critical inquiry most often gives the spotlight to one particular work rather than inspecting the whole array of the mentioned TV auteur’s opuses. For

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\(^\text{165}\) Robin Nelson, *State of Play*.


\(^\text{168}\) With the exception of David Simon and Joss Whedon who have more than two series.
instance, while David Chase is considered an auteur because of *The Sopranos*, scholarly criticism is absent for his production and writing contribution on *The Rockford Files* (NBC, 1974-1980), *I’ll Fly Away* (NBC, 1991-1993) and *Northern Exposure* (CBS, 1990-1995). Similarly, Matthew Weiner’s experience on *The Sopranos* in regards to producing and writing is outshined by his one and only drama serial so far *Mad Men*. Therefore, it is problematic to examine televisual authorship strictly from the viewpoint of author theory that emphasizes ‘recurring style’ over a group of films to become a signature of a particular filmmaker. Nevertheless, perhaps there is another way to look at authorship in television without abidingly resorting to auteur theory in its strictest strand. And this is where *Breaking Bad* becomes an interesting case study.

Television drama production is a highly collaborative project. Although it is inarguable that feature filmmaking will not roll without collaboration between its creative forces, the duration and intensity of narrative television production can extend beyond that of feature filmmaking. It is a long-term project that can span for a number of years, even decades, depending upon ratings and networks’ demand. In this respect, collaboration between core units of the production is essential to the success of the series development. Generally speaking, what I refer to as ‘core units’ here include show creator, writer(s), producer(s), main actors, production designer, director of photography and editor. Within this core unit, the showrunner that often functions as executive producer, supervising writer, writer and director is the central decision maker, meaning that every creative decision that needs to be taken must go through him or her before a visiting director or other departments in the unit decides to go with it. But not every single creative input and decision comes from the showrunner. Vince Gilligan comments on the collaborative nature of developing *Breaking Bad*:

> The writing of *Breaking Bad* is pretty much a group effort. I sit in this room with the six writers, so there are 7 writers including me. We sit for hours, basically asking ourselves the same question over and over again, we’ve asked ourselves “What happens next?” “What is Walt thinking?” “What is he afraid of?” so we do this for hours and *we try to build the story organically, build each episode, build its plot brick by brick, moment by moment*, and it takes about two weeks to figure out an episode, and this is not the writing of the episode, this is the outlining, the breaking of the story as we call it, and then one of the writers goes off to write that particular episode and I stay in the room with the rest of the writers and start working on the next one up.169

So, when asked if Gilligan had mapped every detail of *Breaking Bad*’s story out from the beginning until the end, he often remarks that he had not done so. In fact, he genuinely admits that he simply had the broad strokes or the general plotting on how the story will unfold as he often cites ‘It’s a story of

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transformation of a guy from Mr Chips and turning him into Scarface.’ However, in producing and assembling every plot details or turning points in the narrative, Gilligan relies on the hyper-collaboration between him and the staff writers which for the three seasons have included Peter Gould (6 episodes), George Mastras (5 episodes), Sam Catlin (5 episodes), Moira Walley-Beckett (4 episodes), John Shiban (4 episodes), Thomas Schnauz (2 episodes), J. Roberts (2 episodes), Gennifer Hutchinson (1 episode), and Patty Lin (1 episode). Gilligan himself wrote eight episodes including the pilot. The similar case can be made about Gilligan’s collaboration with the numerous directors whom have been asked to direct episodes of *Breaking Bad*, some have directed more episodes than others, while Gilligan himself only directed two episodes so far. Consequently, the question becomes, can we consider Vince Gilligan as the auteur of *Breaking Bad*? Or perhaps more broadly, is he a television auteur?

When juxtaposed against ideas of auteurism in the critical study of cinema, perhaps Vince Gilligan is far from being granted an auteur status. If we return to the earliest account that laid the groundwork of auteurism, namely Alexandre Astruc’s *La Caméra-stylo* (1948), one of its influential tenets emphasizes director as the writer of his films. Using his camera as a pen, the director can be likened to a novelist writing his novels with a pen, hence his notion of the camera pen (*caméra-stylo*). Naturally, the idea of film authorship that Astruc put forth bestowed the director as the ‘writer’ that controlled the essential elements of film creation. Only by the director’s control of these elements, Astruc believed that the motion picture became an art of personal creation as direct and immediate as the novelist’s pen. Meanwhile, in the process of creating a television drama like *Breaking Bad*, so much of the filmmaking attributes regularly controlled by the filmmaker, for instance staging and camera placement, are in the hands of multiple directors rather than in Gilligan’s hands as the showrunner who performs the task as the all-embracing superintendent for the overall production of the shows. On top of that, writing as a central attribute of auteur-filmmaking does not reside solely in Gilligan’s hands; he must rely on the crafts of multiple writers that collaboratively augment the story development of *Breaking Bad* thread by thread. Nevertheless, despite the heavy reliance on collaboration with the multiple directors and writers contributing their creative skills to the show, it is inaccurate to say that Gilligan has no arcing “vision” of how he would like the show to be. Therefore, there is a high degree of creative control and decision-making capacities that Gilligan...
retains over the course of three seasons of *Breaking Bad*. In short, although the strict notion of auteur is perhaps incompatible with the reality of televisual creation, this does not mean that there is no auteurst sensibilities. To this, I propose that auteurst impulse in regards to Gilligan and *Breaking Bad*, reside in the realm of visual style and aesthetic tenor.

Contemporary television makers are conscious of the idea of auteurism, auteur theory and other notions of filmmaker as artist. They are sensitive to the world of filmmaking, and more important to the history of cinema. Damon Lindelof, the co-creator and writer/producer of *Lost*, in a recent interview narrates his encounter with auteurst cinema and how he positions himself within and against that particular cluster of filmmaking. A perspective which ultimately triggered his decision to channel his creative pulse in the narrative television world. In a similar tone, Gilligan is imbued with auteurst temperaments, although not explicitly. However, his aspiration toward particular genre or period of cinema history, as his stylistic allusions to Leone, Friedkin, Coppola et al. corroborate, certainly nurture his capacity to manifest his “vision” for the show within the constraints of television industry. This is demonstrated in his control over the visual stylistic ‘overall tenor’ or ‘vocabulary’ throughout the three seasons of *Breaking Bad*. Through this ‘overall tenor’ he can control the coherence of the show throughout the three seasons at least visually speaking. Interestingly, the cable network executives at AMC are on the same page with Gilligan when it comes to visual stylization as Michael Slovis, ASC., explains this in the interview excerpt I quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

This is a step forward in American television broadcasting whereby a newly reformed basic cable television channel—advertisement-supported and bounded with broadcasting regulations— encouraged the television maker to go the extra mile in creating a televisual product according to his “original concept,” at least visually. Especially since this is Gilligan’s first main run as a showrunner. Of course, the upside for the channel is that brand distinction will be further sharpened as AMC is making its way to put itself on the map of American television business of original programming. This creative support, albeit driven by economic logic, gives cinema-aspiring television maker like Gilligan a breathing space for formal experimentation, particularly in the domain of visual style. More established cable channels such as HBO, Showtime and FX, that turned Gilligan and his *Breaking Bad* proposal down may have given their televisual showrunners some type of creative leeway. However, AMC is not an established channel and obviously not a premium cable channel. It is constraint economically by advertising rates and therefore restricted by FCC (Federal Communications Commission) regulatory framework. As a result, AMC allocates smaller budget for its television productions in comparison with the premium cable channels. Nevertheless, driven by industrial ambition and other

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174 See sub-chapter 3.1. *The Curious Case of Breaking Bad: Inception and Reception*.
175 AMC spends US$3 million per episode for *Breaking Bad*. Although this may seem luxurious for television production, in the realm of contemporary ‘high-end’ televisual drama commissioned by premium cable channels, production budget can go up to US $10 million. Therefore, having
corporate motives that may not necessarily run alongside the notion of creative autonomy and artistic pursuit, this development in American television industry as exemplified by AMC, facilitates creative practitioners a small wiggle room for formal experimentation that continues to enrich the aesthetic vocabularies of American television drama.

It is unpredictable whether this gesture will sustain or whether other television institutions in the American context will pick it up. Nevertheless, AMC and Breaking Bad epitomize a ferment period for narrative television creation. Even though Breaking Bad is small in terms of ratings and viewership compared with other transformative programs such as The Sopranos or Lost, it profoundly makes an impact in the continuum of American television drama. For one, Breaking Bad further problematizes the hierarchy of art and popular cultural entertainment by eclectically installing a wide range of stylistic temperaments that cleverly revises the ‘same-but-different’ logic of television drama creation. As Bryan Cranston observes in regards to Breaking Bad’s ‘Not-TV’ characteristic, which explains its small but dedicated niche audience instead of large undifferentiated viewers, and furthermore strengthen its position as a ‘high-end’ boutique TV drama: ‘We [Breaking Bad] are a pungent show. You have to develop a specific taste for it. We are not a vanilla flavour (show). We are not for the masses and never will be.’

US$3 million budget allocation for long-form serialized dramas seems comparatively meager. For producing the “high-end” products, HBO spends roughly from US$4.5 million per episode (Deadwood and Carnivale) to US$100 million for 10 episodes of Rome (2005-2007) with BBC contributing US$15 million of the whole budget. The latest installment of this boutique ‘high-end’ drama, Boardwalk Empire, is reported to have cost the channel US$20 million for the pilot episode alone.


Chapter 4

Conclusion

Through this dissertation I set out to examine the formal development of American television drama at the particular juncture of the TV3 era. As narrative experimentation permeated serialized dramas in the last decade, stylistic refurbishment has undeniably uplifted the aesthetics of American television drama. One of the ways in which this upgrading of television aesthetics has been instigated is through the approximation of the cinematic analogy, as proposed by Michael Z. Newman. The other tendency is through increasing authorial input in the formation of long-form drama serials as television scholar Trisha Dunleavy suggested. Following up these assertions, I aimed to investigate how these two key strategies are evident in a critically acclaimed televisual drama in the latter half of the 2000s. I take Breaking Bad as a case study for it prompts the two strategies mentioned here at the outset. Furthermore, as a working thesis, I contended that Breaking Bad is a stylistically eclectic and projects idiosyncrasy particularly in its visual style. My research questions, therefore, directed at finding how these two central strategies are evident in the case study Breaking Bad and how they are implemented to shape the distinct visual style that Breaking Bad has been accredited with. To summarize the findings gathered from the analysis, allow me to present these in the following points.

First of all, three key strategies are palpable in Breaking Bad in streamlining the cinematic analogy. They are the intensification of continuity, the foregrounding of mise-en-scène through setting and lighting, and the embellishment of cinematographic elements. The intensification of continuity is achieved by exercising salient strategies of dynamic camerawork and the use of bi-polar extreme length lenses and reliance on closer shots in regards to conversation sequences. However, not all elements of style are intensified. As the ASL measurements show, high rapidity in editing as a parameter of an intensified style is not evident in Breaking Bad. Instead, it embraces a more sedate approach to cutting rate which places the show at a medium threshold of editing pace and consequently run against the current trend in contemporary Hollywood cinema and American television drama. This strategy suggests a ‘selective intensification’ approach to continuity in Breaking Bad, which may not reveal all indications of an intensified schema, but some are more prominent than others. In terms of setting, by optimally combining the utilization of built sets and actual locales, Breaking Bad aims for a high degree of verisimilitude in their spatial diegetic representations. Moreover, by setting the story in New Mexico, Breaking Bad is able to install a ‘local color’ feel to the visual style as the exterior shots of the desert and vast landscape of the region have become a signature of the show and arguably became a recurring ‘silent’ character that encapsulates Breaking Bad’s diegesis. Low-key lighting mode plays a vital role in determining the sombre ‘dark’ mood of the show to a great extent. This reveals one of the discernable cinematic sources that Breaking Bad aspires to: the film noir. Much like the use of the chiaroscuro lighting style in many noir films, in Breaking Bad this has
engendered a pessimistic and fatalistic world view that characterizes the show as a ‘dark and depressing’ television drama to go along with the painful transformation of the main character Walt from a chemistry teacher to a sadistic drug kingpin. The last strategy is through importing the cinematographic embellishment as found in the arts of cinema. Fundamentally, *Breaking Bad* uses the cinematic apparatus to construct the analogy of a cinematic feature in television, such as by recording its images only on celluloid films and also to project the visual on 1.78:1 widescreen format. Additionally, the approach to cinematization is exemplified by composing the pictorial imageries according to the principles traditionally practiced in feature filmmaking such as implementing the rule of thirds and asymmetrical framings. Color tonality is meticulously desaturated and graded following the trend of New Hollywood cinema of the 1960s and beyond. But significantly, color filtration is used as visual markers to contradict the content of narrative development such as the massacre of a truckload of human passengers by the antagonist characters by presenting it in golden yellowish color tone that invokes incongruity. And finally, through importing the un-classical shot structure onto its shot-by-shot juxtapositions of different visual framings, *Breaking Bad* reveals another signal of cinematic aspiration that may arguably be influenced by the Western genre, more especially by the sub-genre of the spaghetti Western represented by the works of Sergio Leone.

In regards to authorial input, Vince Gilligan and his core creative team have benefited from the creative liberty that the basic cable channel AMC has given in shaping the distinct visual aesthetics of *Breaking Bad*. In fact, the relationship between Gilligan, his creative ensemble and the channel emblematized an interesting development in the continuum of American television industry whereby authorial imposition, mostly coming from the overall “vision” of Vince Gilligan, is exercised to a great degree. Nevertheless, this problematizes the notion of auteurism at the same time. When examined from the critical telescope of auteur theory, perhaps Vince Gilligan is far from being granted an auteur status due to the fact that attributes that are routinely ascribed to an auteur-filmmaker, such as staging (actor movement and camera placement), are in the hands of multiple directors. Additionally, the moment-by-moment story development of *Breaking Bad* is in the hands of multiple writers instead of coming solely from Gilligan’s imaginative labor. Nevertheless, despite the heavy reliance on collaboration, it is not to say that Gilligan has no arcing “vision” of how he would like the show to be. In this case, there is a degree of control and creative decision making that Gilligan retains over the course of three seasons of *Breaking Bad*. In short, although there has to be a slight conceptual adjustment to tweak the incompatibility of classical auteur theory with the dynamics of televsual creation, this does not mean that there are no auteurist sensibilities. As one of the central features of my thesis, I propose that auteurist impulse in regards to Gilligan and *Breaking Bad*, reside in the realm of visual style and aesthetic tenor. And for that reason, *Breaking Bad* elicits an eclecticism and idiosyncrasy in visual style that works effectively as a brand distinction strategy for the cable channel AMC, but more important, as artistic gestures that
contribute to enrich the aesthetic vocabularies of American television drama that further breaks the distinction between television and cinema at the stylistic level.

Prospectively, future research undertaking should pick up where this research left off. Evidently, within this scale, there are many possibilities of research angles that cannot be pursued due to temporal and spatial limit. Therefore, a more comprehensive analysis into the stylistics of American television drama at the latter half of the 2000s is more than necessary. One of the ways this can be achieved is through conducting a rigorous comparative stylistic analysis of several case studies of long-form American TV drama serial from cable channels (both premium and basic) and network television channels. By examining several textual examples from the same period, we can perhaps discover signs of continuity and change in the aesthetic evolution of American TV drama. What I am interested in pursuing is to bring this comparative analysis to study the much narrower domain of ‘high-end’ drama serials, i.e. produced and shown by two or three different cable channels, to examine whether there are striking or subtle differences in styles between shows that are typically shown, for instance on HBO, with those shown on AMC and Showtime. In addition, this can help us understanding whether premium cable channels’ original programming differ tremendously from the basic cable channels’. Ultimately, through this comparative research, we may gather findings and substantial empirical data to advance the study of narrative televisual stylistics.
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## Appendix A
Visual Illustrations Accompanying the Analysis in Chapter 3

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<td><strong>Figure 3.3</strong> ...a ‘single’ of Skylar criticizing Walter, Jr.: “You are late again...”</td>
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Figure 3.4
A reverse shot revealing Walt, Jr. responding sarcastically to his mom: “Because there is no hot water...again!”

Figure 3.5
Walt in a ‘single’ denoting his despondency toward the circumstances.

Figure 3.6
Back to Skylar in another ‘single’ commenting on Walter, Jr.’s response...
Figure 3.7
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Figure 3.8
Walter, Jr. is mockingly asking his dad what it feels like to be ‘old’ in an over-the-shoulder shot taken from a different continuity line.

Figure 3.9
The scene closes with a ‘single’ of Walt reacting wryly to his son’s sardonic question.
Figure 3.10
An over-the-shoulder shot of Walt, Jr. conveying his amused feeling over his dad’s reaction.

Figure 3.11
“No Mas” opens with an extreme long shot of the desert while the barely seen village sits underneath it.

Figure 3.12
A wide-angled shot depicting the crawling man while a passer-by walks pass him as he enters the house.

[Analytic Aspect: Intensified Continuity Schema in Practice]
**Figure 3.13**
A medium shot exposes to us that there are other people crawling following the longhaired man.

**Figure 3.14**
The crawling crowd is heading toward a destination while other villagers dine and drink on the left side of the pathway not being bothered by what they are seeing.

**Figure 3.15**
A car is heading toward the village as the extreme long shot transmits this plot information.
Figure 3.16
A macro shot of the skull-tipped leather boot belongs to the mysterious visitors that we will soon find out who they are exactly.

Figure 3.17
As the camera sweeps rightward from a below the eye-level framing to...

Figure 3.18
...slowly adjusting to a medium shot of the men in suit...
Figure 3.19
...until it finally settles on a close up of the twin brother standing closer in the foreground.

Figure 3.20
Racking focus technique alters the focus to isolate the other men as it reveals to us that they are identical twins.

Figure 3.21
The reverse rack focus shifts our attention back to the first brother as we see him rotating his head scanning the environment.
**Figure 3.22**
Wide-angle lens is deployed to contain the two cousins kneeling down and begin crawling like others in this shot.

**Figure 3.23**
Hand-held tracking shot follow the twin brothers crawling up further to the endpoint.

**Figure 3.24**
Another wide-angle lens employment in capturing a new establishing shot.
Figure 3.25
A counter shot provided by long focal length lenses flatten the crawlers with the desert landscape in the background.

Figure 3.26
As the cousins reach toward the entrance a wide-angled shot captures this plot moment.
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<th>Analytic Aspect: Mise-en-scène</th>
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**Figure 3.27**
In *Breaking Bad*, the house of the Whites provides one of the main diegetic settings. Facilitated by sound stage construction, the depth of space can be achieved thus enabling characters to roam flexibly as this hand-held tracking shot follows Skylar walking along the hallway to the living room.

**Figure 3.28**
By designing the interior in great depth and width, *Breaking Bad* aims for a high degree of verisimilitude in its diegetic representation.

**Figure 3.29**
Below eye-level wide angled Wellesian shot magnifies the depth and height of the interior implying a sense of desolation as nobody is seen occupying this spacious home.
Figure 3.30
Wideness of the living room and kitchen cannot facilitate familial cohesion in *Breaking Bad*.

Figure 3.31
The adjacent spatial zones in the house made suggestively very distant as Walt and Skylar fruitlessly rectifying their marital crisis.

Figure 3.32
The camper van, a 1986 Fleetwood Bounder, is the recreational vehicle (RV) that Walt and Jesse set up as a mobile meth lab. Here (left) seen in the desert driven by Jesse as Walt arrives with his car (right). The RV becomes a recurring motif in *Breaking Bad*. 
Figure 3.33
The accommodating height of the RV is suggested by the visibility of the ceiling and the slight low angle framing.

Figure 3.34
Implied depth of the RV from a reverse angle outlining a diagonal perspective.

Figure 3.35
The artificial construction of the RV’s interior is functional to facilitate Walt and Jesse’s relationship development including the frequent quarreling and physical contact.
Figure 3.36
When the camper van is being demolished...

Figure 3.37
...squashed to every bit of its pieces...

Figure 3.38
...Walt and Jesse are paying their last respect by solemnly saluting the RV as if it had died and this is its funeral.
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<th>Exterior</th>
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<td>Wide exterior shots of the New Mexico desert open the pilot episode.</td>
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<td>Exterior shots of vast New Mexico desert open a sequence in “Negro Y Azul” (Season 2, Episode 7).</td>
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<td>The savannah in the desert of New Mexico often used as location for incriminating appointments between meth-related agents in the story.</td>
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<td>The desert is the only hideaway where Walt and Jesse can ‘cook’ crystal meth.</td>
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<td>Hank and the DEA force are preparing for a sudden drug trade bust set up by their team in the desert.</td>
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<td>The DEA’s inside man Turtoga is ironically decapitated and his head is sent to the DEA atop an alive tortoise as a message.</td>
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<td>The tortoise explodes...</td>
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<td>Figure 3.47</td>
<td>...and sets the immediate death of several DEA agents. But one survives even though the explosion cost him his leg.</td>
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Figure 3.48
An establishing shot indicates the clear bright sky of a sunny day, however once we cut to the interior...

Figure 3.49
...low key lighting illuminates Walt’s face unevenly implying the gloomy mood around the house and also to register his unsettled feeling.

Figure 3.50
Maximum low-key lighting style is maintained in every part of the house including the kitchen, as Walt stands unresponsive to Skylar’s question.
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<td>Another establishing shot of Jesse’s house as we cut to another scene the following day, once more designating a clear bright day.</td>
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<td>Yet, a master shot reveals how dark it is in Jesse’s kitchen as we could only see silhouetted imagery of Walt and Jesse discussing their tactical scheme to assassinate Tuco.</td>
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<td>Extreme low-key illumination conceals Walt’s visitor Mike until he opens the door.</td>
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Figure 3.54
Side lighting connotes feelingful quality of character as Walt’s suppressed angst and despondency become stronger.

Figure 3.55
Hard lighting is chosen for exterior shot as this example shows Hank’s shadow cast upon his right side of the face onto his shoulder without being diffused by a reflector or other source of illumination.

Figure 3.56
The street lamps impersonated by hard lighting rig illuminate Walt’s cold-blooded shooting of the gangster...
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<td>Figure 3.58</td>
<td>In <em>(Ernest Hemingway’s) The Killers,</em> Burt Lancaster as The Swede awaits his impending death as the chiaroscuro lighting emphasizes the pessimistic mood and hostility of an unsafe world.</td>
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<td>Figure 3.59</td>
<td>The killers arrive and immediately gunning down on The Swede as the backlighting provides the only source of illumination...</td>
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**Figure 3.60**
...as a close up of The Swede’s hand cuing us to infer that The Swede is helpless and dies in a fatalistic circumstances.

**Figure 3.61**
Extreme lighting minimalism hardly shows where the characters are standing as we listen to Jesse and Walt conversing at a laser arcade in “Full Measures” (Season 3, Episode 13).

**Figure 3.62**
Neon lights outside of a dingy motel suggestively providing illumination for Jesse as he persuades a sex worker to be his alibi for a police investigation resulting an extreme high contrast between the shadow and the green-lit areas of the room.
Figure 3.63
Walt’s lab assistant Gale is hosting Gus Fring in his apartment. With soft backlighting and minimal key light composition, their faces are cast with deep shadows to the extent of obstructing their faces.

Figure 3.64
Walt and Gale are having champagne in the crystal-meth super lab during their break. But this rather jovial moment is transmitted with extreme minimal lighting contradicting the celebratory atmosphere of the plot.
Figure 3.65
Rule of thirds derived from photographic and cinematic arts guide visual composition in *Breaking Bad*. Walt is placed at two intersecting points on the right side of the nine-part grid instead of at the center of the frame. Whereas...

...attenuated continuity schema-influenced television drama frames subject dead center as this shot of J.R. Ewing in *Dallas* illustrates.
Figure 3.66
In the episode “737” (Season 2, Episode 1) the sky is graded by a photographic filter so that it projects earth-tone color feature complementing the muted color tones.

Figure 3.67
In season two, brown and earth tones essentially permeate the color tonality as achieved by polarization technique.

Figure 3.68
Golden yellowish color tone visually marks the presence of the twin cousins in “No Mas” as this extreme long shot depicts one of them killing the truck driver...
Figure 3.69
...and finally burn the truck to pieces as they walk across the border.

Figure 3.70
In “Sunset” (Season 3, Episode 6), the golden yellowish color schema mark the appearance of the twin brothers again. This time one of them kills a police officer.

Figure 3.71
Aggressive foregrounding of Walt captured by a wide-angle lense create an expressive effect to exaggerate Walt’s fear of Tuco’s volatile behavior.
In a parallel fashion, when Hank shot Tuco to death, a wide angle lens represents aggressive foregrounding of Tuco’s body facing up.

Deep focus composition is extrapolated to capture two actions in one frame as we see Jesse climbing over the barbed-wire fence on the upper left of the frame while the garage owner is obliviously talking on the phone attempting to sell the RV.

In another deep-focus shot we see the garage owner reacting aggravatingly as Jesse manages to retrieve the RV.
Figure 3.75
Extreme long shot suggesting a bird eye’s view as Walt and Jesse finding their way into the city from the desert.

Figure 3.76
Extreme long shot of the New Mexico desert as we cut to...

Figure 3.77
Walt’s extreme close up denoting an intense stare...
Figure 3.78
Then cuts to an extreme long shot of a vehicle coming in.

Figure 3.79
As Walt gets off the car and walk toward the vehicle we follow him in a hand held tracking shot...

Figure 3.80
...followed by a reverse angle continuing the tracking shot.
Figure 3.81
A wide shot encapsulates the desert and the two men approaching each other.

Figure 3.82
Walt and Mike face each other in another wide shot as if a showdown was about to take place.

Figure 3.83
Walt approaches Gus’ car as another sidekick gets off...
| Figure 3.84 | Then a closer wide shot of Walt and the boss man Gus Fring making a new deal as the credit title pops in at the below center of the frame illustrating a symmetrical two shot. |
| Figure 3.85 | Once the new deal is reached, Walt walks back to his car as another wide shot of the desert dwarfs his smaller size. |
| Figure 3.86 | A long shot of the desert opens Leone’s *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, but it is soon filled with... |
Figure 3.87
...an exaggerated close up of the one-armed bounty hunter’s face.

Analytic Aspect: Framing/Contribution to an Intensified Continuity Schema

Figure 3.88
The ‘Breaking Bad shot’ 1

The opening shot reveals two hands wiping down the screen. As it progresses the screen becomes clearer and we see some type of cleaning product poured onto the screen obstructing our vision...

...and followed by a straight cut revealing Walt wiping down and mopping up the hard wooden flour to get ride of the dismembered body parts of a guy that they had killed by using hydrochloric acid.
The sequence begins with a pitch black screen concealing the information that we normally get from an establishing shot. Two hands slowly clear the screen...

...as it turns out, these hands belong to Walt and Jesse as a medium shot conveys the visual of them digging up the ground to bury the handgun.

The ‘Breaking Bad shot’ 3
Figure 3.91
The ‘Breaking Bad shot’ 4

Figure 3.92
The ‘Breaking Bad shot’ 5

Figure 3.93
A shot denoting the “viewpoint” of a piano keyboard from *Blues in the Night* (1941).
Figure 3.94

Figure 3.95
The trunk shot from the pilot episode as Walt unpacks his crystal ‘cooking’ paraphernalia.

Figure 3.96
Object “viewpoint” shot situating our vision from within a dryer filled with U.S. dollars as Walt reaching in to collect them.
Appendix B

Breaking Bad Episodes Details*

“Pilot” Episode
[Season 1, Episode 1]
Original airdate: January 20, 2008
Written by Vince Gilligan
Directed by Vince Gilligan
Cinematography by John Toll, ASC.

“Seven Thirty-seven”
[Season 2, Episode 1]
Original airdate: March 8, 2009
Written by J. Roberts
Directed by Bryan Cranston
Cinematography by Michael Slovis, ASC.

“Breakage”
[Season 2, Episode 5]
Original airdate: April 5, 2009
Written by Moira Walley-Beckett
Directed by Johan Renck
Cinematography by Michael Slovis, ASC.

“Negro Y Azul”
[Season 2, Episode 7]
Original airdate: April 19, 2009
Written by John Shiban
Directed by Felix Alcala
Cinematography by Michael Slovis, ASC.

“No Mas”
[Season 3, Episode 1]
Original airdate: March 21, 2010
Written by Vince Gilligan
Directed by Bryan Cranston
Cinematography by Michael Slovis, ASC.

“Sunset”
[Season 3, Episode 6]
Original airdate: April 25, 2010
Written by John Shiban
Directed by John Shiban
Cinematography by Michael Slovis, ASC.

“Half Measures”
[Season 3, Episode 12]
Original airdate: June 6, 2010
Written by Sam Catlin & Peter Gould
Directed by Adam Bernstein
Cinematography by Michael Slovis, ASC.

“Full Measures”
[Season 3, Episode 13]
Original airdate: June 13, 2010
Written by Vince Gilligan
Directed by Vince Gilligan
Cinematography by Michael Slovis, ASC.

* Source: Breaking Bad Official Webpage on AMC Website
http://www.amctv.com/shows/breaking-bad
Appendix C

Glossary of Film Techniques*

Mise-en-scène:
All of the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed: the settings and props, lighting, costumes and makeup, and figure behavior.

Cinematography:
A general term for all the manipulations of the film strip by the camera in the shooting phase and by the laboratory in the developing phase.

Editing:
In filmmaking, editing is the task of selecting and joining camera takes. In the finished film, the set of techniques that governs the relations among shots.

Sound (diegetic and non-diegetic):
Diegetic sound includes any voice, musical passage, or sound effect presented as originating from a source within the film’s world. Non-diegetic sound includes mood music or a narrator’s commentary, represented as coming from a source outside the space of the narrative.

Screen direction:
The right-left relationships in a scene set up in an establishing shot and determined by the position of characters and objects in the frame, by the directions of movement, and by the characters eye-lines. Continuity editing will attempt to keep screen direction consistent between shots.

Axis of action:
In the continuity editing system, the imaginary line that passes from side to side through the main actors, defining the spatial relations of all the elements of the scene as being to the right or left. The camera is not supposed to cross the axis at a cut and thus reverse those spatial relations.

180° line:
The continuity approach to editing dictates that the camera should stay on one side of the action to ensure consistent left right spatial relations between elements from shot to shot.

Match-on-action:
A continuity cut that splices two different views of the same action together at the same moment in the movement, making it seem to continue uninterrupted.

Eye-line match:
A cut obeying the axis of action principle, in which the first shot shows a person looking off in one direction and the second shows a nearby space containing what he or she sees. If the person looks left, the following shot should imply that the looker is off-screen right.

Establishing shot or master shot:
A shot usually involving a distant framing, that shows the spatial relations among the important figures, objects, and setting in a scene.

Shot/reverse-shot & over-the-shoulder shot:
Two or more shots edited together that alternate characters, typically in a conversation situation. In continuity editing, characters in one framing usually look left, in the other framing, right. Over-the-shoulder framings are common in shot/reverse-shot editing.

Tracking shot:
A mobile framing that travels through space forward backward or laterally.

**Crane shot:**
A shot with a change in framing accomplished by placing the camera above the subject and moving through the air in any direction.

**Dissolve:**
A transition between two shots during which the first image gradually disappears while the second image gradually appears; for a moment the two images blend in superimposition.

**Wipe:**
A transition between shots in which a line passes across the screen, eliminating one shot as it goes and replacing it with the next one.

**Jump cut:**
An elliptical cut that appears to be an interruption of a single shot. Either the figures seem to change instantly against a constant background, or the background changes instantly while the figures remain constant.

**Deep focus:**
A use of the camera lens and lighting that keeps objects in both close and distant planes in sharp focus.

**Deep space staging:**
An arrangement of mise-en-scène elements so that there is a considerable distance between the plane closest to the camera and the one farthest away. Any or all of these planes may be in focus.

**Racking focus:**
Shifting the area of sharp focus from one plane to another during a shot; the effect on the screen is called rack-focus.

**Low-key lighting (chiaroscuro):**
Illumination that creates strong contrast between light and dark areas of the shot, with deep shadows and little fill/light.

**High-key lighting:**
Illumination that creates comparatively little contrast between the light and dark areas of the shot. Shadows are fairly transparent and brightened by fill light.

**Three-point lighting:**
A common arrangement using three directions of light on a scene; from behind the subjects (backlighting), from one bright source (key light), and from a less bright source balancing the key light (fill light).