

**In-between still and moving pictures:
series within Stephen Poliakoff's drama serial *Shooting the Past* (1999)**

As Lez Cooke notes in his history of British Television Drama,¹ what used to be the traditional staple of television drama, namely the single drama, had all but disappeared from the schedules by the late 1990s while series, serials and soap operas were steadily increasing. While this general trend testifies to the increased difficulties for original drama to be produced, some writers and filmmakers have managed to use the serial format to convey their own personal vision, refusing to conform to mainstream generic and aesthetic codes. Stephen Poliakoff is one of them, using the serial form as a reaction to the increasing fast pace of television dramas in the 1990s and as a means to reflect upon the relationships between past and present.

Shooting the Past is a three-part television drama serial which starts like an old Ealing comedy, pitting a small bunch of English eccentrics against foreign intrusion when their workplace, a photographic library, is taken over by American entrepreneurs whose project is to turn the premises into a modern business school for the twenty-first century. Each part is thus devoted to a round of negotiations about the future of the premises and its content, each negotiation being structured around a series of photographs. Eventually, what is at stake in this series of negotiations is the very status of pictures and their interpretation. Indeed, *Shooting the Past* provides a moving reflexion on the power of pictures to build up a narrative and “meet fate”² when set in montage. Through elaborate sequence montage, odd juxtapositions of sound and image, and constant interplay between still and moving images, it offers the possibility of filmic reflexivity, and ultimately shows how television can illustrate the magic of cinema. In this respect, *Shooting the Past* is a perfect illustration of how “‘high-end’ television drama”³ has been extending the series-serial narrative.

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¹ *British Television Drama. A History*, London: BFI-Palgrave, 2015 [second edition].

² « Au montage, on rencontre le destin », Jean-Luc Godard, « Le montage, la solitude et la liberté » in *Jean-Luc Godard par Jean-Luc Godard II*, 1984-1998, Paris : Cahiers du cinéma, 1998, 244.

³ Robin Nelson, *State of Play. Contemporary “high-end” TV drama*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.