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Broadcasting a Sinister 'Jacobean' Aesthetic from the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse: Sightlines, Camerawork and Websterian Dramaturgy in Ian Russell's *The Duchess of Malfi* (BBC Four, 2014)

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When, in May 2014, BBC Four announced "a unique television premiere – a new production of John Webster's bloody revenge tragedy *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614) performed in a perfect recreation of an early Jacobean theatre", it is not likely that either BBC Four nor Shakespeare's Globe, whose Sam Wanamaker Playhouse production was the object of the broadcast, realized just how unique Ian Russell's broadcast would remain. By Rachael Nicholas's count, between 2009, when NT Live was launched, and October 2017, when Nicholas's listing ends, 128 live multi-camera captures of single plays by Shakespeare were produced. In the same period, by contrast, only three plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries–*Doctor Faustus* (twice), *Volpone* and *The Duchess of Malfi* (twice)–were live-captured using high-definition multi-camera digital video technology.[1] Of these, only Russell's recording of Dominic Dromgoole's production of *The Duchess of Malfi* has been broadcast on terrestrial television. As a consequence of the prominence of Shakespeare among theatre broadcasts of other "classics" and (more rarely) new writing, it is fair to say both the grammar of theatre broadcasts and scholarship about theatre broadcasting are influenced by the disproportionately large impact of cinematic broadcast Shakespeare on this medium (Aebischer and Greenhalgh 3).

It is this bias I seek to address by examining Russell's *Duchess of Malfi* and its paratextual presentation in detail. Apart from John Wyver's live-blog, an online *Bardathon* review by Peter

Kirwan and Andy Kesson's short article for Wyver's special issue on "Not Shakespeare on Television and Beyond" for *Shakespeare Bulletin*, Russell's *Malfi* has received no critical attention to date. I will argue that all three factors that make this broadcast stand apart from its Shakespearean counterparts–the venue of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, the target medium of television, and Webster's distinctly non-Shakespearean dramaturgy–played a crucial role in creating a quite idiosyncratic televisual "Jacobean" aesthetic that stands at odds with the expectations surrounding cinematic Shakespeare broadcasts. This aesthetic includes a deliberately dark tone that includes moments of actual invisibility, multifaceted characterization that resembles the fragmentation of the body familiar from the early modern poetic blazon, and "sinister" camerawork. It draws a significant amount of energy from the long-standing association of Webster's tragedy with what Susan Bennett, in *Performing Nostalgia*, long ago identified as the "Jacobean" as a signifier of "transgression, dissidence and desire" (2). Recognizing the specifically "Jacobean" features of Russell's style for *Malfi* allows me, in the final part of this essay, to return to some key conventions associated with Shakespeare broadcasts and expose the extent to which our uncritical acceptance of specifically Shakespearean features as normative extends even to the hybrid medium of theatre broadcasting.

For Shakespeare's Globe, working in partnership with BBC Four on a nationwide broadcast provided a unique opportunity, both in terms of financing and dissemination,[2] to promote the particular sensory qualities of its brand-new indoor playhouse which, due to its restricted audience capacity of 340 and the relatively high ticket prices, was otherwise going to have little reach beyond London's cultural elite and a dedicated international audience of theatre historians. After years of construction work, and with the end of Dominic Dromgoole's stewardship of the Globe complex drawing near (it ended in 2016), the opening of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse represented an important milestone for Shakespeare's Globe that warranted the new playhouse's promotion to the wider British public. Penelope Woods's description of the King's Men's Blackfriars as a "sensorium" with "erotics" particular to this "small candlelit theatre" can effortlessly be transposed to the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse (164, 162), a theatre whose dark-paneled *frons scenae* with its glittering gold

ornamentation Will Tosh has revealed was specifically designed to provide a "tonally right" "Jacobean" backdrop for Dromgoole's opening production of *Malfi*, with "the darkly glittering interior" there to "satisf[y] popular expectations of what a Jacobean playhouse 'should' look like" (31). In this first season, the playhouse enveloped its viewers in a heady scent of beeswax and warm fresh oak (the oak no longer emits the same fragrance). Through its small size and thrust stage layout it moreover facilitated a sense of "intimacy" between performers and spectators which Sarah Dustagheer aptly describes as generating a "sealed-off, immersive, stimulating, and engulfing physical world-within-the-world" for the theatre audience (234). Liz Schafer reports that watching *The Duchess of Malfi* at the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse involved a recognition of the extent to which Webster's heroine is "imprisoned, caged in, by the audience" as much as she is "by her barmy brothers". In their reviews of the production, Schafer and Bridget Escolme also highlight that the playhouse's sightlines differentiate sharply between different groups of spectators, to the extent that while "the privileged audience at the front of the stage" were afforded a view deep into the recess of the central opening (or "discovery space') in the richly gold-ornamented *frons scenae*, viewers in the upper gallery were "craning their necks trying to see what the hell is going on" (Schafer; see also Escolme 210-211).

These challenging sightlines combined with the novelty of candlelit performance to create a great degree of nervousness about visibility in the playhouse's first season–and this, I contend, translated into a concern with visibility and oblique sightlines in the broadcast that became one of its distinguishing stylistic features. Two "Candlelit Playhouse Technicians" in addition to the stage managerial team were required to manage the six large overhead chandeliers and the extra light sources from sconces on the pillars, the shutters at the back of the auditorium, which were open to varying degrees for much of acts one, two, and five, and the handheld chandeliers that enabled many performers to light their own faces as well as those of others.[3] With so much of the action of the play taking place at night, this production was particularly notable for raising and lowering

chandeliers (a feature of the performance Schafer found “distractingly entertaining”), and even extinguishing all the candles in the theatre to create moments of near and total darkness–an effect discussed in a separate program note by Farah Karim Cooper, who argued that the manipulation of “sight, light and darkness” in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse enables “the effectiveness of illusion [to become] a defining dramaturgical principle for plays like *The Duchess of Malfi*.”

For his live-capture of Dromgoole’s *Malfi*, Russell responded to the specific affordances of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse and to the platform of television by drawing on his experience of directing 33 multi-camera productions in the challenging thrust-stage and shared-light environment of Shakespeare’s Globe between 2010 and 2014 (Nicholas). Unlike broadcast directors working for NT Live and RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon, who rely on two camera rehearsals to tweak the scripts and camera angles so as to be able to produce a broadcast-ready live mix on the night of the cinema broadcast, the much tighter broadcasting budget for Shakespeare’s Globe productions does not allow for camera rehearsals. Instead, for many years, the standard procedure has been to record productions across two performances, editing some footage of the first recording into the live mix of the second.[4] This was also the method Russell adopted for *Malfi*, for which he used the postproduction period between recording the performances on 11 and 13 February 2014 and the screening on BBC Four on 25 May to mix the feeds from the second recording into a pacey edit that included “a few re-cuts”, which were possible thanks to “isolated recordings of all the cameras” during the two performances.[5]

Russell’s aim was to produce a broadcast made-to-measure for television in its emphasis on brief establishing shots followed by talking heads and two-shots. The single set design of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse stage and use of multiple live-edited cameras mapped itself onto many of the traditional craft practices associated with the studio sets of mid- to late-twentieth-century television soap operas and sitcoms.[6] Meanwhile the sightlines from the lower gallery mapped themselves onto the convention of eye-level filming with the aim of creating “the most natural mid-shots and close

ups."[7] As a result, the broadcast took on the feel of the television genres (other than news and sports reporting) most commonly associated with experiential liveness, a sense of "'reality' (immediate presence)" and "actuality" (Butler 43), while also marking it as "traditional" (as opposed to the now more common single-camera set-up in these genres) in its grammar. With a few markedly televisual transitions, such as the dissolve of a slowly circling candelabrum over an establishing shot of the stage to mask the theatrical labor of the shrine of Ancona being thrust out of the discovery space at the beginning of act 3 scene 4 (figure 1), or close-ups on the singing face of Gemma Arterton's Duchess as she lit the candles with Cariola and the two "Candlelit Playhouse Technicians" at the beginning of act four (figure 2), the broadcast reframed this practical necessity connected to this theatre's particular technological set-up into a televisual moment of contemplation of the Duchess's beauty and fortitude. Whenever possible, the broadcast thus worked to create a primarily televisual spectacle, with selective framing and shots of candelabra covering up the fact that here, the Duchess was engaged in her most socially levelling gesture of the entire evening, working alongside her servant and backstage staff to facilitate the continuation of the performance.

1.

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Figures 1 and 2: transitional candles: televisual dissolve of candelabrum over the extreme wide-angle shot of the stage from the static upper gallery camera (figure 1); Duchess lighting candles while singing (figure 2)

Even so, Ian Russell was ready to admit that capturing the particular sensory environment of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse made it "trickier than usual" to produce a satisfactory theatre broadcast that would be true to the promise made by Tony Hall (Director General of the BBC) that the BBC's audiences would be given the televisual equivalent of "front row seats" (Hall cited in Shervin).[8] The layout of the compact auditorium, with gallery pillars obstructing sightlines, meant that all six cameras in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse had to be static on their tripods. As a consequence, the camerawork overwhelmingly reinforced the sense of poise and stateliness of the court of Amalfi. It is because of the static nature of much of the broadcast that the disruption of order which comes with Ferdinand's lycanthropy, with his frenzied dashes across the stage, was the more obviously heightened by the sudden pans and tilts that followed his erratic movements and those of the

almost equally agitated doctor. The "slackness of framing" in these moments when the cameras struggled to keep track of the performers' movements was yet one more way in which the broadcast evoked the reality effects and sense of immediacy associated with sitcoms and soap opera (Butler 43). Only one, front-facing, camera was located in the upper gallery, providing top-down, extreme wide-angle establishing shots that offered a strongly distorted perspective onto the stage and auditorium; it was therefore rarely used (camera A, figure 3; figure 1 exemplifies the angle).[9] One further "locked-off" camera facing centrestage from the lower gallery in a permanent wide angle provided what Russell described as "a visual "anchor" within the space" (camera B, figure 3; figure 15 exemplifies the angle).[10]

Most shots, however, were recorded either by the other, more flexible, front-facing camera which had a restricted range of movement from within the central aisle (or "*vomitorium*") in the pit (camera C, figure 3), or by the two cameras in the lower gallery on either side of the pit (cameras D and E, figure 3), enabling much of the broadcast to revert to the three-camera set-up from one side of the 180° axis of action associated with traditional sitcom and soap opera craft practices (Butler 38-40; 193). The two side cameras were in heavy use, as they could approximate a typically televisual shot/reverse-shot set-up in close-up or mid-shot whenever two characters were facing one another in dialogue across the thrust stage (Butler 45). In the wooing scene, for example, while Alex Waldmann's Antonio hesitated to acquiesce to the Duchess's proposal, the lovers were isolated in separate close-ups that always focused on the speaker. Only once their courtship had progressed did the frontal camera show the lovers in a two-shot that emphasized their physical and emotional proximity. While this technique was highly effective in conveying the privacy and intensity of this key scene, its success hinged on camerawork that excluded from the frame the theatrical elements which, on the stage, always stood in the way of the lovers: the chandeliers that were hanging at shoulder height to illuminate their faces and that physically separated them at one point, and the audience who shared the space with them, denying the Duchess her right to a private life by their very presence and contributing to the play's own regime of surveillance.

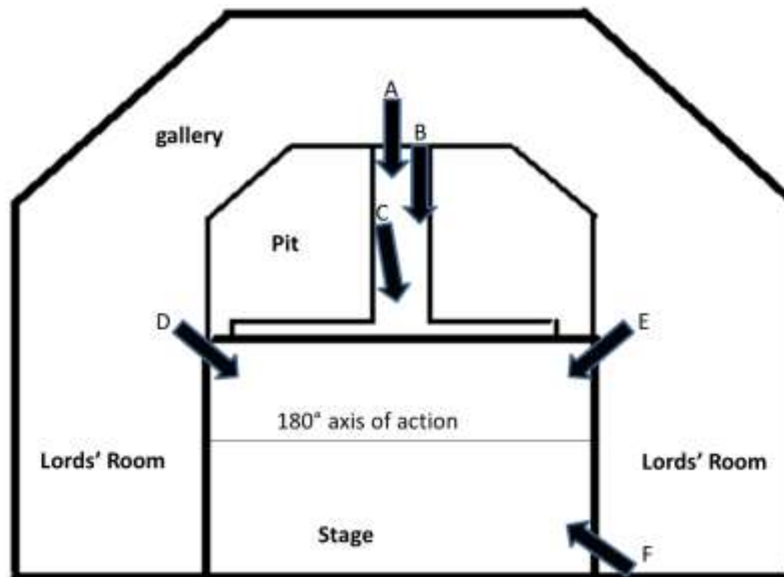

Figure 3: Camera positions in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse. Sketch (not to scale) by the author.

The technique also depended on privileging the speaker of a line over the listener, so that the reaction of each lover to the other's speeches remained invisible. This signaled an emphasis on the spoken word rather than a more theatrical mode of storytelling that allows the viewer to listen to the speaker while observing the reactions of other characters. The clarity of the sound and intelligibility of Webster's complex language, in this broadcast, seemed to trump the stage image at most times. Furthermore, with no exceptionally long takes even during a single monologue, such as the Duchess's celebrated parable of the salmon and the dogfish (3.5.123-44), the change of viewpoints paid little heed to Webster's versification and frequently cut across verse lines, with the edit closely correlating with Arterton's sense that Webster's versification is "not as lyrical as Shakespeare … much more conversational" with "on-the-line thought".

The emphasis on the speaker rather than dramaturgical composition was particularly evident in the play's exposition, whose dramaturgy relies on the commentator (Antonio in dialogue with Delio, placed in the musicians" gallery) and the object of the commentary (the Cardinal, Ferdinand and the Duchess, emerging in turn from the discovery space below to stand centerstage) sharing the

performance space. For Antonio's vignettes about the brothers, the camera mostly focused on Antonio and Delio in the musicians' gallery above the stage, framed by the pillars of the gallery as if in a space entirely separate from the stage (figure 4). As Andy Kesson observes:

It is striking that Webster's dramaturgy, establishing two spaces on stage that are independent, but mutually observable, should be so cinematic and yet to prove so hard to capture on film. It is as though an assumed imperative to film the speaker rather than the subject of their speech played against the tenor of this play's early modern dramaturgy of observation. (615)

It is only when the Duchess stepped out of the discovery space onto the stage that Russell let the camera's gaze rest on her rather than on Antonio, transforming his voice into a televisual voice-over that guided the viewer's appreciation of the Duchess from two alternating viewpoints (figures 5-8). The object of contemplation here was the luminosity of Arterton's face, whose shimmering complexion was caught in the soft glow of hand-held candles that acted as spotlights. The technique, then, rather than merely focused on Webster's dialogue, was, whenever the Duchess was present, designed to illuminate different viewpoints onto her character and face, offering alternating mid-shots and close-ups in a quest to remediate,[11] for the broadcast viewer, the much-commented-on "intimacy" of the space.

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Figures 4-8: exposition scene with alternating viewpoints onto the multi-faceted Duchess

In his review of the stage production, Kirwan found that Arterton had portrayed the Duchess as "humane, dignified … sometimes a little artificial" but with "a great deal of warmth" ("@ The Sam

Wanamaker Playhouse"). In his review of the broadcast, by contrast, Kirwan described the same performance as "alabaster-still", revealing the extent to which the camerawork, by showing this Duchess as a work of art to be contemplated in detail and from various sides, was able to generate precisely the monumentalizing stillness which the character herself so fiercely resists when she insists on how she is made of "flesh and blood" and refuses to be seen as "the figure cut in alabaster / Kneels at [her] husband's tomb" (1.1.454-456). As Kirwan saw it, in the broadcast the "close proximity of the cameras", which here constructed Arterton's performance as literally multi-faceted and still, "allowed for greater emotional heft in the main plot" for the BBC audience ("@ BBC Four"). Both Dromgoole and Russell favoured the "closer coverage" of such cropped shots because of the way it heightened the intensity of the performance and "generated a greater sense of confinement and pressure" by virtue of excluding the audience space from the frame.[12] If many of the close-ups in the broadcast showed the Duchess with her chin held high, this gestural characteristic was a result of Arterton's direct address of many of her lines to the otherwise least privileged audience members in the upper gallery just a few feet above her, to whom she appealed in her distress with the characteristic warmth Kirwan had noticed in the stage production. In the theatre, the manner in which she repeatedly established eye-contact with these audience members spoke of her willingness to break through boundaries of class in more than just her marriage. Remediated as a televisual close-up, however, Arterton's upward gaze lost its "democratic" appeal without providing the compensation of emotional proximity, becoming instead an image of haughty stillness and distance. Arterton's raised chin read at best as a sign of the Duchess's fortitude and proud defiance of her brothers and, at worst, as the proud demeanor of a character with an incorrigible sense of entitlement which she carried to her grave (figure 9). The physical intimacy of the close-up, paradoxically, had an emotionally distancing effect, affecting a key element of the Duchess's characterization.

The emphasis of the camerawork and editing on multi-faceted intimacy/confinement/pressure linked to a fetishization of Arterton's beauty paid particularly disturbing dividends in the scene of the

Duchess's death. Watching the death scenes in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, Schafer had already been unsettled by their "pornographic closeup" effect and the sense of having "a ringside seat at a realistic enactment of a woman being executed", concluding that "there is something of a slow-motion snuff movie about it all". The broadcast literalized Schafer's cinematic metaphor. The theatrical close-up effect Schafer had observed effortlessly translated into the integration of actual close-up shots in the mix of eight shots of the Duchess from four different angles, achieving a possibly even more unsettling effect (figures 9-16). Juxtaposing the proximity of close-ups with more distancing wide-shots of the dying Duchess, the blazon-like camerawork, in presenting her as the focal point of a multitude of viewpoints on her body and face, set her up as an object of morbid fascination. Like the female love object in Petrarch's poetic blazons, whom Nancy J. Vickers has taught us to recognize as subjected to the control of the poet who scatters her body parts across his *Rime sparse* (or "scattered rhymes') into "a collection of exquisitely beautiful disassociated objects" (266), the Duchess was here subjected to a technique that sought to give the viewer access to every facet of her as a mechanism of rhetorical control. In the terms of psychoanalytic film theory, the sequence corresponded to what Laura Mulvey would describe as "voyeurism": a fetishistic investment in the beautiful woman as object of the gaze which "has associations with sadism" and derives pleasure from "ascertaining guilt", which in turn offers the satisfaction of "subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness" (21-22). Having drawn out her suffocation to an almost unbearable extent, Russell's mix thrust into the spectator's view a final, grotesque close-up of the Duchess's sagging head (figure 14) before retreating to a wide shot of her slumped body on the stage (figure 15). If the Duchess's ability to "[light] the time to come" and the dazzling beauty of her face in death (1.1.209, 4.2.264), visualized metonymically by shooting it through the candelabrum deposited on the stage, restored her as an object of pleasurable contemplation (figure 16), it could not quite compensate for the obscenity of the forensic examination from all sides of her slow execution in the preceding sequence.

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Figures 9-16: selection of shots of the death of the Duchess; 9: final appeal to the audience in the upper gallery; figure 15: wide shot; figure 16: "dazzling" face that concludes the sequence as Ferdinand enters to look at his sister's body.

Whereas in claustrophobic scenes such as this, the camerawork adhered to the rules of "invisible technique" which govern standard live broadcasts, mainstream cinema and television alike (Ward 14), the sixth camera (camera F, figure 3) regularly disrupted the spatial organization of the broadcast, opening it up to showcase the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse's audience space, in accordance with Dromgoole and Russell's shared "keen[ness] to show the auditorium and the audience".[13] According to the rules governing "invisible" camerawork, all cameras filming an object or person should be on one side of "the 180⁰ line or axis of action", so as to offer the viewer a spatially coherent view of the object or person (Orpen 16-17). As can be seen in Figure 3, this is the logic according to which cameras A to E were organized, treating the Sam Wanamaker stage almost as if it were tucked behind a proscenium arch, with cameras D and E positioned at the downstage corners of the stage to enable shots to sometimes almost (but never entirely) penetrate the space of the stage from its sides and offer approximations of a shot/reverse-shot dynamic. Viewpoints from across the 180⁰ line of action can be spatially disorienting and unsettling and are experienced as disruptive; they are therefore generally avoided in theatre broadcasts no less than in conventional television or cinema. This is what makes the location of Russell's sixth camera so significant here (camera F, figure 3). Located in the far upstage right corner and facing towards the *vomitorium* at an angle that cut across the 180° line, Russell's "semi-reverse" camera acted as an oblique disruptor:[14] an uncomfortable vantage point that afforded something akin to an outsider's view of the stage and the audience in the theatre. This was the only camera which was associated predominantly with a specific character: Bosola (Sean Gilder), the malcontent spy and social misfit who looks upon the world of the play askance, from a critical angle that unmoors preconceptions and that allows him to travel along a journey from evil to good that results in the mayhem and confusion of Webster's tonally and morally disconcerting final act.

In the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse staging, Dromgoole's blocking of the early scenes consistently had Bosola enter from the door to the audience's left (i.e., stage right), the *sinister* side of the stage associated, in medieval and early modern dramaturgies, with hell (Fitzpatrick 220-222). Russell

followed Dromgoole's lead by using that sinister viewpoint to film Bosola's appearances, with a dramatic effect on all the shots produced by this camera. This vantage point consistently provoked a sense of discomfort, not only because of the reversal in the direction of the gaze, which disrupted what Cochrane and Bonner call the "personal geography of stage and action [which] is not only available but essential to each individual, the sole occupant of a single viewpoint" in the theatre (Cochrane and Bonner 127), but also because this viewpoint associated a view of the audience in the theatre with spying and potential evil. The angle ruptured whatever "suturing" the predominantly televisual style of filming in close-up shot/reverse-shot patterns had created (Aaron 19-22). With the theatre audience facing them in the rear of these shots, television viewers, rather than feel part of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse audience and in control of a spatially coherent viewpoint, were put in Bosola's sinister, alienated and critical position vis-à-vis the stage action *and* the theatre audience. From there, the light streaming in through the open shutters at the rear of the auditorium and the *vomitorium* was experienced as a shocking and distracting glare (figures 17-18), and the bizarre disconnection between the candlelit early modern characters and their incongruous twenty-first-century audiences was thrust sharply into the broadcast viewer's awareness (figure 18).

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Figures 17-18: the sinister “Bosola camera”. Figure 17: first introduction of this angle for “Here comes Bosola, / The only court gall” (1.1.22-23); figure 18: with shallow focus showing audience members in anachronistic juxtaposition with Bosola (5.2); figures 19-20: the sinister “Bosola camera” deployed in act 3 scene 2, with close-up of Ferdinand’s hand (figure 20) deploying horror film conventions.

The association of this camera angle with Bosola was so consistent in the first two acts that even when he did not appear in a scene, as in the Duchess’s bedroom/closet in act 3 scene 2, the use of this angle introduced an ominous sense of spying into the light-hearted opening of that scene (figure 19). This foreboding was justified, a few minutes later, when, in one of the very few “bravura”

moments of the broadcast (Barker 15), a close-up onto the door of the discovery space first revealed Ferdinand's hand (figure 20) and then, in an upward tilt, his face as he moved into his sister's private space. Although this particular shot relied on the conventions of horror film for its effectiveness, the earlier "Bosola camera" shot had triggered, for the television viewer, a sinister sense of disorder, intrusion and impending danger.

It is in Webster's dumb show at the shrine of Ancona, however, where Webster's most archaic emblematic dramaturgy is at work, that the interplay between the "Bosola camera" and the front-facing cameras was used to most striking effect. Following a frontal wide angle shot of the brightly-lit stage with the shrine in its center, which stressed the perfection of this perspectival spectacle, Russell's cameras isolated each part of the dumb show in turn to offer a sequential narrative with clear focal points for each shot (in the theatre, the action was much more fluid and overlapping). In the broadcast, Russell focused on the procession of the Cardinal and "divers churchmen" out of the side doors, returned to a perfect, wide-angle perspective for a view of the symmetrical arrangement of the stage, and zoomed in on the Cardinal "delivering up his cross, hat, robes, and ring, at the shrine" (SD 3.4). It is at this point that the "Bosola camera" came into play to provide shots of the Duchess with her children begging access to the shrine from her position in the *vomitorium* below the stage, which alternated with frontal shots of Count Malateste standing at the edge of the stage and repeatedly holding his hand up in refusal of her petition (figures 21-22). The use of the "Bosola camera" to film the Duchess here not only emphasized her exclusion from the order, ceremony and society captured by the front-facing cameras, but it brought into sharp perspective the causal link between Bosola's agency and the Duchess's banishment and her reduction to a vertically subordinate position at variance with everybody else.

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Figures 21-22: the "Bosola camera" capturing the Duchess's sinister rejection by the central forces of Duke Malateste's order in the dumb show at the shrine of Ancona

Clearly, however, camerawork alone could not be sufficient to remediate, for television audiences who might have tuned in on the Spring Bank Holiday Sunday out of curiosity rather than specialist interest in either Webster or the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, the particularities of both this space and of Websterian dramaturgy. This explains the rather heavy-handed framing of the broadcast in a range of paratexts that belabored the point that, as BBC Four's program information put it, this was a truly "extraordinary performance" that would offer something distinctly novel and un-Shakespearean (BBC), thus tapping into the rich vein of "Jacobean sensationalism" which was a hallmark of the first two seasons at the Sam Wanamaker playhouse (Tosh 29). Never mind that the BBC's program information completely misunderstood the nature of the playhouse's uncurtained thrust stage when it announced that "the curtain draws back and the play unfolds in a bloody and downright ghoulish chain of events" (BBC Four "BBC Arts"). What mattered here was how this billing oriented the viewer towards thinking of the broadcast as *sensational* – both an exceptional occurrence and a television program that would communicate to the audience some of the sensory

excitement of “the audience cocooned in a wooden chamber made of pale oak, and the stage lit solely by hundreds of candles” (BBC Four “BBC Arts”).

Similar work was also done by James Shapiro’s one-hour documentary *The Mysterious Mr Webster*, which preceded the broadcast in the schedule, and by the introduction to the broadcast featuring one of the BBC’s best-known faces: current affairs journalist and cultural pundit Andrew Marr.[15] Filmed from a camera positioned within the central discovery space, so that the entire Sam Wanamaker Playhouse auditorium could be seen behind him, Marr’s introduction was intercut with close-ups of the stage floor, the painted ceiling, the carvings on the gallery pillars and the candelabra, letting the broadcast viewers familiarize themselves with the space presented in almost haptic detail so as to get a “feel” for the space and its dimensions.[16] Hailing the television broadcast as a “special event in British *theatre*” (my emphasis) and thus erasing the line separating the two media of broadcast television and theatre, Marr then homed in on the particularities of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse and the challenges it represented for its remediation on television. Addressing the broadcast viewers directly, Marr demanded that they “concentrate on the extraordinary possibilities of staging, and scenery, and lighting – no electric lighting of course, but candles. Hundreds of candles.” He continued: “Now it’s bold, and perhaps crackers, to be trying television by candlelight, but as you’ll see, the effect is extraordinary. So welcome to a world of shadows: not just the soft, candlelit gloom of the theatre, but a moral universe which is dark with jealousy, mistrust and revenge.” The audience was thus oriented, from the start, to view the broadcast as representing a heroic experimental endeavor to overcome the double technological challenge of candlelight and the medium of television, justifying both with reference to the tragedy’s shadowy moral universe.

With television audiences strongly oriented towards considering candlelight as the most distinctive feature of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, this sensorium’s other stimuli (its scents, the heat and smoke rising from the candles, the physical discomfort of its packed hard benches and the sightlines

hampered by architecture and candelabra) were all subsumed under the governing sense of eyesight. It was therefore striking, following Andrew Marr's warning about the shadows and darkness that made the broadcast into such a "crackers" exercise, to find the opening scenes (not least because of those open shutters) remarkably well and evenly lit on the television screen – to the extent that John Wyver found the image "very bright and sharp" and the "illumination very even" with "a lot of general light [that] seem[ed] to spill across the stage" even in a night scene ("Live-Blogging"). The brightness of the image here corresponded to the carefree brightness of the Duchess's mood right through to the moment of her discovery by Ferdinand, and it enabled switches from the intensity of dialogue in close-up to the use of a wider angle that captured the Duchess's direct address to the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse audience, who shared the light with her. Although there was a genuinely dark nighttime scene for Bosola's discovery of the nativity chart Antonio had drawn up for his firstborn son, Marr's initial warnings seemed out of proportion with the clarity of the image throughout this first half of the play.

All this changed when the mood turned to tragedy. After a dazzling scene at the shrine of Ancona (figure 21), the broadcast re-introduced Marr for another piece of orientation of the television audience, who had by now got used to the screen bathed in a warm twilight in shades of gold, beige and ochre. With a note of tremendous intensity, Marr summed up the plot so far, offered advance notice of the "series of foul tortures" and general destruction ahead and announced:

But before the final two acts begin, a word of warning: the play is about to get darker. Literally. The two brothers are about to play a very nasty trick on the Duchess. This trick requires to be played in the dark. So, for just over a minute, as the Duchess tries to work out what is going on, the stage, and therefore your screen, will go dark. It doesn't matter how many thousands of pounds you've spent on it, whether it's wide-screen, flat-screen, HD, it – will – go – black. So do not adjust your set: the final part of *The Duchess of Malfi* is about to begin.

At the most obvious level, after the easing of the broadcast spectators into accepting the conventions of the candlelit playhouse in the first half of the play, this instruction prepared the audience for the next step: Webster's dramaturgical *coup-de-théâtre* that was going to be as disconcerting for the television audience as for the theatre audience, who were also plunged into the most profound darkness as Ferdinand presented his sister with a dead man's hand. The comment, Andy Kesson explains, "tied the fidelity of this television version of a stage production to the rhetoric of an unmediated quality of broadcasting" and made light – or the absence of light – the sole indicator of the broadcast's authentic remediation of the audience experience in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse (611).

More subtly, the interval commentary oriented broadcast viewers, once and for all, to accept Marr's direct address to the broadcast audience as a substitute for the direct address to the theatre audience by the performers and to accept the dissociation between the television viewer in the light of their own living room, able to get up and see their way to their potentially misbehaving TV set, and the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse audience in the shared light and/or darkness of the theatre. Even though moments of direct address were frequent in the theatre (including a moment, captured in the broadcast, when Ferdinand cornered one specific audience member with a direct question in his mad scene), and although James Garnon, playing the Cardinal, praised how the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse encouraged the company to "play *with* the audience" rather than "*to* the audience", none of the performers acknowledged the broadcast viewers. Instead of the performers, it was Marr who directly addressed the camera to play *with* the broadcast audience and orient them to consider themselves as consumers of a specifically televisual experience. The narrative he created in this remarkably one-sided "interaction" played out in the intimacy not of the theatre, but of the broadcast audience's homes, was one of these viewers' potential complaints about television reception, implying the possibility of two-way interaction even as complaints were pre-empted by the remark.

Thus oriented towards a specifically *televisual* aesthetic of invisibility, the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse's sensory frustration of its audience through hard benches, partial sightlines and hazy candlelight was, in the second half of the broadcast, remediated through recurring moments of deliberately poor visibility. Television audiences were asked to peer at the dark screen to discern near indiscernible figures and facial expressions or were simply not given access to the visual focal point of a scene. The aesthetic of invisibility went far beyond the "oddly effective" total blackout Marr had announced.[17] Even after the brightly lit wax figures of Antonio and his son were thrust through the discovery space opening, for example, they were not shown to the broadcast viewers in detail for an extraordinarily long time. While in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, audiences were subjected to multiple sensory stimuli of brightness, scent and heat that accentuated the goriness of a spectacle which could not be ignored, in the broadcast, a shot of the Duchess's head against the rows of votive candles was visually overwhelming in that it produced so sharp a contrast of light and shadow that her facial expression was completely unreadable for broadcast viewers: extreme visibility was turned into invisibility (figure 23). When, in the following scene, Bosola entered wrapped in a black coat against the backdrop of the dark discovery space, the shot was almost entirely black save for the faintest hint of a hand in the bottom centre of the frame (the image is so dark that it cannot even be used as an illustration of this point). While he talked to the Duchess, the Duchess was clearly delineated in the left half of the frame, while Bosola was no more than a black hole in the right half (figure 24). Most strikingly, in the only use of rack focus in the entire broadcast, Bosola, still hooded and masked in black, was an almost invisible figure in sharp focus against the Duchess in a blur (figure 25), before the lens was eventually adjusted to bring the Duchess into focus (figure 26). As the broadcast progressed to the climax of the Duchess's death, its viewers increasingly had to peer, guess at what they were seeing, and adjust their focus in a manner that transcoded into the medium of television the frustrations of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse's awkward sightlines, discomfort and smokiness, with this frustration justified by Marr's commentary with reference to the conditions of the playhouse. What the broadcast produced here was more an

adaptation, for television, of the space of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse than it was an adaptation of Dromgoole's *Malfi.*

23.

24.

25.

26.

Figures 23-26: the aesthetic of invisibility. Figure 23: extreme contrast; figure 24: the Duchess and Bosola both within the frame, with Bosola invisible; figures 24-25: rack focus privileging the

invisible Bosola wearing a black mask and cloak over the blurred shot of the Duchess (figure 24) before eventually sharpening the image of the Duchess and blurring Bosola instead (figure 25).

The broadcast of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse's *Malfi* thus made use of the historical association of present-day digital theatre broadcast with television, including the convention of using a well-known authority figure to introduce a transmission of a play, to produce a broadcast that worked just as hard to enskill its audience into understanding the conventions governing candlelit performance and Webster's "ghoulish" "Jacobean" style as it strove to produce a spectacle made-to-measure for television and partaking in its reality effects and sense of immediacy. Recoding the affordances of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse into affordances of television, the broadcast produces a hybrid experience of both platforms by adopting televisual techniques to film transitions, record dialogue in shot/reverse-shot patterns and to translate theatrical intimacy into televisual proximity through the use of close-ups (with a significant impact on characterization). This brought about a much more fundamental shift in which the broadcast audience was addressed separately from the audience in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse from the stage-as-television-studio with Marr as the anchor. Filmed from the discovery space, Marr presented the auditorium, rather than the production, as the spectacle and positioned his viewers to be able to combine a televisual sense of immersion and identification with the lead characters through "invisible" camerawork with an oblique viewpoint that aligned them with the malcontent character of Bosola and positioned them at a critical, distanced, angle to the performance and the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse audience. While the "invisible" camera techniques and emphasis on close-ups promoted a sense of televisual immersion in the play, the idiosyncratically sinister viewpoint of Webster's malcontent worked hand-in-hand with the individualist set-up of television viewing to disrupt suture and a sense of community between the television viewer and the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse audience. It is this careful balancing act that made it possible for Russell's *Malfi* to function as a "faithful" remediation

of the performance conditions of the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, with a stress on candlelight and an aesthetic of invisibility that came to stand for all the other sensory stimuli of the playhouse and that produced a version of "ghoulish" Jacobean drama, and of the playhouse, fit for television.

The "sinister" vantage point of Russell's *Malfi* broadcast, in turn, allows us to return to the Shakespeare broadcasts produced by NT Live and RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon and recognize the extent to which these broadcasts, which we have come to accept as self-effacing remediations of theatre, are in fact governed by conventions that are specific to the combination of Shakespeare's plays, the spaces of the National Theatre's Olivier auditorium and the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, and the dissemination through cinema broadcasts. The difference goes far beyond the lighting conditions for the respective broadcasts and the relative darkness of candlelit theatre which Marr stressed so insistently. Russell's *Malfi* allows us to re-see some of the conventions that have accrued around Shakespeare broadcasts that have become near-invisible in their universal-seeming "quiet transparency" (Sullivan 632). One such convention is the fluidity and apparently effortless movement of cameras on tracks that give the Shakespeare broadcasts from those larger auditoria a sense of ease and flow, which is distinct from the more rigid style of Russell's static cameras that monumentalized Arterton's Duchess without affording a genuine sense of emotional proximity to her. Whereas in the larger auditoria, the possibility of including tracking shots that combine with zooms allow broadcasts of Shakespeare plays to slowly draw the viewer into the thought processes of soliloquizing characters in sustained long shots, thus creating the illusion of "Shakespearean" depth and lyricism,[18] the nature of this "Jacobean" space here determined a style of filming that kept the viewer at a distance from the protagonist even in her most direct moments of interaction with her audience and that disrupted Webster's verse in a way that translated into a perception of his play as prosaic and jagged and his heroine as paradoxically both statuesque and fragmented.

Another key convention of NT Live and RSC Live broadcasts of Shakespeare is the ability of crane shots to move the broadcast viewer through the space and give them a range of vantage points unavailable for any human observer in the theatre. When a crane is available, the top-down views it offers of the stage not only serve to orient the broadcast audience in the space, but also give them a sense of control and power over it: this is a space they understand from a literally superior vantage point. Regardless of the extent to which subsequent camerawork, by cropping out large parts of the stage and the audience, creates a “zoning of performance” that disconnects sequences within it from the broader spatial organization of the broadcast (Sullivan 645), the crane shots that bridge scene changes and are most often deployed at the start of a scene, where they function as “placing” shots that allow the audience to “get their spatial bearings” (Wardle 143), provide a secure, reassuring visual anchor to which they can return. Russell’s *Malfi* broadcast reveals just how ideologically-determined that sense of control and understanding of the space is, countering it with an approach to theatrical space that, by rarely allowing the viewer to lose their spatial bearings on the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse’s small stage while also integrating the oblique vantage point of the “Bosola camera”, combines a sense of spatial understanding with broadcast viewer’s separation from the theatre audience. The introduction of an external standpoint destabilizes the broadcast viewer’s relation to the fictional space. The approach to filming the Shakespeare broadcasts even in thrust spaces like the RST or the Donmar Warehouse, which uses frontal shots as a spatial anchor and hardly ever allows a camera to cross the 180^{0} axis of action gives the cinema audience a sense of an ordered world in which they are immersed. This approach is disrupted here by the comparatively more prominent use of the side cameras and the “Bosola camera”, facilitating a distinction between the disordered, jarring and gloomy world of “Jacobean” drama, from which the television viewer is excluded even as it casts the theatre audience in a critical shared light, and the reassuring smoothness and suture of a “Shakespearean” experience. What concentrating on Russell’s *Malfi* reveals, then, are stylistic differences in the broadcast style in response to the architectural and

technological features of the theatrical space and to Webster's dramaturgy that shed fresh light on the features of Shakespeare broadcasts that are so unproblematically accepted as "universal".

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Notes

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[1] The modest corpus is made up of Stage on Screen's live recordings for DVD dissemination of *Doctor Faustus* (2009), *Volpone* (2010) and *Duchess of Malfi* (2010) and the *Doctor Faustus* cinema broadcast from Shakespeare's Globe (2011). Trevor Nunn's *Volpone* for the RSC (2015) was recorded but has not yet been released. Edward's Boys have produced DVDs of their productions of early modern plays, but these are not the type of professionally-produced live-mixed multicamera captures I concentrate on in this essay.

[2] Chui-Yee Cheung, Film & Digital Distribution Manager at Shakespeare's Globe, explains that the theatre "lacked the funding to capture *Malfi* ourselves and the BBC were keen to do so in exchange for the broadcast rights. Having previously worked with the BBC on numerous other captures and broadcasts, they seemed like the natural choice." Private Correspondence, 5 September 2016. On the mutual benefits of the partnership, see Kesson 609-611.

[3] Programme credits for *The Duchess of Malfi*, January 2014. In later productions with less demanding lighting plots, only one technician was necessary.

[4] Since 2016, when Emma Rice's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (also directed by Ian Russell) was live-streamed on the BBC's "Shakespeare Lives" online platform, Shakespeare's Globe has moved to producing live streams and broadcasts of a single performance without prior camera rehearsals.

[5] Ian Russell, Private Correspondence, 31 August 2016; see Friedman for a behind-the-scenes account of broadcasting for NT Live and Wyver "Screening", Stone and Aebischer *Shakespeare, Spectatorship* for accounts of the similar process for RSC Live from Stratford-upon-Avon.

[6] For the craft practices for soap operas and sitcoms, see Jeremy Butler (38-49; 176-193); these conventions survive in some present-day sitcoms, though single-camera schemas are dominant now.

[7] Ian Russell, Private Correspondence, 12 August 2016.

[8] Russell, Private Correspondence, 12 August 2016.

[9] See also "Live-Blogging The Duchess of Malfi" by John Wyver (Illuminations Media and Director, RSC Screen Productions), in which Wyver notes that "Some of the cameras have very wide-angle lenses." The irate response to the blog by Dominic Dromgoole offers a fascinating insight into the rivalry between Shakespeare's Globe and the RSC in the final years of Dromgoole's tenure as Artistic Director of Shakespeare's Globe.

[10] Russell, Private Correspondence, 12 August 2016.

[11] Butler notes the frequency with which close-ups and medium-close-ups are employed in traditional studio recordings of soap opera. He explains: “Pragmatically, a medium close-up is easier for camera operators to frame. … Additionally, relying on medium close-ups for the majority of the he close shots means that when close-ups, or extreme close-ups, are employed they will have more impact” (44). Much the same can be observed in this broadcast: the final, more tightly framed close-up on the dead Duchess’ face in Figure 16 discussed below is the more effective for the absence of such tight framing in the sequence leading up to this climax.

[12] Russell, Private Correspondence, 12 August 2016.

[13] Ian Russell, Private Correspondence, 12 August 2016.

[14] Ian Russell, Private Correspondence, 12 August 2016; Russell reports that Dromgoole was “a fan” of this camera angle.

[15] For a critique of the heavy-handedness with which these frames seek to steer reception, see Kirwan “*Coriolanus*” 276.

[16] See also Kesson’s analysis of Marr’s commentary (611-12).

[17] Kirwan, “The Duchess of Malfi (Shakespeare's Globe) @ BBC4”.

[18] I discuss this effect in detail in [anonymised for peer review].