

## Introduction: defining a genre

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The uniforms will take us into parts of society that we usually don't enter.  
Tony Garnett, producer (Garnett 1998: n.p.)

The police series is a genre of British television drama that has captivated audiences for over sixty years. Its inclination to explore the more distressing aspects of British life, into which other forms of mainstream television often dare not venture, still manages to attract viewers in their millions. However, with the finale of *Broadchurch* (ITV, 2013–2017) peaking at 9.3 million viewers on Monday 17 April 2017, you could be forgiven for thinking that the genre is in decline. In comparison, *The Sweeney* (ITV, 1975–1978) regularly reached 20 million homes: that's 35 per cent of the then total British population, compared to *Broadchurch's* 14 per cent of the public in 2017.<sup>1</sup> In essence, the nature of television broadcasting has changed and its audience has dispersed across a highly competitive and global, multichannel marketplace. Hundreds of channels, streaming services, and digital platforms are aggressively competing with one another, utilising algorithms to tailor entire services around our individual tastes. With the added luxury of being able to watch whatever content we want, whenever we want, on any device that we want, any programme that draws in viewers around the 10 million mark represents the most successful British television drama broadcast in the late 2010s.

Nevertheless, as a staple of British television schedules, police dramas have continuously operated as a 'Trojan horse' with the potential to influence national debate. As expressed by producer Tony Garnett (above), often the most commercially successful and critically revered police series utilise a clear iconography and set of themes. Popular with both broadcasters and audiences this recognisable format can expose the effects disenfranchised communities experience from broader socio-economic changes. Such a genre possesses the capability to reveal how national strategies employed by the Government to tackle inequality, and the perceived relationship between poverty and crime, impact upon the British public's

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relationship with its police force. Therefore police officer characters can be used as an incidental means of exploring transformations to traditional class identities; class relations; and the dynamics of social, economic, and gender inequality.

Following the hardship of the Second World War there was a collective belief, in light of the 1942 Beveridge Report and the writings of economist John Maynard Keynes, that the 'future of full employment, social justice, and a minimum level of welfare for all people' served as the 'ideal' to which all 'governments aspired while in office' (Kingsley Kent 1999: 335). So popular was this vision that the Beveridge Report sold over a million copies. William Beveridge became an international celebrity who regularly explained to large crowds the social principles he felt should underpin western capitalism. However, over time Beveridge's social vision has had its universalist foundations gradually stripped away by incumbent prime ministers. Harold Wilson introduced earnings-related contributions in 1966, Edward Heath introduced increased means-testing in 1973, and Margaret Thatcher removed the Government's commitment to full employment by 1986 in favour of a globalised neoliberal economy underpinned by individual entrepreneurship.<sup>2</sup> Analogously, the police series has maintained its position as 'a privileged site for the staging of the trauma of the break-up of the post-war settlement', given its frequent depiction of social unrest whilst Government provision for the most vulnerable continues to decline (Brunsdon 2000: 196).

This is the first study to analyse television police series produced in the UK from 1955 until the late 2010s over the course of a book. Notions of what constitutes a 'police series' can change over time. It is a genre whereby archetypal series borrow a mixture of visual and thematic tropes more readily associated with other established genres and movements. The purpose of this book is to examine how cultural understandings of what constitutes the police series have developed over each decade as the relationship between a television programme's production practices, visual style, and resultant ideology has evolved. When referring to 'production practices' I mean the authorial contribution of key practitioners to productions, the camera technologies available to them, and dominant performance styles of actors at the time. Essentially this book is a diachronic exploration of the tensions that exist between the nexus of these production choices with the subsequent style and then ideology of key texts in relation to wider socio-economic events. *You're nicked* explores how all of these factors operate in dialogue with one another and considers how they impact on the changing definitions of the UK police series genre.

### Reaching a definition

The police series is a genre with a number of cultural influences, including the soap opera, horror, sci-fi, western, and social realism, that are often combined in a sophisticated manner. A recurring theme repeatedly explored through this combination of influences, which prominent feminist scholars argue is intrinsic to most forms of television drama, is a sexual division of labour. This division often depicts 'the home as a space of femininity and leisure and the public world as a place of masculinity and work' (Brunsdon *et al.* 1997a: 19). Most existing academic studies of police series exclusively examine how police officers are portrayed in their working lives as part of the public world of work. However, academics have not always considered the extent to which the depiction of private domestic spaces can make an ideological contribution to the genre. This book is interested in how representations of gender and social class, within both public and private spaces, are articulated visually according to production practices at play within landmark series. The study will analyse how a dichotomy between the public and private spheres is reinforced, debated, or challenged by the stylistic and thematic composition of specific series. It also considers to what extent fictional television programmes can be considered 'evidence' of social change.

As hundreds of dramas broadcast from 1955 to today could fall under the umbrella term 'police series', it would be impossible to analyse them all sufficiently within a comprehensive study. Therefore, this book has undertaken a rigorous selection process. Rather than interrogating the precise boundaries that exist between the 'detective series' and the 'police procedural', I have chosen for analysis here series that regularly depict the routine work of police constables and detectives.<sup>3</sup> They are series grounded in the real working practices of specific constabularies at the time of broadcast. Action-based series including *Gideon's Way* (ITV, 1965–1966), *Department S* (ITV, 1969–1970), *The Professionals* (ITV, 1977–1983), *The Sandbaggers* (ITV, 1978–1980), *Spooks* (BBC, 2002–2011), and *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010–) etc. are not included. These dramas are decidedly more invested in espionage or fantasy and are less interested in the types of crime likely to be experienced by ordinary members of the public. Nor are they interested in how crime trends were being addressed by real police forces or specialist squads. Including such series could embroil this study in questions of where intelligence-gathering ends and policing begins, thus losing sight of the focus on how the representation of police procedure and its impact on the public has developed. Although such programmes may

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be considered police series in another context, they are not deemed so in this instance. Similarly, the police series that have been chosen were popular at their time of transmission. I have discarded marginal series, as *You're nicked* is a study of popular police series that regularly attracted millions of viewers and so may have influenced their respective cultural and social epochs.

#### Current scholarship

Landmark academic studies on the stylistic composition and ideological construction of British police series often negotiate two widely believed assumptions. First, the idea that the genre traditionally abides by a masculinist discourse is treated as a truism. Second, there is an intrinsic supposition that the introduction of film cameras and then digital technology automatically updates the visual sophistication and/or ideological complexity of the genre. Alan Clarke provided the first key academic study of the British police series. His essay (Clarke 1992) maps the ideological make-up of key series in relation to the production technologies used, whilst considering what was occurring within the British police force at the time.

Clarke believes that a cluster of four ideological elements define the parameters of the British police series. These are: the threat of crime that is depicted, the type of family life the protagonist leads, whether the protagonist engages in rule-breaking, and to what extent their characteristics are individualistic. Using this guiding schema Clarke contends that *The Sweeney's* use of 16 mm cameras provided the police series genre with a 'harder edge' compared to previous series and their 'slow moving narrative and static camerawork' (Clarke 1992: 233). However, according to Clarke, *The Sweeney* does not manage substantially to revolutionise the ordering of the genre's ideological components. Protagonist Jack Regan (John Thaw) is still an honest and incorruptible police official who works tirelessly 'to protect the public from villains who prey on society' like his predecessor George Dixon (Jack Warner) of *Dixon of Dock Green* (BBC, 1955–1976) (Clarke 1992: 243). Following this analysis Clarke argues that the BBC's later series *Juliet Bravo* (BBC, 1980–1985), in comparison to *The Sweeney*, 'provides a transformation in the genre through the reordering of ideological elements' (Clarke 1992: 248). Both series were created by Ian Kennedy Martin but now the threat of crime is reduced in scale; protagonist Jean Darblay's (Stephanie Turner) family life is given more script time; there is no rule breaking; and the emphasis on individual traits, domestic situations, and career progression of the main character paint

a different picture of individualism. Because ‘the transformation of the genre is a product of social forces of production shaping these ideological parameters’, Clarke also maintains that it is important ‘not to isolate moments of fictional representation from the rest of the lived world’ (Clarke 1992: 252). In particular he considers *The Sweeney*’s depiction of individualism in part as a response to the appointment of Robert Mark as Metropolitan Police Commissioner.

Clarke’s study proved to be pivotal to the academic study of police series. His focus on the leading protagonist as the principal site for discerning how a series’ style, ideology, and relationship to the real world intersect has dictated subsequent studies of the genre. For example, Lez Cooke’s *British Television Drama: A History* (2015a), and his contribution to the *Television Genre Book* (2015b), situate the development of the police series in relation to the stylistic tendencies of British television drama at the time of production. Both studies reiterate Clarke’s narrative by characterising key technological developments, such as the rise of film-camera technology and then digital handheld cameras, as updating the verisimilitude and ideological reordering of the genre. Cooke’s brief readings of *Z Cars*, *The Sweeney*, and *The Cops* (BBC, 1998–2001) continue to represent an accessible basis for studying this genre that still has yet to be substantially challenged. Each analysis considers how changes in production technologies and their resulting visual discourse can impact upon a protagonist’s characterisation in relation to what was happening within the British police force at the time.

Analysing the rich lineage of British police series requires watching hundreds of hours of content. Therefore academic works often focus on the representation of police officer characters within a very specific time period over the course of a book. This ensures that a more nuanced account of the genre’s developments can be excavated. Susan Sydney-Smith’s *Beyond ‘Dixon of Dock Green’* (2002) begins with Robert Barr’s *Telecrimes* documentary series (BBC, 1946) and concludes with *Softly, Softly* (BBC, 1966–1976) to consider how overlooked texts influenced better-known series from 1946 up until 1966. Her analysis of the six-part *Pilgrim Street* (BBC, 1952), for example, ascertains that all the ‘germinal ideas’ of *Dixon of Dock Green* and *Z Cars* (BBC, 1962–1978) can be traced back to this particular series and its depiction of ‘ordinary everyday crime’ (Sydney-Smith 2002: 79). Similarly, Helen Piper’s *The TV Detective* (2015) examines British detective series broadcast from 1992 to 2012 to chart the detective genre’s ‘aesthetic directions’ as a means of categorising the types of dissident protagonists that are central to the genre (Piper 2015: 2). In so doing, Piper’s genealogical study considers how the development process within different television

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production contexts can impact upon the narrative and stylistic form of detective subgenres. Both authors concentrate on a twenty-year period in order to provide a more detailed account of development within a specific era that cannot be achieved by books operating within a larger timeframe.

Correspondingly, the BFI TV Classics series takes an even more concentrated approach. Each book devotes itself to one television series to draw out links between the drama in question and its social context. Mark Duguid's *Cracker* (2009) traces the origins and development of ITV's series in the context of early 1990s television and places it in its contemporary social and political landscape. Meanwhile, Charlotte Brunsdon's *Law and Order* (2010) analyses the controversial BBC serial in relation to contemporary criminal justice scandals of the 1970s to explore the outrage that the broadcasts caused.

Another approach to studying the police series, adopted by other contributions to the Manchester University Press Television Series, involves focusing on the career of a particular screenwriter or producer. Stephen Lacey's *Tony Garnett* (2007), Julia Hallam's *Lynda La Plante* (2005), Lez Cooke's *Troy Kennedy Martin* (2012), and Steve Blandford's *Jimmy McGovern* (2013) each analyse one television auteur. Each book examines how a television practitioner develops their authorial signature and to what extent their contributions may have impacted upon the visual, verisimilar, and ideological development of UK police series.

Lastly, Sue Turnbull's comprehensive *TV Crime Drama* (2014) contains a chapter that examines the developments, in the form and style, of the British procedural series from its inception up until 2014. It considers what has been valued within the British context of production in relation to America. Similarly, her later chapter entitled 'Women and crime' examines the representation of women police officers in UK, US, and Scandinavian crime drama. Whilst the strength of Turnbull's book is that it manages succinctly to cover the entire history of the genre and open up a dialogue among different countries' practices, she still largely conforms to the oft-repeated narrative of the genre's development in the UK. Whilst Turnbull has instigated a well-needed reassessment of the genre, it scrapes the surface in terms of the precise class and gender politics that are at work in pivotal series.

### Rationale and methodology

In response to this scholarship, *You're nicked* is the first study to examine British police series from 1955 until the present day in a way that

conceptualises the importance of the genre's position within the wider socio-political context. It considers the unique insight the genre may be able to provide the postwar settlement's disassembly and the ways in which television drama may have intervened in the debates that led to this process. At the time of writing, television scholarship on the British police series has made little attempt to engage with criminological theory largely because each study, following Clarke's schema, primarily analyses the representation of police-officer characters as a measure of a given programme's ideology. To change the academic landscape this research analyses the depiction of the recurring civilian character types and their reasons for committing crime. It asks to what extent the crimes committed can be ascribed to social inequality, fracturing class relations, the dissolution of class identities, a lack of employment opportunities, or inadequate social justice. Where appropriate this representation of crime is mapped on to key criminological theories of the time and historical accounts of changes that were enacted within the British police force in response to public fears surrounding certain crime trends.

The diachronic methodological approach adopted here, usually synonymous with feminist studies of television drama, is particularly interested in how the representation of public and domestic spaces, and the differences that exist between them, can metonymically contribute to broader discussions regarding the public's understanding of class identity and gender roles.<sup>4</sup> Centring this discussion on the nature of the tension that exists among the production methods used, visual style produced, and resultant ideological composition created, in relation to cultural influences as well as socio-economic happenings, will reassess how understandings of what constitutes a police series have changed over time. Examining the nature of this interplay both through 'landmark', and critically overlooked but commercially popular police series, will further complicate the police series canon.

To examine this interplay, and deduce how the style produced by specific production technologies contributed to the ideological composition and development of the police series, my textual analysis is informed by Keir Elam's semiotics: a mode of analysis referred to as a 'science dedicated to the study of production of meaning in society' (Elam 1980: 1). Like Helen Wheatley's (2005) pivotal analysis of *Upstairs, Downstairs* (ITV, 1971–1975), my semiotic approach also pays particular attention to Elam's interest in the relationship shared between a character's attitudinal markers (gesturing) and their illocutionary markers (dialogue). I employ the approach pioneered by Wheatley because it has a refined ability to uncover the disjuncture that can exist between a character's

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immediate dialogue and their gesturing. By paying particular attention to a character's framing, movement, positioning, and interaction with their set design, i.e. reading a scene 'spatially', one can deduce how dominant social issues of the time were being addressed (Wheatley 2005: 155).<sup>5</sup> Like Wheatley I subscribe to the view that 'the rhetoric of television drama is a rhetoric of discussion' because 'television does not present firm ideological conclusions – despite its formal conclusions – so much as it comments on ideological problems' (Newcomb and Hirsch 2000: 566, 565). Therefore I apply this form of textual analysis to the way specific social concerns are discussed in public and private spaces whilst keeping attuned to a programme's production practices and the social changes occurring in British society at that time. My analyses consider to what extent the police series genre can be treated as evidence of social change and what its contribution to that social change might be.

### Structure of the book

To reevaluate the development of the British police series each chapter is structured into three sections. The first section analyses how the visual style of the production mode in question frames the police-station space. It examines how the camerawork and set design are used to depict the police force's institutional politics, its inner rivalries, and its ideological stance towards preventing and solving crimes. The second section of each chapter then examines how these stylistic tropes are used to frame the domestic settings of civilian characters. It considers to what extent a series can intervene in national debate by paying specific attention to the economic anxiety and social pressures families were experiencing in relation to the fracturing postwar settlement and its impact on class and gendered identities. Lastly, the third section of each chapter examines what happens when the spatial composition of the police station and civilian home are combined within the homes of police officials. A police officer's, or detective's, domestic space must strike a balance between the sense of order featured in the police station with the socio-economic pressures occurring in the other civilian homes within their community. Therefore methodically studying the relationship among production technologies, style, and ideology within three different types of space in each chapter, in relation to socio-economic and criminological developments in British society, will reformulate dominant understandings of a genre that has been central to British television's development as a communicative medium.



Chapter 1 initially examines how *Z Cars* negotiates modernity in relation to the BBC's previous hit *Dixon of Dock Green*. Shot in real time by six simultaneously recording video cameras within a television studio, *Z Cars* weekly attracted 14 million viewers and is widely considered to have helped establish the founding conventions of the British police series genre. Set in the fictional Liverpool estates Newtown and Seaport, *Z Cars* has a distinctive regional flavour. Here, in terms of criminology, deviant subculture theories are particularly prevalent given the distinction repeatedly made between working class men's cultural goals and the institutional means by which they cannot achieve them. Essentially this first chapter argues that *Z Cars* instigated a shift in social-realist culture away from the inherent nostalgia of soap operas towards a more sobering assessment of alienated men who have slipped through the cracks of the postwar settlement.

Chapter 2 challenges traditional genre studies that grant too much significance to *The Sweeney* when looking at the 1970s. 'The 1970s: an action-fuelled filmic decade?' redresses such a balance by comparing *The Sweeney's* use of film cameras on location, utilised to capture the cut-and-thrust working practices of the Flying Squad, in relation to *Hunter's Walk* (ITV, 1973–1976). The latter is a series that uses video cameras in the studio to undertake lengthy ethical discussions on how to keep the fictional Northamptonshire town of Broadstone at peace. Whilst *Hunter's Walk* invites a viewer to draw on their own conclusions, there is no such autonomy in *The Sweeney* as the camera becomes primarily interested in identifying with a principal protagonist and conforming to their perspective. Rather than being narratively focused on the act of pursuing criminals, *Hunter's Walk* concerns itself with the repercussions of crime and the suffering of victims within the home from a somewhat feminist perspective.

Chapter 3 brings the very popular 1980s series *Juliet Bravo*, *The Gentle Touch* (ITV, 1980–1984), and *The Bill* (ITV, 1984–2010) back into academic consciousness to argue that the gender politics of each programme are actually more intricate than previously realised when analysed spatially. *Juliet Bravo* uses the dimensions of Hartley station, a fictional Yorkshire-based police force, to echo the Scarman Report, that stated the priorities of the police and public had diverged. Meanwhile *The Gentle Touch's* use of the close-up, as part of a melodramatic discourse, occupies a sceptical stance towards the additional paperwork that was being introduced in anticipation of the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act as a response to Scarman's criticisms. Building on this reading, 'emergent feminist thought and resurgent video cameras' explores how both series explore the ideological

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inconsistencies of Margaret Thatcher's reassertion of the Victorian two-parent family unit through the representation of civilians' and police officials' private lives. Following this comparative analysis, *The Bill's* use of Outside Broadcasting (OB) units is considered. I argue that this production technique, which brought video cameras and the studio method of recording drama to real outside locations, actually depoliticises the domestic space as part of a wider postfeminist discourse.

Chapter 4 first examines *Prime Suspect* (ITV, 1991–2006), *A Touch of Frost* (ITV, 1992–2010), and *Cracker* (ITV, 1993–2006). Each programme shares a stylistic and thematic affinity with the horror film, as the psychology of barbarous murderers are investigated in relation to larger socio-political anxieties. By utilising different stylistic traditions of the horror genre, each series captures an increasing dissatisfaction with the Home Office's 'rational actor model' approach towards tackling crime, which had dominated political discourse since 1970. From *Prime Suspect's* fear of a growing underclass, to *Frost's* criticisms of an increasingly sexually promiscuous middle class, and *Cracker's* concerns surrounding an emerging working-class 'masculinity in crisis', 'The 1990s: transitioning from film to digital' considers the different ideological implications that arise from each series' exploration of British society's apparent social decline. 1998's *The Cops* is subsequently analysed for ushering the use of handheld digital cameras into the genre in a manner similar to the then-popular docusoap format. Set within Manchester in the fictional council estate of Skeetsmore, the series uses the digital cameras to frame both police officers and civilians. The resultant unstable aesthetic mimics the precariousness of sociologist Anthony Giddens's new individualism whilst critiquing the New Labour Government's use of 'left realism' criminology, adopted to tackle the disproportionate number of personal crimes suffered by the so-called 'underclass'.

Chapter 5 focuses on how police series of the 2000s use digital effects, particularly colour saturation, to access a nostalgia for the past as a means of addressing contemporary uncertainties. *Waking the Dead* (BBC, 2000–2011), *New Tricks* (BBC, 2003–2015), and *Life on Mars* (BBC, 2006–2007) all borrow visual elements from the sci-fi genre to examine how the nature, role, and difference between public and private spaces have changed over the past thirty years. Each series assesses the impact an increasing use of technology has on the police force and civilian life in relation to the past with varying ideological results. Accordingly, all three programmes are at odds with one another when considering how traditional detective work should be integrated with new, intelligence-led policing directives to combat increasingly complex forms of crime.

Chapter 6 considers how the most successful police series broadcast since 2010 have marketed themselves as ‘quality’ television drama through their use of high-definition cameras and aerial photography. ‘The 2010s: looking to pastures new’ examines how such a stylistic direction has enabled *Broadchurch* and *Happy Valley* (BBC, 2014–) to draw connections between character and landscape in a manner similar to the recent Nordic Noir television crime genre, but in a way that merges the visual discourse of British landscape television documentaries with British new-wave social-realist cinema. Each series presents a different view of the way in which the ‘squeezed middle’ class can cope with austerity. *Broadchurch* advocates pro-social conservatism and postfeminism’s ‘new traditionalism’ as a means of enduring the suffocating and erosive community pressures of its southern coastal town. Meanwhile, the West Yorkshire-based *Happy Valley* employs Raymond Williams’s common culture to guarantee its lower-middle-class community’s survival.

Lastly, the conclusion builds on the main developments uncovered by the book to provide a new framework for studying British television genre. Having focused on the use of space to challenge inherent assumptions repeatedly made about different production techniques, modes of realism, narrative formats, and ideologies, *You’re nicked* provides a revisionist history of British television, British society, and British culture.

## Notes

- 1 Figures obtained from ITV (2017); and Gambaccini and Taylor (1993). The percentage of the overall population these viewers encompassed was then worked out through the Office for National Statistics (2017).
- 2 These actions were implemented by the 1966 Supplementary Benefit Act, the 1973 Social Security Act, the 1982 Social Security and Housing Benefit Act, and the 1986 Social Security Act.
- 3 For a consideration of the differences that exist among the detective series, police procedural, and action series see Creeber (2015b).
- 4 See the analysis of soap operas, sitcoms, and daytime television conducted by Carole Lopate (1977), Tania Modleski (1979), Richard Dyer *et al.* (1980), Ellen Seiter (1982), and Patricia Mellencamp (1986), who collectively broaden the meaning of the term ‘political’ in television studies and wider culture to ‘include a general interest in everyday life, especially the female-associated spheres of domesticity and consumerism’ (Brunsdon *et al.* 1997a: 5).
- 5 Wheatley argues that reading Lady Marjorie (Rachel Gurney) spatially reveals a character who, despite voicing anti-feminist sentiments, is struggling with repressed desires. Marjorie wears a high collar and heavy corsetry, and is positioned behind her desk when expressing such opinions to provide her character with ‘a sense of containment’ (Wheatley 2005: 154). This contrasts starkly

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with her relaxed demeanour and kimono dress on a visit to the opera with a man who is not her husband. Taken together these elements signify Marjorie's longing for the 'exotic outside to which she has no access' (Wheatley 2005: 154), and so address feminist debates concerning the clash between societal expectations of housewives in relation to their personal aspirations.