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"Don't Stop…"
Re-thinking the Function of Endings in
Narrative Television

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Abstract
"Don't Stop…"
Re-thinking the Function of Endings in Television

This thesis argues that the study of narrative television has been limited by an adherence to accepted and commonplace conceptions of endings as derived from literary theory, particularly a preoccupation with the terminus of the text as the ultimate site of cohesion, structure, and meaning. Such common conceptions of endings, this thesis argues, are largely incompatible with the realities of television's production and reception, and as a result the study of endings in television needs to be re-thought to pay attention to the specificities of the medium. In this regard, this thesis proposes a model of intra-narrative endings, islands of cohesion, structure, and meaning located *within* television texts, as a possible solution to the problem of endings in television. These intra-narrative endings maintain the functionality of traditional endings, whilst also allowing for the specificities of television as a narrative medium.

The first two chapters set out the theoretical groundwork, first by exploring the essential characteristics of narrative television (serialisation, fragmentation, duration, repetition, and accumulation), then by exploring the unique relationship between narrative television and the forces of contingency. These chapters also introduce the concept of intra-narrative endings as a possible solution to the problems of television's narrative structure, and the medium's relationship to contingency. Following on from this my three case studies examine forms of television which have either been traditionally defined as particularly resistant to closure (soap opera and the US sitcom) or which have received little analysis in terms of their narrative structure (sports coverage). Each of these case studies provides contextual material on these televisual forms, situating them in terms of their narrative structure, before moving on to analyse them in terms of my concept of intra-narrative endings. In the case of soap opera, the chapter focusses on the death of the long running character Pat Butcher in the British soap *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985-), while my chapter on the US sitcom focusses on the varying levels of closure that can be located within the US sitcom, using *Friends* (NBC, 1993-2004) as a particular example. Finally, my chapter on sports coverage analyses the BBC's coverage of the 2012 London Olympics, and focusses on the narratives surrounding cyclists Chris Hoy and Victoria Pendleton. Each of these case studies identifies their chosen events as intra-narrative endings within larger, ongoing texts, and analyses the various ways in which they operate within those wider texts.

This thesis is intended to make a contribution to the emerging field of endings studies within television by shifting the understanding of endings away from a dominant literary model which overwhelmingly focusses on the terminus of the text, to a more televisually specific model which pays attention to the particular contexts of the medium's production and reception.

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Acknowledgments

Author's Declaration

This thesis represent the original work of Stuart Bell, unless otherwise stated in the text. The research upon which is it based was carried out in the Theatre, Film and Television Studies Department at the University of Glasgow under the supervision of Professor Karen Lury and Doctor Amy Holdsworth during the period of October 2011 to November 2015.

Chapter One
Introduction

Origins

This thesis is about endings in television, though over the course of my research I have found this simple description to lead to confusion. One of the unforeseen 'pleasures' of undertaking and writing a PhD has been talking about it with friends, family, and colleagues. However, attempting to reduce four years of study, and so many thousands of words of writing into an easily digestible statement has proven to be difficult, and I have invariably found my own attempts to be more misleading than intended. However the confusion which tends to arise has less to do, I think (hope), with my attempts to explain my research, and more to do with widespread conceptions concerning the idea of endings in television. To illustrate: whenever I have discussed my PhD with others, the conversation quickly, and perhaps understandably, turns into a discussion of *specific* endings, more accurately the 'best' and 'worst' endings on television and revealingly, I have found many of the same examples come up time and again. Frequently cited examples include the finales to *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010), *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007), *The Wire* (HBO, 2002-2008), and more recently the final episodes of *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013) and *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015). These examples are, I would argue, hugely revealing in their consistency and shared characteristics. For instance, they are all fictional, all originate from the United States, and all could, in different ways, be classified as quality or prestige dramas. While this

perhaps tells you more about the company I keep and their viewing habits, I find it equally revealing in terms of the kinds of programmes that *do not* come up, for example, soap opera, news, sport, or reality television. Conceptions of endings seem largely tied to drama, or in some cases comedy.[1] The reasoning behind these selections is also highly illuminating. Reasons given for classifying an ending as 'good' largely tend to centre on ideas of closure and satisfaction, while reasons given for a particular ending's 'badness' tend to centre on a *lack* of closure, as well as a sense that too many "threads" have been left hanging.[2]

When I first proposed the idea for this thesis, it was my intention to write about these very endings, to analyse them in order to construct a taxonomy of sorts, a model of television endings based on a detailed textual analysis of notable series finales drawn from both drama and comedy. Such a project would have sought to identify common characteristics across the endings of programmes such as those described above. In essence what I had originally proposed was a study of television endings rooted in literary and film studies, one which assumed that endings in television operated in a similar way to endings in those other mediums. However, it became clear early on that the concept of endings in television was far more complex and the relationship between the two more problematic than I had first anticipated.

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[1] Any list of 'best' or 'worst' ending in television is likely to contain the final episodes of *M*A*S*H* (CBS, 1972-1983), *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004), *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989-1998), *Cheers* (NBC, 1982-1993), and *Frasier* (NBC, 1993-2004). For example: Collins *et al* (2015), and Sepinwall *et al* (2015).

[2] JH Miller (1978) analyses the various, and ofter confused, ways in which we refer to endings, good and bad, in terms of their "knottiness". I discuss this further in my second chapter in relation to closed and open narratives.

The genesis of the idea for this thesis grew out of my undergraduate, and later post-graduate Masters study. Like many of my own students, I initially entered into the film and television programme at Glasgow with a sole interest in film. However, I quickly developed an interest in television, an interest that, over time, came to focus specifically on narrative. I developed this interest further in my undergraduate dissertation, where I discussed mythological structures in film, television, and video games (the latter at a time when the department was only just beginning to develop its own interest in interactive entertainment.) This interest in narrative further developed through my Masters study, where I further explored the subject of narrative structures on television, primarily in terms of popular, quality examples of US drama. I first explored an interest in TV endings in my Masters dissertation, where I wrote about liminal moments in television drama, exploring those moments where characters hang between life and death in programmes such as *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005-)*, Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (The WB, 1997-2001, UPN, 2001-2003)*,* and, perhaps most significantly, the final episode of *Lost.*

The latter programme, perhaps more than any other, has cast a considerable shadow over my career studying television. In many ways I owe my interest in television narrative and endings to *Lost*. My interest in endings coincided with a period in which a number of high profile, serialised television programmes were drawing to an end, including *The Sopranos*, *Battlestar Galactica* (Sci-Fi, 2004-2009), and, most importantly, *Lost*. *Lost* was the programme which first introduced me to the potential of narrative television. In particular, the series' fourth episode, "Walkabout", with its famous twist in which a mysterious, and very much mobile character is revealed to have

been in a wheel chair prior to the plane crash that opens to narrative, opened me up to thinking critically about television in a way that I had not before considered. It is only fitting then that the same show, some six years later, should provide the genesis for my interest in endings. However, it was not just the final episode itself (though I *have* spent a considerable amount of time studying it) that provided me with my interest in endings, but also the wider cultural context of the series finale, and the reactions towards it from fans and critics alike.

In 2006, three years into the series' run, it was announced that *Lost* would be coming to an end in three seasons time. This announcement, hailed as "bold and unprecedented" by the series producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse, and "potentially paradigm-shifting" by industry magazine *Variety* (Adalian, 2007), was the exception in an industry where "a good textual death" (Harrington, 2012) is generally rare. By announcing *Lost's* endpoint so far in advance ABC, the US network which aired the show, sought to ensure viewers that this heavily serialised, narratively complex programme would end on its own terms. It would not, it was implied, carry on endlessly past all logical endpoints like other cult favourites, and frequent points of comparison, *Twin Peaks* (ABC, 1990-1991) and *The X-Files* (Fox, 1993-2002)*,* nor would it simply stop, cancelled by the powers that be in the face of dwindling ratings, like similar shows *Firefly* (Fox, 2002-2003) and *Jericho* (CBS, 2006-2008). Significantly the announcement was hailed as "game-changing" simply because in television an ending is not assured.

Television is littered with countless examples of programmes cancelled before their time, before they are able to bring their narratives to a satisfactory close. Again, the link

between satisfaction, closure, and endings is key, and a perceived lack of these qualities

eventually saw the series finale of *Lost* come in for significant criticism from viewers

and critics alike. In the age of online television criticism, where 'hot-takes' and

immediate discussion are rampant, this discourse became immediately widespread. *io9,*

a popular blog dedicated to all things sci-fi and fantasy, declared the finale to be "a

mess" and lambasted it for its failure to provide closure for its many narrative threads

(Anders, 2010). Similarly, Daniel D'Adarrio (2013), writing for *Salon,* scathingly stated

that *Lost* had become "a show whose twists and turns didn't always seem to be

undertaken by people who knew what they were doing." The perceived lack of closure,

or "answers" as they were framed by many, resulted in some arguing that they had

"wasted" six years of their lives watching the show (McNamara, 2012.) As a result of

this negative reaction, *Lost* has, in many ways, since went on to become a cultural

shorthand for ending poorly. To illustrate, Damon Lindelof himself retweeted 20 people

who attacked him on Twitter following the *Breaking Bad* finale, suggesting that even

after all these years, the *Lost* finale continues to occupy the position of 'bad ending' for

many (O'Neal, 2013).

I have focussed on *Lost* here both because of its key role in the development of my

own interest in endings and narrative television, but also because I think it reveals a

great deal about widespread attitudes towards endings in television. As the above

demonstrates, a major source of dissatisfaction with the ending of *Lost* was the

perception that the narrative had failed to provide closure for its many mysteries and

loose ends. I would also argue that a major source of dissatisfaction stemmed from the

expectation that, given the ending was announced so far in advance, the producers and

writers had been given enough time to craft a satisfying ending. This expectation is, I think, central. As stated above, few television programmes are allowed foreknowledge of the end in the way *Lost* and its viewers were. Simply put, *Lost's* viewers were conditioned to *expect* an ending, and into that expectation they poured their own expectations that the ending would be satisfying.

What we see here is something of the complex interplay between narrative and the specificities of television production. *Lost* was the exceptional case precisely because it was allowed to end on its own terms, something denied the vast majority of television. Television is produced for an audience, and thus the life of a television narrative is dependent on that audience. While various industrial changes have begun to alter our conception of ratings, in many ways the relationship between audience and text continues to be symbiotic. A successful show can be expected to continue to air until it is no longer successful, while a less successful show can expect to face cancellation sooner rather than later. This relationship goes beyond authorial intention and pre-planned narrative construction. Indeed, some successful shows have been known to replace authorial figures as they continue to grow in success. *The Walking Dead* (AMC, 2010-) is perhaps one of the most notable recent examples, having replaced its showrunner no less than three times over the course of its six season (to date) run.[3] Similarly, as Ryan McGee (2012) points out in his contentious defence of episodic storytelling, shows that boast of their pre-planned narrative intentions are rarely afforded the opportunity to realise them.

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[3] The show was initially developed and showrun by Frank Darabont, who was later replaced by Glen Mazzarra, who served as show runner through seasons two and three. Mazzarra himself was later replaced by Scott M. Gimple, who remains show runner as of the time of writing.

In pursuing this project, then, it became clear that the relationship between television, with its specificities of production, and endings is extremely complex and problematic. This problem becomes notably more pronounced if we shift focus away from dramatic forms to consider the full spectrum of narrative television, including forms of non-fiction television which are not typically considered to be narrative. As I have suggested, my original vision for the thesis was to analyse those kinds of notable endings that have dominated television discourse for the past decade or so, namely the quality US drama and comedy series whose endings have had a wide cultural reach. However, I began to expand the scope of my enquiry to include other forms of television which I was not as comfortable with, such as soap opera, sitcoms, news programmes, and sports. All, excepting the sitcom, are forms for whom endings would seem to play little part, and in the case of the sitcom endings have proven to be a contentious issue.[4] Soap opera, in particular, is typically seen to be emblematic of television's resistance to closure. For example, Robert Allen (1985: 75) has stated that the central aesthetic characteristic of the soap opera is its "absolute resistance to final closure." Beyond fictional forms the problematic relationship between endings and television becomes even more evident. It seems absurd, for example, to think of an ending to the news. Yet these are all, in different ways, narrative forms of television. They all, in different ways, mediate reality, crafting it into narratives to be consumed by the viewer at home. We talk, after all, of news *stories,* yet we do not typically think of these forms in terms of endings. However, these narrative forms can, and frequently do end. For example, the recent spate of resignations from US chat shows, such as David

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[4] David Grote (1983: 103): "The only ending that the sit-com allows is death. Because the series format is designed to last forever without significant change, obviously no ending is planned."

Letterman from *Late Show with David Letterman* (CBS, 1993-2015) and Jon Stewart from *The Daily Show* (Comedy Central, 1996-), events which have been framed in the media as the end of their respective eras (see: Worland (2015) and O'Neal (2015) demonstrate the persistence of endings in television.

This thesis argues, that we do, in general, all share a common understanding of endings and their functionality, an understanding largely rooted in our engagement with narrative forms over time, in particular the novel. Throughout this thesis I will place this common understanding of endings in opposition to the specificities of television production and transmission, thus before moving on, it seems prudent to specifically define this common understanding, to answer the fundamental question with which I began this project: what is an ending?

In many ways, endings seem simple, they are essential elements of narrative. Mariana Torgovnick (1981: 1) has called them "sacred". Endings exert an unusual power over narrative. Prior knowledge of an ending can colour, or even ruin our engagement with that narrative. For example, Torgovnick discusses the example of Detective Fiction, wherein the pleasure of the narrative resides in the gradual working out of the perpetrator. Thus knowing the identity of the perpetrator from the beginning can radically alter our engagement with that narrative. Instead of following along *with* the narrative, attempting to work out the identity of the perpetrator along with the detective, we might instead seek out plot holes or clues that justify the final reveal. Similarly, a 'bad' ending can equally colour our opinion of the narrative as a whole. Henry James (2011: 6) defines a good ending thus: "a skilful ending gives the reader a sense that the text fully captures life and leaves no relevant aspect of its subject

unexplored." It can therefore be assumed that a "bad" ending does none of these things. In this way, then, endings also feature a qualitative functionality, becoming one of the key ways in which we evaluate the value of a narrative as a whole.

In terms of this part/whole relationship, endings also have an interpretative function. In many ways endings represent the "pole" of reading (Paul Ricoeur, 1980: 174), the goal towards which we direct our attention. In the majority of our engagement with narrative, our reading is singular in its direction, from beginning to end. Thus the ending is, in many ways, the *destination* of reading. Furthermore, what we seek in that destination is, according to Peter Brooks (1992: xiii), that "which is denied to us in our own lives: meaning." In our move towards the ending we seek a final point of comprehension, one which will reveal the meaning of the whole. In this respect endings enact a dual movement, one both linear and circular. Our reading is linear, moving from beginning to end, once reached, however, the ending produces what Ricoeur (1980: 186) terms a "spiral movement" back through time to the beginning. In so doing the ending establishes a concordance with the beginning, binding the narrative as a whole and encouraging us to look back in retrospection, making sense of all that has passed in the light of the ending. In other words, until an ending is reached, the full meaning and significance of the narrative cannot be experienced.

Endings then have an enormous burden placed on them in terms of structure and comprehension. This functionality is essential to the ways in which we engage with and understand narratives. However, as I have shown, television is largely resistant to the concept of a terminus based ending. Lacking such an ending then, we are presented a problem. Viewers consume a vast amount of narrative television on a daily basis, and

yet they are able to make sense of these narratives in terms of both meaning and structure despite a lack of a *proper* ending. For example, viewers of soap opera are continually denied an ending, indeed they do not expect one. How then, we might ask, are they able to make sense of the whole without the functionality of an ending. This is something that television studies, along with popular criticism, has struggled to answer, largely due to an insistence on maintaining the traditional location of endings at the terminus of the text.

A key question for this thesis then is: how do we resolve this seeming tension between narrative, endings and television? As a possible solution, this thesis proposes the concept of "intra-narrative endings" as a way of partially resolving this tension while answering the problem of endings on television. Intra-narrative endings, as I term them, seek to shift the functionality of endings away from the terminus of the narrative to various points *within* the narrative. In this respect they form islands of structure, meaning, and interpretation within ongoing television narratives. In this way the various burdens we place on endings are moved away from the terminus of the narrative and dispersed to various points throughout the narrative, lessening this burden while also allowing for the specificities of television production. In this way, otherwise 'unending' forms of narrative television, for example, soap opera or the news, can be read in terms of the functionality of endings, without the need for a complete, terminus based ending. Intra-narrative endings thus allow us to extend narrative analysis of television endings out of an overwhelming focus on fiction to consider a much broader range of examples. At the same time it also allows us to keep in mind the specificities of television production and reception.

Thus, the key aims of the thesis are: to demonstrate the problematic relationship between endings and narrative television; to propose a way of approaching endings in television which pays attention to both the specificities of the medium whilst also maintaining many of the essential characteristics of endings; to shift the conception of endings in television away from the terminus of a text, to other points *within* the text (intra-narrative endings); and, finally, to demonstrate the presence, and benefits of, intra-narrative endings across a range of narrative television texts.

Research Context

At the time when I initially proposed the idea for this thesis, work on television endings was relatively rare. However, as I have stated, the genesis of this thesis also came at a time where a number of notable programmes were drawing to an end, and this context has also provided the jumping off point for a small number of studies interested in endings in television. Jason Mittell (2006, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2015), in particular, has led the study of what he terms "narrative complexity", a form of television narrative which adheres very closely to programmes that might otherwise be called 'quality' US drama. Mittell's work on narrative complexity has been expressed both in academic contexts as well as in his blog, and his "historical poetics" approach seeks to deconstruct complex narratives on television, in programmes such as *The Wire* (Mittell, 2009) and *Lost* (Mittell, 2011). Crucially his work on narrative complexity has maintained a focus on endings, both in his essay "Preparing for the End" (2009) and in his recent book chapter on endings in *Complex TV* (2015). Due to Mittell's focus on a

particular brand of quality television, however, his conception of endings is very much rooted in that common understanding outlined above, though his chapter on endings does make some moves towards medium specificity. For example, in *Complex Television,* he undertakes a taxonomy of sorts, deconstructing the various forms of endings available to television as he sees it. These include: stoppage, wrap-up, conclusion, cessation, resurrection, and finale. Each of these categories usefully links a form of ending to a specific production context, for example, stoppage describes the sudden cancellation of a programme's narrative, while conclusion describes a narrative that, while cancelled, is able to construct an ending that is satisfying to a certain degree. While Mittell's classifications are useful, they are ultimately indebted to the conception of terminus based endings. Implicit in Mittell's taxonomy is the idea that finales are the only *real* endings, and that all others represent a disruption of the intended narrative construction. Thus while Mittell's linking of narrative to production contexts is useful, it is ultimately limited in application. It cannot, for example, necessarily be applied to forms of television that lie outside of Mittell's narrow focus, such as soap opera or the news, though in terms of the former, C. Lee Harrington attempts to do just this.

Harrington's (2012) approach to television endings is somewhat unique, exploring them in relation to the concept of *ars moriendi,* the concept of dying well. Her 2012 essay seeks to construct a model of a "good textual death" for television, primarily as applied to the kind of TV texts also analysed by Mittell. Linking the end of television series to medieval instructional booklets on dying well, Harrington attempts to construct a thanatology of television. In particular she notes the centrality of coherence and closure in dying well, and links this to television through a range of comments made by

industry personnel. While Harrington's approach is unique, and her stress on a thanatology of media studies convincing, her argument, by definition, is fixated on the terminus of the text. Similarly it is limited in terms of its application to forms of narrative out with her narrow field of study. Additionally her reliance on the words of industry personnel, specifically various show runners and executive producers such as Ronald D. Moore (*Battlestar Galactica* (Sci-Fi, 2004-09)) and Carlton Cuse (*Lost*) lends an overwhelmingly authorial tone to her analysis of dying well, at the expense of a more thorough analysis of the production specificities of television. While she does extend his analysis in part with a brief exploration of endings in US soap opera, again her reliance on industry personnel obscures the broadcast context of those soaps, stressing the authorial intentions over the textual realities of those endings. That said, her concept of constructing a wider school of thanatology for media studies is convincing, and I also argue throughout this thesis that a wider focus on endings is essential for the study of television in general.

The study of endings on television has also seen support in the form of the 2011 SCMS conference which hosted a panel on endings in the form of series finales, with a range of papers delivered by Jason Mittell, Christine Becker, Greg Smith, and Sean O'Sullivan. Each paper approached the question of endings in a different way. Mittell looked forward to the impending ending of *Lost* by analysing the various ways in which that show prepared for the end. Christine Becker employed a similar approach to the ending of UK drama *Ashes to Ashes* (BBC, 2008-2010), the sequel to *Life On Mars* (BBC, 2006-2007)*, while Greg Smith focussed on the widespread phenomenon of cancellation. O'Sullivan presented perhaps the most innovative study, proposing a new

poetics of television narrative rooted in an structural analysis of poetry. His concept of the "sonnet season" reads 'quality' television narratives such as *The Sopranos* in terms of sonnet structure, though, again, his narrow focus limits the application of his theory to television more generally.

The Sopranos has proven to be a particular preoccupation with television scholars studying endings, including sustained analysis of its final episode "Made in America" by Dana Polan (2009) and Martin Zeller-Jaques (2014). Both engage in a similar approach to the finale by couching it within a wider cultural discourse of closure and finality, what Zeller-Jaques (114) describes as "discourses of satisfaction". Each approaches these discourses from opposite ends, Zeller-Jaques focussing on the build-up and lead-in to the finale created by various institutional discourses of expectation, while Polan analyses the aftermath of the finale, focussing particularly on the varied (often negative) reactions from critics and viewers. Such approaches are broadly similar to Mittell's historical poetics and are just as valuable in terms of couching the text itself within wider institutional and audience contexts.

Again, however, these studies are all couched in the kinds of programmes that I have largely attempted to avoid. They all approach endings in terms of *actual* endings, that is, the terminus of the text (the final episode or scene). They are also rather limited in terms of scope, adhering, for the most part, to so called quality serial dramas. Looking towards the future the study of endings seems, in some small ways, to be opening up. My own research seeks to contribute to the blossoming field of study by re-focussing it away from a strict focus on endings themselves, towards re-thinking the *concept* of endings in the context of television as a specific storytelling medium.

Methodology

For the purposes of this study, I focus on a range of television programme forms and genres. As noted above, existing analysis of TV endings has overwhelmingly tended to focus on dramatic forms of fictional television. This has been further narrowed to so-called "quality" television texts, primarily US in origin, however, for the purposes of this study I have chosen to expand the scope of enquiry to include a far wider range of narrative television, both fictional and non-fictional. That said, the model of television which I propose throughout this thesis is predominantly derived from an understanding of US television, in particular US television's manifestation of serialisation as both a narrative and economic logic. However, while my model of television may be derived from my analysis of the structures of US TV, as I argue throughout the thesis, it is flexible enough that it can be applied to other national contexts particularly, as I do within the thesis, to a British context.

I define narrative television as any form of television that mediates and narrativises reality. This thus encompasses the vast majority of television's output with a few, notable exceptions.[5] I particularly focus on forms of television that have been explicitly linked with a sense of 'unendingness' and an extreme resistance to closure. As such, my three core case studies focus on soap opera, the sitcom, and sports broadcasting.

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[5] Mimi White (2004), in her essay "Re-considering Liveness" discusses a range of television programmes, including *Wetter-panorama* and the programmes of US network C-Span that can be considered rare forms of non-narrative television. These programmes are geared towards the dissemination of information, in the case of the former weather conditions in European Ski resorts, and in terms of the latter various US Federal proceedings, with little to nothing in the way of narrativisation.

Throughout the thesis, however, I also refer to a wide range of examples drawn from the full spectrum of television. This is by design, as part of my core argument is to demonstrate the usefulness and application of intra-narrative endings for narrative television in general. As a result this thesis takes a largely ahistorical view of narrative television. While a study of the historical development of television and its narrative forms would be fruitful, that is not my intention here. Rather my intention is to analyse television as a specific narrative form and, as I argue in my second and third chapters, this narrative form transcends efforts at periodisation, particularly in terms of how the core characteristics of narrative TV, which I identify in chapter two, can be identified across the history of the medium. As such I draw my range of examples from across television's history.

Throughout the thesis I also use the above described common definition of endings as a baseline understanding of the concept against which to contrast the specificities of television production. I expand on this definition, drawn both from a popular understanding of endings and literary theory, in my second chapter.

I have chosen to focus on predominantly US and UK programmes for a number of reasons. Firstly these are the contexts which lie immediately within my own experience of television and as such I am able to draw on a range of examples from across both contexts. Secondly, limiting the scope of my study to these two contexts allows me to both narrow my focus whilst also allowing me to be comprehensive across my two chosen national contexts. Finally much of the existing work on endings in television has already been undertaken within these national contexts, and it is my intention with this thesis to respond to and develop these existing studies.

My approach is close textual analysis of selected texts, along with a structuralist and deconstructive approach, wherein I deconstruct and analyse the narrative structures at various levels, from macro- to micro-scale (series, season, episode, act, scene.) I also approach my chosen texts discursively, in particular focussing on the central issue of closure in the construction of endings. In analysing closure I look at concepts of theme, dialogue, and character. In addition, I also consider the importance of memory and repetition to narrative TV, particularly the employment of memory and circular narrative in the construction of closure, as well as the repetition of images, settings, and storyline archetypes.

Throughout I maintain a sense of the production contexts of the programmes I am analysing. While I do not delve too much into the actual realities of industrial production, I am careful to maintain a consideration of these texts in their initial contexts. In doing this I am keen to avoid the tendency in some scholarly work on TV narrative to separate the text from the initial context of its transmission. While DVD boxsets and streaming have made it increasingly easier to view individual programmes in isolation, I recognise that the vast majority of narrative television continues to be produced with the aim of being viewed as live, in its original, scheduled context. This context is, I believe, central to the internal narrative structures of the vast majority of television's narrative programming. For example, programmes airing on commercial television are structured so as to account for commercial interruptions, while those that air on non-commercial services such as the BBC, or other non-advertising funded services such as Netflix or HBO, are not. By way of comparison, the two flagship soap operas on British television, *Coronation Street* (ITV, 1960-) and *EastEnders* (BBC,

1985-) feature different narrative structures due to the presence of commercial breaks on the former. *Coronation Street* is separated into discrete acts, with each act building to a cliffhanger of sorts leading into the commercial break. *EastEnders*, on the other hand, airs without interruption, and thus lacks these act breaks. This is just one example of the often subtle ways in which specific production and transmission contexts have an effect on the narrative structures of television, and I maintain a focus on these throughout the thesis.

Chapter Outline

The purpose of this introductory chapter has been to provide an overview of the genesis of this project as well as to outline the key aims of the thesis, and Chapter Two explores these issues in greater detail. It begins by further exploring the concept of endings in narrative, developing a common conception of endings rooted in literary studies of narratives and endings. This will involve an unpacking of the complex functionality of endings in narrative, exploring both the formal and discursive dimensions of endings, with a particular focus on the centrality of closure to the construction of "good" endings (James, 1909). Following this, the chapter moves on to focus on the problematic relationship between narrative endings and television, situating this firmly in the specificities of television production, in which the requirements of television production seem opposed to endings as they have been defined in the first part of the chapter. Here I also unpack narrative television. Rather than attempt to construct a grand theory of narrative television, however, I identify and analyse five

central characteristics which I argue can be located across a huge range of narrative television. These characteristics are: serialisation, fragmentation, duration, repetition, and accumulation. Each of these characteristics, I argue, operate together across a huge range of television and each presents a unique challenge to the concept of endings in television. Finally, the chapter culminates with a description of "intra-narrative endings", and considers the implication of the concept for the study of narrative TV.

Chapter Three moves on to discuss a sixth characteristic of narrative television, contingency. This chapter argues that, rather than representing a narrative strategy of television, contingency is instead a force which is exerted *against* narrative television, and is a force which has wide reaching implications for the concept of endings in television. The chapter first outlines the "paradox of contingency" as outlined by Paul Ricouer (1980) in his essay "Narrative Time". This paradox is the concept that all narrative is motivated by two different aims, described by Frank Kermode as the desire to "mime contingency", and the opposing need for order and structure (1967: 151). From here the chapter goes on to apply this idea to television specifically, providing an overview of the four layers of contingency that I identify in television. These four layers correspond to different aspects of what I term television's sphere of influence, describing television's ability to control chance events. Moving out from the centre, where television exerts complete control over its narratives (in terms of cancellation and continuations), I provide examples of each of the other three layers, including: the autonomy of the people *on* television (retirement, firing, death of key actors or presenters), institutional contexts such as industrial action or wider institutional decisions (the 2011 writers strike or the sale of The WB network), and finally, events

over which television exerts no control, such as catastrophic events like the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster or the 9/11 terrorist attacks on Washington and New York. Finally the chapter provides an illustration of the various ways in which the concept of intra-narrative endings can be used to resolve the paradox of contingency in television narrative.

Chapter Four provides the first of three case studies which look at specific forms of television. Chapter four focusses on one particular moment from the British soap opera *EastEnders,* the death of long-running character Pat Butcher (Pam St Clement), providing a reading of this in terms of an ending. The chapter opens with a brief overview of the relationship between soap opera and endings, in particular focussing on the form's perceived and extreme resistance to narrative closure, before moving on to outline the narratives structures of British soaps, *Eastenders* specifically. From here I go on to analyse the death of Pat Butcher (during the 2011 New Years Day episode) as a particular example of an intra-narrative ending, focussing particularly on the way in which the narrative drew on the considerable narrative history of the soap and the character in the construction of its ending.

Where Chapter Four focusses on a specific moment within the wider narrative of *EastEnders,* Chapter Five takes a broader look at the various levels of closure which can be identified in the narrative structures of the US Sitcom. Here, via a specific focus on the US sitcom *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004) I demonstrate the various levels of intra-narrative endings that can be found within the show, contrasting Grote's (1983: 103) argument that the only end for sitcom is "death."

Finally, Chapter Six, the last of my three case studies, applies the concept of intra-narrative endings to sports broadcasting, in particular the 2012 London Olympics. Here I provide a reading of the final cycling events of British athletes Chris Hoy and Victoria Pendleton, reading the conclusion of their events as an intra-narrative ending in the context of the narrative of the games as a whole. Beginning with a brief overview of the limited narrative study of sports television, I move on to look at the unique production contexts of the Olympic games, rooted in the complex relationship between the Olympic Broadcasting Service and international broadcasters. From here I move on to provide an overview of the 2012 games in the context of the BBC's coverage, constructing a branching model of narrative involving the use of hub broadcasts with ancillary coverage of the events. Finally I provide a detailed analysis of the two cycling events themselves, focussing on the way in which the BBC's coverage constructed contrasting endings based on the differing outcomes.

In the final chapter I conclude by outlining my findings while considering the contributions of my research more generally. I then move on to consider future areas of research and applications of the concept of intra-narrative endings, both for television, and also for television studies more generally. Overall, this thesis provides an intervention in the blossoming field of the study of endings in television.

Chapter Two:
"The Story Machine"
The Problem of Television and Endings.

Introduction

In his 2006 essay "From Beats to Arcs: Towards a Poetics of Television Narrative" Michael Newman describes television as a "story machine" (16). In many ways, this description provides the perfect illustration of the fraught relationship between television's narratives and its endings. In particular, Newman's description elegantly captures the tension between art and commerce in television production. Television, as a "story machine" is less a window on the world than it is a production line, endlessly producing new stories for the consumption of its viewers. Television is rife with stories, both a narrative medium, and a medium of many narratives. Narrative touches almost every aspect of television (with few notable exceptions) and while some are more highly regarded than others, all are products of the machine.[6] In his description of the care structures of television, Paddy Scannell (1996) notes how television, despite its long associations with liveness and immediacy, is always already ahead of itself in terms of its production of content for its viewers. While we might experience television in the here and now, he argues, television is always ahead of us, ensuring a steady stream of stories for our consumption.

As David Hendy (2003: 8) has noted, this steady but continuous stream of content is facilitated by serialised modes of production, meaning that television production has

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[6] I discuss the exception in my introduction.

much in common with the factory production line. However, serialisation is perhaps more familiar in television studies as a narrative mode. For example, John Caldwell (1995) distinguishes between series and *serial* modes, while Christine Geraghty (1981) refers to soap operas as "Continuous Serials." Thus, serialisation is both a form of TV narrative, and a description of its production. In this we again see the link between production contexts and narrative structure. As Hendy (8) notes, a central element of serialised production of television is the re-use and recycling of various elements. For example, soap opera was an early product of this mode of production (both on radio and later TV) due largely to its suitability to this mode of production wherein a limited cast and setting could be re-used and recycled to produce a large amount of content.

This logic, Hendy argues, continues to hold sway over television production, which continues to be geared towards the persistence of its more popular narratives. Despite various changes to the ways in which we consume television, ratings continue to exert an almost tyrannical hold over the medium and the stories it tells. Whilst perhaps an oversimplification, the rule of thumb has tended to be that the most popular programmes are expected to continue production for as long as they remain popular, while those less popular can be described as "on the bubble" awaiting potential cancellation. In my introduction to this thesis I referred to the exceptional case of *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010)*,* a rare example of a show wherein the series finale was announced three years in advance. This was, and still is, a rare occurrence on television wherein a show was given advance notice of its endpoint. The reason to return to this example is to demonstrate that television narratives are largely determined by industrial contexts of

production and popularity. *Lost* is an exception to the rule, but television is crowded with unfinished narratives whose stories were cut off by falling ratings.

Returning to Newman, he notes how this influence of commerce over narrative art has tended to be viewed as a negative. However, in the essay he argues that, in fact, it is the very contexts of television production which allows for a specifically televisual form of narrative. However, Newman's argument, while highly useful in terms of linking narrative to specific contexts of TV production, does not, on the whole, touch on the problematic of endings in television. The narratives created by television, I would argue, are resistant to the concept of endings due largely to these same specificities of TV production. In order to demonstrate this it is necessary to both reiterate, and expand on the common understanding of endings that I discussed in Chapter One.

As Mariana Torgovnick (1981) states "endings are sacred". The strength of an ending can colour our entire opinion of a narrative. At the most extreme, the strength or weakness of an ending can effect the entire legacy of a narrative, as, again, we see with *Lost,* a popular and critically acclaimed show which has nevertheless come to be negatively judged based on the perceived weakness of its ending. On the other hand, a 'good' ending can ensure a programme's legacy is secured, as in the case of critical reactions to, recently, *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013) and *Mad Men* (AMC, 2007-2015). In between, an ambiguous ending can lead to bafflement, and in many cases, anger, as seen in the case of *The Sopranos* (HBO, 1999-2007). However, these examples, are in many ways, exceptional, representative of only a small sample of television programmes to which an ending is a possibility. Far more of television is occupied by programmes for which endings are elusive. Soap operas, for example, are

defined by their resistance to endings, continuing on and on for years and even decades. Moving out of the fictional realm, how can we locate endings in sports coverage or the news, both heavily mediated, both narrativised but both forms lacking an ending.

Endings are, traditionally speaking, essential elements of narrative. As Frank Kermode (1967: 23) has stated, the good thing about narratives is that they have to end. As the above shows, this creates particular problems for certain forms of television, however, this is due, I would argue, to our conception of endings being rooted in tradition. By tradition I refer to our popular understanding of endings as coming, simply, at *the end* of a narrative. It is telling that in my above examples endings were framed as the final episodes, or more usually, the final *moments* of television shows. However, as I want to go on to demonstrate, endings in narrative have a far more complex functionality which does not necessarily have to locate them at *the end* of a narrative, and that this functionality is the key to reading various forms of TV narrative in terms of endings.

On the one hand, traditional endings are, as Jason Mittell (2015) states "the end" of reading/viewing itself. In other words, they are the goal towards which we direct our attention when consuming a narrative. As EM Forster (1962) argues: "What happens next appeals to the human impulse of curiosity, only exhausted at the end." Similarly, Henry James (1909) has defined narrative thus:

> The prime effect of so sustained a system, so prepared a surface, is to lead
> on and on; while the fascination of the following resides, by the same token,
> in the presumable somewhere of a convenient, of a visibly-appointed
> stopping-place. (p.6)

Furthermore, endings are interpretive tools. As we are led on by the narrative, it is out of an expectation that the ending will provide the final point of comprehension upon which the meaning of the whole can be discerned. As Peter Rabinowitz (1997) states:

> Last sentences cannot serve to focus a reading experience (at least not an initial reading experience). But they do often serve to scaffold our retrospective interpretation of the book. (p.62)

Of course, our traditional conception of endings is rooted in their simple formal function as the terminal limit of the text, the last page, scene or shot. We know we have reached the end of a film when the credits roll, or a book when we turn the page to "the end". Again, however, this simple formal functionality is problematic for television. Unlike films or novels, which are limited narratives (that is, their narratives are contained within a single, discrete text) television's narratives are frequently long-form, serialised, and fragmented across often hundreds of episodes. As such, there is a question of how and where we locate endings in television. While the traditional view holds that an ending in television is identifiable as *the end* of the programme i.e. the last episode, due to the specificities of its production and transmission television also forces us to consider other points as endings: the end of an episode, or a season for example. Each is, in its own way, a discrete text unto itself, albeit one part of a bigger whole. Does the ending then reside in the whole, or do we locate it at other points? Even if we locate a TV ending as coming at *the end* of the text, this is only applicable to a limited range of programmes, as my above examples demonstrate. Furthermore, this precludes an entire spectrum of television from ever possessing an ending, particular those seemingly unending forms of television such as soap opera, news, and sport.

The relationship between television and endings is, then, a problematic one. Endings are central to narratives and how we engage and understand them, yet television's status as a "story machine" has led to the proliferation of a narrative form which seems almost paradoxically resistant to them. Scholarship holds that the pleasures of television are incompatible to those of other, more limited narrative forms. For example: Dennis Porter (1977: 783) has stated that television resists endings in favour of "an indefinitely expandable middle," while Robert Allen (1995) has typified television as an open medium. Writing about the pleasures of television John Fiske (1987: 185) has stated that TV viewers experience television as "ongoing and cyclical rather than climactic and final." However, I would argue that this difference has been overstated. If we unpack the complex functionality of endings we see that they are vital in order to understand and engage with narrative. Not only do they provide structure to a narrative, but they engage us in a process of interpretation and comprehension. Lacking endings, are we to therefore understand that television lacks these aspects? Yet viewers are able to engage with television's narrative in a complex way, even in examples (such as soap opera) where endings are improbable (though, of course, soaps can and do end, as I discuss in Chapter Four).

Clearly the complex functionality which we ascribe to endings continues to operate in television with or without a *proper* ending. This chapter proposes that this complex functionality can be mapped onto points within television texts which I term intra-narrative endings. These intra-narrative endings represent points within ongoing television narratives which function in similar ways to traditional endings, but which are not tied to the burden of overall closure. They represent an attempt to engage with

television narrative which pays attention both the complex functionality of endings, whilst also paying attention to the specificities of television as a medium. Endings in this respect are no longer simply located at the terminus of the text, but at different points throughout the TV text. Furthermore this is not simply a case of shifting endings to the ends of individual episodes or seasons (as opposed to series as has been traditional) but a more subtle identification of points of closure *within* texts. This chapter will begin by providing an overview of the relationship between endings and narrative in general, building on those points already discussed in this introduction. The chapter will then go on to provide an overview of the major characteristics of television narrative, and how these complicate the relationship between endings and narrative, before finally moving on to explain, in detail, the function of intra-narrative endings and their implication for the study of narrative television.

Endings and Narrative

While I have already sketched the complex functionality of endings above, in this first section I want to provide a more thorough overview of endings as they have been theorised, primarily in literary studies. As I have suggested, our conception of endings tends towards certain expectations, namely structure, meaning, and closure. These expectations, I would argue, have been largely informed by conceptions of endings which stem from literary analysis of the novel. As such, the following overview of the major issues surrounding endings is intended to represent a widespread view of endings and the expectations typically attached to them by audiences. As I have shown in my

introduction, these expectations can be demonstrated in the various reactions from scholars, critics, and audiences alike towards particular endings, and the purpose of presenting them here is to construct a common conception of endings to test against the narrative structures of television in order to demonstrate the problematic nature of the relationship between the two.

As I have already demonstrated, endings in narrative possess a complex functionality, functioning both formally and discursively. On the one hand, endings can be defined as simple formal features which represent the terminal limit of a narrative.[7] In this they mirror their conceptual opposite, beginnings, in setting limitations on what can be told. In his lecture, "A Sense of an Ending" Frank Kermode (1967: 44) provides a useful and elegant illustration of the way in which beginnings and endings function in this way. In particular he uses the example of "tick-tock", the sound of a grandfather clock, to demonstrate the fiction of time. As Kermode argues, the sounds "tick-tock" are largely meaningless in their own right, however, the space between them is filled with significance. It is crucial, he argues, that the sounds are differentiated, in reality the sounds are the same, yet we differentiate them in our description of them. "Tick" therefore becomes the beginning, "Tock" the end, and by differentiating them in this way we make time "talk our language" (44). The thing described by the description "tick-tock" is not the sounds themselves, but rather what they represent, the space in-between, both empty *and* filled with significance, the fiction of time. For Kermode, this

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[7] It is important to distinguish between the end of a narrative and the end of a text. Generally when we discuss the end of a film, novel, or television programme, we are referring to the end of the narrative. In his book *Paratexts,* however, Gerard Genette (1997) argues that the narrative can be extended to paratextual materials. As such, the end of the narrative might also extend to the back cover of a book, or include the closing credits of a film or television programme. Thus, for Genette, the end of the narrative and of the text are indistinguishable.

is an elegant narrative in miniature. The narrative itself, a second in time, is defined by silence and emptiness, but the beginning "tick", and the ending "tock", bind it, give it structure, and fill it with significance. In other words, only through beginnings and endings can narratives be given form.

Another way to think about the formal functionality of beginnings and endings is to distinguish between narrative, and the narratable. As DA Miller (2002) argues, the narratable, that is, everything that *can be* narrated, "inherently lacks finality" (xi). Thus in order to create narratives, we must bind the narratable, imposing a sense of an ending onto its potential limitlessness. Of course, this idea of limiting the narratable with beginnings and endings is a useful one in terms of limited narratives such as novels, which possess clearly delineated beginnings and ends. However, this becomes more problematic if we consider *ongoing* narratives such as series, franchises, and, most pressingly, television. In terms of ongoing narratives such as, for example, the long running fantasy novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (Martin, 1996-), the issue of where one narrative ends and another begins becomes somewhat blurred. In purely formal terms we must ask, where do we locate the structuring principles of beginnings and endings in such series? At the beginnings and end of each novel, or at the level of the series as a whole? Similarly, the boundaries between texts become even more blurred if we consider the idea of shared narrative universes, such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) in which each film ostensibly shares the same narrative space as the other. How do we identify individual narratives within this larger narrative universe? The release and reception of the films in the MCU makes this somewhat simpler. Each film is released individually, under the banner of an individual character (for example

Iron Man (Favreau, 2008)*, The Incredible Hulk* (Leterrier, 2008)*, Ant Man* (Reed,

2015)*,* and so on) with long gaps of months or years in between. However, as of *The*

Avengers (Whedon, 2012) the narratives of the individual films have increasingly

coalesced, to the point that *Captain America: Civil War* (Joe and Anthony Russo, 2016)*,*

is set to include many of the characters usually set apart in their own films. The reason

to dwell on the case of the MCU is to demonstrate how narratives can fluidly travel

between discrete texts. In film the delineation between texts is usually simple, after all,

we cannot usually "binge watch" films in cinemas (unless during special retrospective

screenings). What is new for cinema with the MCU, however, is the norm for television,

where episodes of the same narrative programme air week after week, day after day.

Locating an ending according to its purely formal functionality is thus not as simple

as common sense notions would suggest. It is therefore important to consider the

discursive functionalities of endings, as these functionalities are bound up in our

expectations for endings. While beginnings and endings limit and order the narratable

into a narrative, once ordered the narrative becomes further structured according to two

principles, which the Russian Formalist school name *fabula* and *syuzhet* (Propp (1928),

Shklyovsky (1917))*.* These terms can also be referred to as story and discourse, the first

referring to the events of the narrative *as they happened,* the second referring to those

same events *as they are described* by the narrative discourse. The fabula represents

those events that happened in the order they happened, while the syuzhet represents the

various ways in which those events are ordered and communicated to the reader or

viewer. The two co-exist to form a narrative, without the fabula there is clearly nothing

to tell, whereas without syuzhet, the narrative is rendered as a simple chronicle of

events. Issues of causality are essential here. The syuzhet creates the story by implying a relationship between events, lending them significance because of this relationship. EM Forster (1962) illustrates the crucial role causality plays with a simple comparison between two phrases 1) "The king died, the queen died"; and 2) "The king died *and then* the queen died" (82-83; emphasis mine). As Forster argues, the first phrase is merely a chronicle of events as they happened, whereas the second, by implying a relationship between those events, creates a narrative, in which one event follows the other in a sequence of cause and effect.

This relationship between fabula and syuzhet has a major effect on endings and their location within a narrative. While an ending may correspond to the end of the fabula, that is, the final event in a chronological sequence of events, an ending is also attached to the end of the syuzhet, that is, the end of the narrative discourse. As such, the end of a narrative may come at *any point* during the fabula, depending on the design of the syuzhet. While classical narrative structure employs a largely chronological structure, many narratives employ non-chronological structures for a particular effect. For example, the film *Irreversible* (Noe, 2001) unfolds in reverse. The ending is thus, chronologically speaking, the first event to occur in terms of the fabula, however in terms of the narrative the syuzhet deploys the ending to make a larger point about the irreversibility of time. Similarly, an episode of US sitcom *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989-1998) ("The Betrayal") also unfolds in reverse, this time for the purposes of humour, beginning with an outlandish situation before working its way backwards chronologically to depict the increasingly absurd events leading up to it. Locating an ending to a narrative, then, is not simply a matter of seeking out the last events of a

narrative, rather it is tied far more closely to the designs of the narrative discourse. Endings are not tied to mere chronology, but are rather major elements of narrative discourse. While they can be representative of the final moments of the fabula, in many cases they are not, and it is almost inconsequential if they are. Rather, endings fulfil a larger discursive function.

To return to a point made earlier, endings are, in many ways the "pole of reading" as Paul Ricoeur (1980) has termed it (174). They are the points to which our attention is drawn, and in many ways they are the goal of consuming narrative itself. This suggests that endings have a tremendous power over both the reader and the narrative as we are drawn forward in our search for larger meaning. As Brooks states (1992): "what we seek in narrative fiction is that knowledge of death which is denied to us in our own lives: meaning (22)" Endings have this burden of meaning. We seek in our endings some final point which will frame and make sense of the whole.

Central to this is the concept of closure. Again we return to the question: what is a 'good' ending? Henry James (1907) neatly sums up the traditional view when he states "a skilful ending gives the reader a sense that the text fully captures life and leaves no relevant aspect of its subject unexplored" (p.6). Marianna Torgovnick (1981) argues that the function of closure is to denote a sense that "nothing has been omitted from the work." (p.4) As the pole of reading an ending sets in motion a process of retrospection rather than speculation, giving us a sense of the narrative as a cohesive whole, which in turn "creates the illusion of a life halted and poised for analysis." (James, 1907, p.6) Closure exerts a huge force on narrative. As we have seen, failure to achieve satisfactory closure risks a narrative being labelled as a 'bad' ending. This can be further illustrated

by the terminology we often use to discuss narratives and endings in particular. The problem, JH Miller (1978) argues, is inherent in the way we talk about endings. The image of the knot in particular involves a confusion of meanings, whereby we seek in a 'good' ending not only a 'tying up' of loose ends, but also a *denouement*, literally an unravelling. He argues:

> knotted, unknotted- there is no way to decide between these images. The novelist and the critic of novels needs them both and needs them both at once, in an indeterminable oscillation. (p.6)

However, Russell Reising (1996) and D A Miller (1981) have both argued that the overwhelming significance placed on endings and closure is problematic in terms of analysis. Reising argues that: "By thus reifying closural moments, traditional narrative theory has unnecessarily constructed endings as the embedded and fully coherent essence of the narrative act, which, given the numerous energies and agendas driving towards some perfectly revelatory, demystifying closural epiphany, can only be imagined as fully sufficient as both origin and telos of narrativity." (p.8) In other words the privileged position given to concepts of closure limit the possibilities of narrative since closure has come to be regarded as the very essence of narrativity. Similarly Miller argues that:

> Once the ending is enshrined in an all-encompassing cause in which the elements of a narrative find their ultimate justification, it is difficult for analysis to assert anything short of total coherence. One is barred even from suspecting possible discontinuities between closure and narrative movement preceding it, not to mention possible contradictions and ambiguities from within closure itself. (p.xiii)

Closure then exerts an almost tyrannical influence over endings and the ways in which we engage with them.

The almost tyrannical rule of closure over narrative has been recognised by writers and scholars alike. 'Open' narratives represent one possibility of overcoming it, though even these are problematic and influenced by the overwhelming force exerted by closure and endings. 'Open' narratives in literature, such as those of Joyce and Conrad (Friedman, 1966) have tended to be characterised as a rebellion against closure, as well as an attempt to more accurately capture the experience of lived existence through an emulation of contingency. Such open narratives, however, are, in many ways, paradoxical. I will discuss further in the next chapter the "paradox of contingency" as outlined by Ricoeur (1980), but here it is important to recognise that even the most open of texts must end at some point, and that because of this necessity they are bound up within the interpretive and retrospective function of an ending. In other words, the very openness of the ending becomes the point of meaning. Friedman (1966), sees what he calls the turn to an open narrative as being not only a "formal insult", but also "a calculated assault on the 'ends' of experience." (xii) He further states that: "endlessness has become an end in itself", that "The new form exposes not only heroes and antiheroes but readers, too, to an essentially unlimited experience". (xiii) The open ending, Friedman argues, is closer to life as we experience it. Whatever discomfort we feel with an open ending only reflects the discomfort we feel in our own lives. Of course, he points out, open endings present problems to their authors. He states:

> the new turn toward openness invariably leads him along two horns of dilemma. How can he suggest at the end of his novel that these are the final pages of this particular rendering of experience- for practical necessity dictates that he must end - while at the same time he suggests that there is never a close to experience - as mythic necessity dictates, for there is no end, really, is there? In short, how can he end without closing? (p.180)

So-called open endings then do not provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of endings and closure. Rather than defy the tyranny of closure, they in fact, it seems, affirm its power over narrative, and particularly, endings. The very fact that necessity dictates that a narrative *must end* denies the possibility of a narrative without an ending. Endings, along with beginnings, bind a narrative in time, give it meaning and significance, in essence, they *create* narratives. A narrative without an end is seemingly a conceptual impossibility. As Friedman suggests, the very fact that a narrative must end implies that it also closes. As such, even a resistance to closure, in some way, represents a form of closure in itself.

As this first section has sought to demonstrate, endings are functionally complex, operating both in terms of form and discourse. This complex functionality in many ways defines narrative. Endings are both the goal towards which we direct our attention, as well as the final point of structure, meaning, and comprehension upon which we hang our reading or viewing. A narrative without an ending seems conceptually impossible, however, as I will go on to demonstrate in the next section, this model of endings has proven problematic for television. Rooted in the analysis of literary sources such as the novel, the overwhelming influence of closure and the structuring force of endings is unsuited to television due to the formal and production specificities of the medium. In the next section I will illustrate these specificities in order to demonstrate the incompatibility of television and traditional conception of endings.

The Problematic of Endings on Television

It would be easy to characterise TV narrative as open ended. Indeed this is typically how many forms of narrative TV have been characterised. Soap opera is perhaps the most obvious example as it has been typified by an extreme resistance to closure and the open-endedness of its narratives (see: Allen (1985), Porter (1977), and Palmer (2008)). On the face of it, soap opera would seem to be the perfect example of Friedman's characterisation of open narratives in literature, endlessly leading on to new experiences with no end in sight. However, the example of soap opera ultimately illustrates why the comparison between TV narrative and open endings is unsatisfactory. As we have seen, even in literary open narratives an ending is a necessity because the text must eventually end. Television proves problematic to this idea. Again soap opera provides a useful illustration. While, as Christine Geraghty (1981) notes, soap operas can and do end (*Crossroads* (ITV, 1964-1988, 2001-2003)*, Brookside* (Channel 4, 1982-2003)), notable examples of the form, such as *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985-) and *Coronation St,* (ITV, 1950-) have stayed on the air for decades, and show no signs of ending soon. In many ways, then, a form like soap opera lacks the *necessity* of an ending, or at the very least postpones this necessity for so long that few audience members expect it. Soap opera illustrates perfectly the institutional impetus of television, the continued production of content. Soaps are, of course, a relatively extreme example of this form of impetus.[8] However, this impetus is present in a huge amount of TV fiction. As my introduction

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[8] There are also forms of international television loosely associated with soap opera which are representative of more closed forms of narrative, such as the South American telenovela. See Chapter Four.

demonstrates, it is only in exceptional circumstances that a TV narrative is allowed to plan its ending in advance. Similarly, if we move beyond fiction we can also see this impetus at work. As I stated in my introduction, it seems absurd to think of 'the end' of the news, for example.[9]

There is also the problem of where to *locate* an ending on television. As I have already questioned, where might we locate narrative closure in television. At the level of the individual episode, or else the season, or the series? These are only the most obvious candidates, and as I have already shown, most narrative work on TV tends to favour the latter. This is clearly because it is the most traditional point for an ending to be located. Indeed it may seem absurd to try and locate an ending anywhere else. But this tendency to favour the terminus of the narrative denies much of television's narrative specificity, rooted, as Michael Newman (2006) demonstrates, in the specificity of television production.

A number of attempts have been made to describe this specificity in grand terms. Perhaps the most notable of these is Raymond Williams' (1974) theory of flow, an early attempt to define television's underlying narrative structure and one which remains influential to this day. Incepted in a hotel room while Williams passively viewed US television, flow describes both the experience and the textuality of television, in which individual programmes derive significance from the programmes both preceding and proceeding them. In Williams' mind, television is not simply a sequence of discreet programmes, but rather a totality of everything that airs. Other examples of such

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[9] There are, of course, numerous 'closed' forms of programming that air on television, including the mini-series, anthology strands, one-off documentaries, and films, as well as historical precedents such as the single play.

attempts to describe the specificities of the TV text include: Nick Browne (1984) in "The Political Economy Of The Television (Super) Text." , Newcomb and Hirsch (1994) in "Television as a Cultural Form: Implications for Research.", and John Ellis (1982) in *Visible Fictions*. Charlotte Brunsdon (1998) has referred to these as the "inaugural modes" of television studies and each attempts to describe the experience of television viewing in terms of an overall narrative structure of the medium.

Browne's concept of a television "supertext", is similar in many ways to Genette's (1997) notion of the literary "paratext", in which each individual programme can only be understood in relation to those elements that 'surround' it. Browne's understanding of this supertext is couched in his analysis of television's "political economy" in which advertising and other commercial considerations are the ultimate mediating institution of television, determining everything from content to time slot. As such, Browne's supertext is an overall narrative structure determined and mediated by the commercial interests of broadcasters. While Browne's theory is somewhat pessimistic in terms of the autonomy of the audience, on the other hand Newcomb and Hirsch's theory of the "viewing strip" affords the viewer a far greater agency in terms of mediating their own viewing experience across channels and programme types (50). In essence, Newcomb and Hirsch oppose the idea of television as a monolithic entity, instead allowing the individual viewer the freedom of constructing their own narratives out of what is made available across the full expanse of television. Finally, John Ellis argues that television is constructed out of discrete units or "segments". These consist of "small, sequential unities of images and sounds whose maximum duration seems to be about five minutes" (112). Television is thus constructed out of differing types of combinations of such

segments, each combination differing from programme to programme, from sequential, as in the case of a drama, to cumulative, as in the case of news.

While each of these theories represents a noble attempt at describing the underlying structures of television, they are limited by the fact that television is not a cohesive whole. Television is vast, defined by its messy textuality (John Caldwell, 1995: 23). This messiness in turn reflects a messy narrativity. Rather than describing television as a narrative medium, it is more accurate to describe it as a medium of many narratives, each possessing their own internal narrative structure. As such, there is no single model of narrative construction which can account for the full narrative output of television. Fictional drama series differ narratively from sports coverage, for example. Television's narrativity is dispersed across numerous genres and programme forms each with their own approach to narrative construction. As a result I do not wish to attempt a grand theory of television narrative itself, but rather I want to identify and illustrate a series of characteristics which I believe run through much of television's narrative output. Whilst no means intended as a definitive list of characteristics, the five characteristics I wish to describe are sufficiently widespread throughout television's narrative production that it is possible to term them as, in many ways, the dominant characteristics of narrative television. These are: serialisation, fragmentation, duration, repetition, and accumulation. A sixth characteristic, contingency, is a far more major one which requires a chapter to itself. I will deal with this in the following chapter.

Each of the five characteristics poses its own problem to the concept of television and endings. For the sake of clarity I will describe each of them individually, providing a series of illustrative examples as I go. However, it is important to recognise that these

characteristics do not operate alone. On the contrary they are symbiotic, one creating the conditions for the others, and so on. Operating together they form the major characteristics of television narrative, fiction and non-fiction, and my examples reflect this.

1) Serialisation

As I have already stated serialisation is both a production strategy and a narrative strategy for television. Borne out of the need to create a continual stream of content for viewers, serialisation quickly became, according to David Hendy (2001), the logic of television production. In narrative terms, serialisation describes a narrative which is told over time, in discrete instalments. In television these instalments are generally represented by episodes. Serialised storytelling is characterised by ongoing, longform narratives which unfold over time over the course of numerous episodes, seasons, and series. Each instalment becomes part of a larger whole. This part/whole relationship is essential to television narrative. For example, Umberto Eco (1994) questions whether or not it is possible to analyse a single episode isolated from the context of the programme as a whole (100).

As I have suggested several times already, perhaps the most extreme example of fictional television serialisation is the soap opera. Rooted in radio, soap opera represents one of television's earliest fictional forms. Part of the reason for this is the compatibility of soaps to television's serialised mode of production. As Roger Hagedron (1988) has argued, serialisation has tended to be used early in the development of new media in order to attract regular audiences, and to demonstrate the specificities of forms such as

literature and cinema. Serialisation, Hagedorn argues, is essential in order "to cultivate a dependable audience of consumers. (5)" This is perhaps the reason why soap opera was one of the earlier and more dominant forms of broadcast narrative. Serialisation in soap opera is, in many ways, its defining narrative feature. In her pioneering work on the narrative structure of soap operas Christine Geraghty (1981) identifies a number of characteristics central to the narrative strategies of the form (which, indeed, she calls the "continuous serial"), many of which fall under the umbrella of serialisation. These include such narrative strategies as the use of cliffhangers, essential narrative elements that seek to maintain viewer interest between episode, and the interweaving of stories over time. I discuss these characteristics further in my case study on soap opera, demonstrating the complexity of interweaving stories across time.

Serialisation is not solely the reserve of soap operas, however, though the serialisation of soap operas has typically been invoked to distinguish it from other, more limited forms of television narrative. For example John Fiske (1987) distinguishes between the series and the serial, where the former is defined as a programme consisting of individual discrete stories which share characters and setting across the series. Similarly, Jason MIttell's (2006) description of narrative complexity defines it as a hybrid of series and serial forms, in particular the procedural structure of programmes such as *Magnum PI* (CBS, 1980-1989) and *Colombo* (NBC, 1968-2003), with the serialised strategies of soap opera. However, such distinctions are, I would argue, in many ways, overstated and, at worst, misleading. Serialisation is a far more subtle narrative strategy than these simple distinctions suggest, and even the most procedural of programmes contain essential elements of serialisation at their core. For example, the

serialisation of character is a major element of procedural television. In these programmes consistency of characterisation is essential, and they often feature continuing, if subtle, levels of serialisation in terms of character. For example, the procedural forensic drama *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (CBS, 2000-) features a running storyline concerning protagonist Gil Grissom's hearing loss. Initially this storyline was framed in terms of an ongoing concern for Grissom, though when the character eventually received treatment the characterisation changed in response to the trauma the affliction had caused him. In this we can see how an ongoing storyline affected the overall characterisation of the character across time. While at no point the primary focus of the drama, Grissom's hearing loss nevertheless constitutes an example of serialisation in the procedural. Similarly, the medical drama *House* (Fox, 2004-2012) featured a series length storyline concerning the title character's ongoing addiction to Vicodin. House's addiction to the pain killer was an ongoing concern from the start of the series through to its finale, and the prominence of his addiction changed in intensity over the course of the show's 10 seasons, including several episodes in which it became the primary focus. Thus *House* represents another example of the subtle ways in which serialised storytelling is threaded through ostensibly standalone episodes.

In terms of non-fiction television, seriality can also be evidenced in forms of documentary television, for example in the celebrated documentaries of the BBC's natural history unit. As Helen Wheatley (2011) has argued, the natural history documentaries of the BBC have, in recent years, taken an increasing turn towards narrative and spectacle. This is perhaps most evident in programmes such as *Planet Earth* (BBC, 2006)*, Frozen Planet* (BBC, 2011) and *Life* (BBC, 2009), programmes

which recast David Attenborough as a narrator, as opposed to his usual role as a presenter. These evidence a far greater sense of narrativisation than, for example, Attenborough's earlier *Life* series[10]. In particular there is a greater degree of anthropomorphism in these shows, as Attenborough's commentary speculates on the thoughts and feelings of the animals portrayed. Beyond this however, the programmes themselves also evidence a strong serialised element. For example, *Frozen Planet* employs a seasonal structure which shows the effects of the different seasons on creatures living at either pole. Across its six episodes the show repeatedly returns to certain creatures, most notably a colony of Emperor Penguins in Antarctica, at different times of the year, building up a familiarity with these creatures as they develop across the seasons. For example, in "Spring" we witness the birth of the baby penguins and the struggles of the males to care for them while the females travel to the sea in search of food. The next episode, "Summer" then continues this, charting the struggles of the males in the extreme conditions, before "Autumn" climaxes with the return of the females, accompanied by a soaring orchestral score that heralds the reunion. Thus while the series ostensibly captures the season mating cycle of the penguins, it does so in a way that maximises the dramatic aspects of this cycle, complete with the happy reunion at the end. Such serialisation has been acknowledged by the BBC, Julia Bradbury (2006), for example, the presenter of *Planet Earth Live* (BBC, 2012), has referred to that show as a "Wildlife Soap Opera".

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[10] Attenborough's long running series of documentaries beginning with *Life on Earth* (BBC, 1979) and concluded with *Life in Cold Blood* (BBC, 2008). These are distinct from the above mentioned BBC natural history documentaries due to the presence of Attenborough as an onscreen presenter as well as their unified themes and aims (to chronicle all aspects of the natural world).

While the above examples belong to a documentary tradition which developed out of other documentary forms, Reality TV is a televisually specific genre which relies on the specificities of television as a medium. Central to this is seriality as a narrational mode. US programmes such as *Laguna Beach* (MTV, 2004-2006) and *The Hills* (MTV, 2006-2010) have been called "docu-soaps", a term which highlights their artificiality. Ostensibly concerned with the real life experiences of different groups of people, these shows are notable in what they choose not to show. For example *The Hills* contains little to no mention of the real-life celebrity of its 'star' Lauren Conrad, despite the high amount of coverage given to her in tabloids and gossip websites. Instead the show is structured according to particular narratives, whether it be the relationship between Conrad and housemate Heidi Montag, or else her time interning at *Teen Vogue*. Famously *The Hills* ended with a shot which revealed the artifice of the show's narrative, as the camera pulls back from an emotional goodbye between two 'characters' to reveal a soundstage.

In its blurring of the lines between reality and fiction, the "docu-soap" genre is a particularly intensified example of seriality in non-fictional forms of television. The narrative structures of the form can also be evidenced in another notable form of reality TV, the reality competition format. Shows like *The X Factor* (ITV, 2004-)*, American Idol* (Fox, 2002-)*,* and *America's Next Top Model* (UPN, 2003-2006, The CW, 2006-) all feature high levels of mediation and seriality. Almost all examples of this form focus on the 'personal journeys' of participants. As the competitions go on, certain individuals are singled out for particular attention as they recur from episode to episode. Naturally the focus on individuals increases the longer the competition goes on, and the longer

particular contestants recur. The result is that these individuals are not merely contestants, but characters within the larger narrative of the show. As with *The Hills* this narrative becomes blurred between the real lives of the contestants and the narrative constructed by the show. I discuss this blurring in greater detail in relation to sports personalities in my case study on the Olympics, in particular with regards to how the lives of individuals becomes 'material' for the narratives of television.

2) Fragmentation

Despite some exceptions such as TV Movies or the single play, the vast majority of television is fragmentary. While, as I have discussed, there has been an increasing tendency in television studies to analyse television series as if they were complete texts, divorced from the initial contexts of their transmission (the phenomenon known as binge-watching), television is both produced, and, by and large, intended to be consumed in fragments. While some television is now moving towards a binge watch model (Netflix, *Aquarius* (NBC, 2015)) the majority of television continues to air as part of a planned schedule. Viewing this schedule can be termed as viewing television "as live", that is, in the context of its original transmission.This viewing is considered as live because it does not involve any form of time shifting, such as recording or binging. While various technologies have increased the potential for time-shifting, for example the BT Vision and Sky+ boxes both allow for the pausing of live television, the 'as-live' television schedule continues to exert a powerful influence over television. For example, time-shifting is only possible after the fact, and choosing what to record is reliant on the schedule in the first place.

In the context of US and British television, the schedule itself is typically organised into hour and half-hour blocks, and most television fits into this (exceptions might include films on TV, though these are usually made to fit into the schedule model). The degree of fragmentation varies depending on context. On British television general guidelines are: half-hour episodes for sitcoms, soaps, quiz, and panel shows, with hour long episodes largely reserved for drama and documentary. There are further differences between commercial and non-commercial broadcasters. For example, the BBC One, a non-commercial channel, airs its programmes across the full allocation of time. An hour long drama on BBC then is exactly that (give or take a few minutes either side reserved for interstitial material). In contrast, an hour long drama on ITV, a commercial broadcaster, can be expected to be between 50-55 minutes in length due to the requirements of advertising.

The US context is similar, with half-hour episode allocations for comedy, soaps, quiz shows, and some drama (for example *Weeds* (Showtime, 2005-2012) and *The Big C* (Showtime, 2010-2013)), with hour long episodes reserved primarily for drama. While the majority of US television is commercial, this does allow for variations in episode length and fragmentation across different contexts. For example, a regular network drama airing in an hour-long slot will typically include three to four commercial breaks, thus the actual programme length will be closer to 42-45 minutes. Subscription services such as HBO, however, do not air commercial breaks, thus an episode of *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-), for example, will typically air over the complete hour-long slot.

The television schedule then consists of fragments of more or less uniform length, separated into hour long and half hour long categories. As the above suggests,

commercial interruptions are one of the main reasons for internalised fragmentation. However, despite their widespread presence, commercial interruptions rarely figure into the critical analysis of programmes, this is despite the huge effect they have on narrative structure and pacing in commercial television. Michael Newman (2006) is a rare case whereby he pays specific attention to the "beats and arcs" structure of commercial television. For example: a programme airing on a US commercial channels such as ABC will be structured into acts, which in turn conform to the position of commercial breaks within the episode. Each act will build to a cliffhanger leading into the break. When shown on UK TV the act breaks of US shows rarely correspond to the UK commercial breaks, due to the differences in advertising rules between the broadcasters. This has an effect on disrupting the pacing and structure of the episode. Similarly, when binge watched on DVD or on streaming, the pacing issues are more apparent as there are no breaks, however the screen still cuts to black, signifying a break along with the other characteristics, such as heightened music or a cliffhanger. In this way the original fragmentation of the episode is retained, but is at odds with the fragmentation of the episode in its new context.

As I have already suggested, Raymond Williams' (2003) conception of broadcast flow continues to exert a significant influence over the analysis of television. 24 hour news channels seem to be as close a realisation of Williams' conception of Flow as any form of narrative TV. Airing continuously throughout the day these news services appear to consist of a constant flow of information. However, analysis of these channels reveals that they are in fact highly fragmented, adhering to their own scheduled structure in a similar way to that described above. The BBC News channels for example

consists of a number of discrete news programmes within the overall, ongoing structure of the channel. BBC News for example features a range of programmes including *Daily Politics, The Film Review, HARDtalk, Click,* and many more. This is in addition to the usual practice of broadcast news to differentiate between news, business and sport. Furthermore, the 'flowing' news itself is fragmented into hourly bulletins, heralded by an onscreen countdown at the top of each hour. As such, while in essence providing a continual flow of news, the BBC News channel retains the fragmentation of other channels.

As a final point on fragmentation, the proliferation of streaming has created a new host of programmes on streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu, and Amazon Prime. These programmes are often released all at once by their service, so that the entire 13 episode first season of *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2013-) was released on February 1 2013 for viewers to watch at their leisure. Interestingly Netflix actively encouraged the practice of binge watching, running competitions on Twitter to see which user can be first to finish a season. Despite this all-at-once release strategy, however, these programmes continue to be fragmented. Indeed the fragmentation seems to maintain various characteristics of broadcast TV at the expense of streaming logic. For example, *Daredevil* (Netflix, 2015-), a recent Netflix original, maintains the teaser-opening credits-main programme structure of broadcast television across all its episodes. This means that viewers binge watching the series must watch the opening credits each time. Interestingly, Netflix's streaming service typically skips the opening credits of broadcast shows if able in order to aid with binge viewing practices. However, their own original programming maintains a broadcast television style of fragmentation, despite there

being no evident necessity for it. Similarly, there is no obvious reason why streaming services should produce programmes in fragments of uniform length (each episode of *Daredevil* is as long as a Cable show) as they are not tied to a schedule. This suggests that fragmentation runs deeper in terms of television than mere context of production.

3) Duration

I have already discussed the ways in which the impetus behind much of television production is towards the continuation of the text. This is a symptom of serialised modes of production and the continued dominance of ratings as a marker of success. While there is a large amount of variation in terms of length between individual programmes and programme types, in general television's narratives can be defined as longform. Exceptions exist, of course: films on television, as well as TV Movies (produced specifically for television such as the often derided Lifetime Movie) or the single plays of the so-called 'Golden Age of British Drama' (*The Play for Today* (BBC, 1970-1984) strand.) However, any serialised form of narrative is, by definition, longform, both in terms of the actual length of the programme itself, as well as in terms of the experience of viewing it. Like fragmentation, the length of individual programmes is dependent on a range of factors, from genre and form, to nationally specific contexts. British television for example tends to air shorter seasons to the US. *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010-) airs only three episodes per season, while a programme like *Broadchurch* (ITV, 2013-) consists of eight episodes per season. In contrast, US series vary between 10-13 episodes for cable series like *Game of Thrones* and *Breaking Bad*,

to 20-25 episodes for network series like *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005-) or *Person of Interest* (CBS, 2011-.)

In both the UK and US contexts soap operas are typically the longest forms of fictional television. Soaps in the UK air without seasonal breaks, airing multiple episodes per week over the course of years or, in many cases, decades. For example, *Coronation Street* has aired continuously since 1960, and as of the time of writing currently airs five episodes per week (with two episodes mid-week.) An interesting variation is the Latin American *telenovela*, ostensibly soap operas, these programmes are longform in terms of the length of their narrative, yet are also limited in terms of duration. For example, the Mexican *telenovela María la del Barrio* (Televisa, 1995-1996), aired its narrative over the course of 92 half-hour episodes.

In addition to programme length, duration also describes the experience of consuming longform television narratives. Other than in those exceptions noted above, we generally experience television's narratives over large expanses of time. Fragmentation is, again, central here. The TV schedule and the rhythms of television's output mean that we experience television's narratives in fragments across time. For a series such as *Broadchurch* we experience it one episode per week, over the course of eight weeks. Soap opera extends this, we experience its narrative over the course of decades. An extreme example of television's capacity for long durations is the "longitudinal documentary" (Richard Kilborn, 2010.) This form takes the concept of fragmentation and duration to an extreme degree charting the lives of its subjects over the course of decades. Perhaps one of the more famous examples of the form, the *Up* series, charts the lives of its participants in seven year increments. As of 2012 the series

has reached *56Up* (Apted, 2012), meaning that viewers who have followed along with the programme since its inception have experienced time in the same way as the participants of the documentary.

4) Repetition

Repetition is a core characteristic of narrative television, a central device that operates to orient the viewer with longform, ongoing narratives.[11] Michael Newman (2006) for example, notes the centrality of the repetition of key narrative information within the prime-time serial. In particular, he notes the prevalence of the "previously on" segment, one of the clearest examples of repetition in television consisting of the actual repetition of key scenes from past episodes intended to remind viewers of what has happened previously within the narrative. However, these segments are typically limited to the form that Newman calls the "primetime serial". They are far less prevalent in other forms of television, however, these forms also evidence a high degree of repetition.

For example, the repetition of key locations within the narrative, is a major characteristic of soap opera, which typically employs a very limited range of settings. *Coronation Street,* for instance, is largely set on the titular street and its homes and establishments, including locales like The Rover's Return pub and the Corner Shop. Crucially these locations evolve over time, as new owners and proprietors are introduced. Repetition of such key locations locates the viewer spatially within the

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[11] I am only interested here in repetition as a narrative device in television. I am not interested in exploring issues of value in relation to repetition and difference in art generally, and TV specifically, though work by John Caughie (1991) and Umberto Eco (1994) form useful approaches to these questions in relation to television.

narrative world. Moving beyond soap opera we can see this at work in a prime-time serial such as *Lost.* That show initially began with a very limited number of locations, however, as the narrative continued the world of the show gradually opened up, introducing more and more new locations as it went. In addition the fifth season introduced a time travel mechanic wherein various characters found themselves adrift in time. At this point in the show's narrative development it began to use various locations to orient the viewer not only in space, but also in time. A key location used to this effect was "the hatch", a location initially introduced in the first season, and then destroyed in the second season finale. The hatch once again became a key location in the fifth season, orienting both the characters and audience in space and time, both by its geographical position, and its relative state. For example: the characters were able to determine where they are in time depending on whether the hatch was intact or not, or even if it was yet to be built.

While the repetition of locations can have a key narrative purpose, given the specificities of television production, it also makes economic sense. Re-using the same locations over and over again keeps costs down. Similarly, the repetition of key shots and images has a dual function in terms of narrative and economy. For example, across the seven seasons of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (Syndicated, 1987-1994), almost every episode re-used the same special effects shot of the Enterprise orbiting a planet. On an economic scale this repetition allowed the show to keep using the same special effects shot without having to spend money on unique shots per episode. On a narrative level however, this repetition served a key function in terms of establishing consistency and difference. While the framing and movement of the shot remained the same, the

actual texture of the planet was different each time. The repetition of the image, the same but different each time, served to provide consistency across the episodes, restating the central conceit of the show to visit new worlds and "seek out new lifeforms", whilst also highlighting the difference of each location.

A final, key form of repetition within television is the repetition of key storylines. This is particularly a characteristic of extremely long running series like soap operas, in which storylines are frequently repeated across the years and decades those narratives air. For example: teenage pregnancy, alcoholism, sexual assault, and murder are all, in many ways, archetypal soap opera storylines, particularly in the British context. Crucially, given the extreme duration of soap operas, each time these storylines are repeated they are adapted for the new time or era. For example, early *EastEnders* featured a cot death storyline which was intended to educate viewers of the realities of the condition. Much later, *EastEnders* in the '00s featured a similar cot death storyline, however this time it was treated in a more melodramatic way. Here the character Ronnie Mitchell, discovering the death of her child, switched the baby with that of Kat Slater. In the second example the narrative centres on the deception, rather than the cot death itself. Crucially, fans reacted negatively to the tone of the second example, necessitating re-writes on the part of the soap to abandon that storyline early (Heritage, 2011).[12]

Moving away from soap opera, the repetition of storylines can also bookend series as they draw to a close. For example, both *Fringe* (Fox, 2008-2013) and *Lost* employed mirroring structures, repeating storylines from earlier in their runs as they approached

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[12] Christine Geraghty (2005) has noted a marked shift in the tone of British soap operas from a realist one to a more explicitly melodramatic one. Certainly this tonal shift is illustrated by the above above example.

the end. Here earlier storylines were repeated in new contexts, subtly altered in various ways to draw attention to the development of the narrative. For example, season six of *Lost* opened with a recreation of one of the first scenes from the pilot episode. The scene was almost identical apart from minor changes which reflected narrative developments in the show over its five previous seasons. In recreating the scene, however, the show also drew on the memories of viewers, invoking them in the service of the new season.

As these examples demonstrate, repetition is a key way of orienting the viewer within the ongoing narrative. The repetition of familiar elements, whether visual, audio, or narrative, creates a sense of consistency throughout a television narrative, ensuring that viewers are well oriented within that narrative, even if they have perhaps lost their bearings due to missing episodes or even due to the complexity and duration of the narrative.

5) Accumulation

This final characteristic is, in many ways, a product of the other four. Serialisation, fragmentation, duration, and repetition all work together to create, over time, the accumulation of narrative material. The longer a narrative, the more material will be collected over time. Accumulation works both in terms of the viewer, and the narrative itself. The viewer accumulates narrative material over time, which in turn informs their engagement with that narrative. Accumulation also creates possibilities, and difficulties, for television. Accumulation requires consistency, and viewers will be quick to notice inconsistencies. A huge part of online engagement with media in general, and television

in particular is dedicated to spotting inconsistencies in long running narratives (the website *TVTropes* for example, features extensive, crowdsourced information on any inconsistencies or "plot-holes" in television). At the same time, however, accumulation also means that television can rely on long term viewers to remember extensive amounts of narrative material. This in turn allows such narratives to draw on their extensive narrative history in order to create new narrative directions.

This is particularly prevalent in soap opera. For example, Christine Geraghty (1981) has discussed the role of the soap historian, an individual employed to keep track of decades worth of narrative material. This role is essential to maintain consistency in the narrative because, as Geraghty argues, the use of the past is a main source of narrative material for soap operas. To illustrate, a recent key event in *EastEnders* centred on the separation of the characters David Wicks and Carol Branning. The scene itself occurred shortly after the couple's planned wedding day, which was abandoned after David suffered a heart attack. The separation occurred when Carol, fearing that David had abandoned her, changed her mind about the wedding and asked David to leave. The final scene between the two characters focussed on them dancing to a record that David had bought Carol to celebrate their wedding day, as the camera pans around the room, focussing on various moments including a picture of David's deceased mother Pat. This simple scene draws on a huge amount of narrative accumulation across the decades long run of the soap. Carol's decision, for example, is determined by her past experiences of David who has historically fled when things get too difficult. David himself represents a major piece of narrative history in that the character was absent for many years prior to his, much heralded, return (I discuss this further in my fourth chapter.) Finally, the focus

on the various mementos in the room, including the photograph of Pat, alongside the sound of the record, draws on the full span of the couple's history. Thus, via the extensive accumulation of narrative material, the scene is lent a historical dimension that draws on over 25 years of narrative development.

Moving beyond fiction, accumulation of narrative material is also a key aspect of the news. Here, information gradually accumulates over time as new information is revealed. This builds, over time, towards a fuller picture and alters the narrative as new information is made available. For example, the news coverage of the 2015 attack on the offices of French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo went through various distinct narrative shifts as new information came to light and accumulated over the two days after the initial attack. Beginning with the attack there was initial confusion as to the perpetrators. Once their identities were made clear, however, the narrative turned towards the manhunt as police sought after the individuals. From here new information, along with new visual evidence, came to light, accumulating to build a more detailed picture of the initial event itself. While this was happening the narrative took a turn as the perpetrators of the attack engaged in a hostage situation and siege with police. Finally police stormed the building and ended the siege, bringing the story to an ostensible end. Here we see that, over the course of two days following the initial attack, new evidence and narrative material accumulated to build a clearer picture or official narrative. From the perspective of hindsight it is difficult to recreate the original development of narrative, and what we are left with, what we now discuss as the event, is the narrative result of accumulation.

Here I have described five major characteristics which run through much of television and which are sufficiently widespread, and run through enough of narrative television, so as to produce a problem for the study of endings in relation to television. The five characteristics work together to create a situation were endings become increasingly unlikely. Over the course of a series, the sheer amount of narrative material accumulated over the course of a serialised, fragmented narrative of significant duration makes the likelihood of an ending increasingly unlikely. Simply put, the longer a narrative becomes, the more and more unlikely an ending is that adheres to the common conception of endings I defined earlier in this chapter.

Conclusion: Intra-Narrative Endings

As I have demonstrated, by comparing the commonly understood functionality of endings to the characteristics of television narrative, the relationship between endings and television is highly problematic for the study of TV narrative. Endings are a key way of engaging with narrative. They frame our interpretation of narrative via processes of closure, however, as I have demonstrated, television narrative is resistant to closure. The production of the vast majority of narrative television is directed towards the perpetuation of the narrative at the expense of overall closure. This presents the study of narrative television with a key problem, namely, how to negotiate and resolve this seeming incompatibility. Television is largely incompatible with traditional narrative study *as it is,* however, it is clear that audiences *are* able to engage with television's narratives. As I demonstrated in Chapter One, criticisms tend to flare up around series

finales, showing that the pull of traditional notions of endings and closure remain strong, however, audiences are still able to engage with narratives *as they unfold*. Soap opera, again, presents a useful example of this. While audiences of prime-time serials might expect an ending eventually, and frame their engagement with such narratives thusly, viewers of soap operas cannot, indeed do not, expect any such ending. The question then becomes: how do they frame their engagement with soap narratives with no expectation that they will ever achieve full closure?

In terms of soap opera, Christine Geraghty (1981:13) has proposed the concept of "moments of temporary resolution" to answer this seeming problem, while L.S. Mumford (1995) discusses the possibility of soap opera reaching "as full a closure as is possible at the level of the individual storyline (68)." These are useful ways of resolving the problem of endings and closure for soap opera specifically, but this thesis proposes extending these concepts further using a model of "intra-narrative endings". Intra-narrative endings represent islands of structure, meaning, and interpretation within the often turbulent and shifting waters of ongoing television narratives. They relocate endings to within the narrative texts of individual TV series, forming key points of cohesion and interpretation within ongoing narratives. In essence, they shift the complex functionality of traditional endings to various points *within* the ongoing text, removing the burden of absolute closure from the terminus of the text while paying attention to specificities of television as a narrative medium. Thus intra-narrative endings are able to maintain the functionality of traditional endings whilst also removing the need for an absolute ending to encompass the narrative as a whole.

The formal structures of television provide a number of key points where we might locate intra-narrative endings. The most obvious candidates would be the end of seasons. These are endings, in a sense, imposed by TV production, though narratively they prove problematic. In the case of the end of seasons, locating intra-narrative endings here might not be appropriate due to the fact that season finales often fulfil a dual role, both concluding the season that has passed, whilst also setting up the various storylines of the season to follow. As a result, many season finales culminate with cliffhangers. One famous example might be the *Dallas* (CBS, 1978-1991) episode "A House Divided", which featured the infamous "Who Shot JR?" cliffhanger, a moment which set off a huge amount of speculation among viewers. Clearly then the ending of that particular season of *Dallas* fulfils none of the functionality of an ending, lacking any closure and instead suspending the narrative until the beginning of the new season. Thus this particular example, as with many other season finales, is not a suitable location for an intra-narrative ending. Furthermore, such structuring elements as seasons are not available to all forms of television, for example soap operas or the news air continuously without seasonal breaks, thus intra-narrative endings have to be located elsewhere.

There is no set pattern to locating intra-narrative endings. Each TV show/genre has its own narrative structure (whilst still possessing the basic characteristics described above) and thus intra-narrative endings follow the rhythms of different forms. Therefore they can appear at different places depending on the genre or form that the narrative belongs to. I provide more detailed analyses of individual intra-narrative endings in my three case studies.

This concept of intra-narrative endings is primarily intended for television, to shift the focus of the narrative study of television away from the tyranny of endings, towards a form of narrative analysis which maintains a focus on closure, whilst also allowing for the specificities of the medium and its production. This has a number of possible applications and implications for the study of narrative television. In moving the study of TV narrative away from a focus on absolute endings (the terminus of the text) it can firstly open up the study of TV narrative to a host of genres and forms which have otherwise been overlooked (this is something I seek to begin with my case studies.) Furthermore, intra-narrative endings could contribute to an understanding of narrative television as something distinct to the medium. That is, by locating endings and closure at points throughout a narrative text we can study narrative TV *as* TV, rather than attempt to force older forms of narrative analysis onto television, forms which are either largely incompatible, or else suitable only for a very narrow band of television.

Intra-narrative endings are intended as only one possible solution to the problematic relationship between endings and television. Narrative television is vast and unwieldy, defying any kind of catch-all solution. However, it is clear that the relationship between theories of endings and closure and the narrative study of television is problematic. The characteristics of narrative television in many ways deny the kinds of traditional closure that narrative theory tends to apply to endings. The realities of television production are simply such that a satisfying ending in the traditional sense is unlikely. As such, narrative television needs a new interpretive framework, one which both accounts for closure and structure, whilst also treating television *as* television. The model of intra-narrative endings, developed out of work done on soap opera narrative, is intended as

one potential solution to this problematic relationship, one which shifts the focus of

narrative study away from the overwhelming influence of endings proper in an attempt

to read television narrative in a more televisually specific way.

Chapter Three
Contingency in Television

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the issue of contingency in television. In my previous chapter I discussed the five central characteristics of television narrative: serialisation, fragmentation, duration, repetition, and accumulation. In many ways contingency can be considered a sixth characteristic, though, as I will demonstrate with this chapter, it is less an internal characteristic of TV narrative itself than it is a force which is exerted *against* television, in turn becoming an integral part of narrative television. In order to demonstrate the force of contingency in television I want to begin this chapter by drawing on my own personal experience with television and contingency.

As a child growing up with television it was easy to consider it, as Paddy Scannell (1996) does, as a daily service. Television was always there, always available. For me, this is where Raymond Williams' (2003) conception of 'flow' is most useful. Television was, and still is (perhaps even more so) akin to running water, always on tap, one need only flick a switch to release the unending, continuous flow of content. Television was, and is, part of the rhythms of everyday life. As a child and young teenager I, like many others, had my own familiar rituals centred on the TV set. For example, everyday after school, before any thoughts of homework, I would settle myself down in front of the TV to view the children's and youth-oriented programming on ITV (now sadly gone from the schedules). This was how I unwound from the school day, and over time it became an automatic ritual of my daily life.

It was in this context that I first experienced the power of contingency over television. As with, I imagine, the vast majority of my generation, the events that opened my eyes were the 2001 terrorist attacks of 9/11 on New York and Washington DC. At that time I was 14 years old, and while I am well over a decade older now as I write this, I still distinctly remember coming home from school that day and turning on the television to view my regular programmes, only to be confronted by the stark image of those smoking towers. Initially, this disruption to my daily schedule was a source of irritation, as such disruptions to routine often are to children and young teenagers. However, I still remember, to this day, the slow sense of dawning realisation as I came to comprehend what I was witnessing unfold on live television. Part of this was, of course, due to the sheer scale of the events unfolding. Another part, however, was due to the way in which this event seemed to hold a powerful sway over television. As I have stated, prior to this, television had seemed ordinary, everyday, always available and, crucially, unchanging. Watching the events unfold in New York, however, as one tower fell, then the other, this illusion was suddenly broken. For the first time I realised that television was not a closed world, that it could be disrupted by events unfolding in the world outside itself. While somewhere in the back of my mind I had vague memories of the televised coverage of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales and its disrupting effect on the schedules, the events of 9/11 were where I first experienced the dawning awareness of how television, how my life as it related *to* television, could be so disrupted by the forces of contingency.

The events of 9/11 have since gone on to join the likes of the space shuttle Challenger disaster (White, 2004, Mellencamp, 1990) and the Iraq War (Hoskins &

O'Loughlin, 2010, Tumber & Palmer, 2004) as seminal events in live television history, with countless studies dedicated to the power of such events to disrupt the regular rhythms of television. This chapter does not wish, necessarily, to add to this already well researched area. Rather this chapter is far more interested in the forces of contingency in terms of their effect on the narrative structures of television, in particular how the forces of contingency further complicate the concept of endings in television.

As Frank Kermode (1967: 151) has argued, narrative has long been caught between the desire to "mime contingency" and disorder and the opposing need to create coherence and system. This desire, however, has been constantly frustrated by what Paul Ricoeur (1980) calls "the paradox of contingency" in narrative. This paradox is largely created by the need for a narrative to end. For Ricoeur, an ending, in many ways, represents the "pole" of reading, the point towards which we move in our consumption of any given narrative. That movement through said narrative, however, is itself dependent on our being pulled along, as Ricoeur puts it, by "a thousand contingencies". For Ricoeur the illusion of contingency is necessary, otherwise the narrative might be considered to be too predictable. As we follow a narrative as it unfolds, our attention is pulled along by various unexpected twists and turns. However, as we approach the end, the illusions of contingency and chance begins to fall away. This is because, as Seymour Chatman (1980) has argued:

> The working out of plot is a process of declining or narrowing possibility.
> The choices become more and more limited, and the final choice seems not
> a choice at all, but an inevitability (46).

It is this inevitability that creates the conditions for the paradox of contingency. As Ricoeur states, "Looking back from the conclusion we must be able to say that this

ending required these sorts of events and this chain of actions." (174) In other words, the functionality of an ending denies the real possibility of contingency in narrative. By imposing structure and meaning, and in turn by encouraging a retrospective reading on all that has come before, endings reveal the seemingly contingent turns of the narrative to instead be part of a deliberate design, all leading towards a pre-ordained conclusion.

This paradox, however, concerns attempts to mime contingency *within* narrative. In the previous chapter I described the various ways in which the five characteristics of narrative television are productions of the specificities of television production, specificities which are, in the case of the vast majority of television production, directed towards the continuation of the television text. Thus the characteristics of serialisation, fragmentation, duration, repetition, and accumulation, are all products of, and responsible for, television narrative's resistance to the functionality of endings as they are commonly understood, that is, in terms of closure, cohesion, and structure. By being directed towards the continuation of the text over this functionality, television in turn opens itself up to contingency and chance. Lacking a clear and visible endpoint, the vast majority of television's narrative content is vulnerable to the forces of contingency, and thus, television, as a narrative medium (or a medium of many narratives), has contingency written into its very ontology. In many ways then, contingency is a central characteristic of narrative television, both a force exerted *against* narrative television and a force which narrative television *subsumes* into itself.

To illustrate: one of the things I realised watching the events of 9/11 unfold live on television was that, while the events had disrupted the regularly scheduled content, television itself did not stop, rather it kept on going, for hours, and then days, continuing

to cover the event with an unwavering eye. In other words, while the initial event had disrupted the regular flow of television as I was used to experiencing it, television had very quickly adapted to this disruption, creating new narratives around the events as they unfolded. Television's capacity to craft narratives, and to adapt those narratives to changing contexts, had subsumed the original, seemingly catastrophic rupture of 9/11 into itself, fluidly creating new narratives almost on the fly. As Mimi White (2004) has written in response to the Space Shuttle Challenger Disaster, the original broadcast surrounding that event was concerned with a specific narrative, the historic launch. However, the disaster disrupted this original narrative. As White notes, however, the broadcast of the event did not stop, rather it carried on, "vamping for time" as it hastily constructed a new narrative around the disaster, adapting itself to the new situation (75). The events of 9/11 operated in a similar way, though the narrative they disrupted was not a specific one, but a wider narrative of television's regular flow (as well as a huge number of cultural and historical narratives.) What was disrupted that day in September was not a particular narrative, but television itself. Again, however, to watch the events unfold on live television was to watch television transforming itself, adapting to the unfolding situation by constructing new narratives to focus on. In both cases the contingent nature of the catastrophic events were subsumed by television, becoming part of television's innate capacity to narrativise reality.

Both 9/11 and the Challenger disaster represent moments of catastrophic rupture in the usual flow of television. Crucially, however, they also represent wider moments of cultural and historic rupture, and for this reason they have been widely covered by television and media studies. However, this chapter argues that the effects of

contingency on television are far more widespread, affecting almost every aspect of narrative television, in turn becoming a central characteristic of television narrative itself. To select just one example from fictional television: The historical epic *Spartacus* (Starz, 2010-2013)*,* was forced to deal with a major disruption early in its run when lead actor Andy Whitfield was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin Lymphoma during production of the first season. While the actor was undergoing treatment for his illness the show's creators and producers dealt with the disruption by crafting a prequel season *Gods of the Arena* (2011) without Whitfield's participation. Sadly Whitfield later died before production on the second season could begin, thus the show was left without its main actor. Rather than cancel the show, however, the part was recast, and Liam Macintyre portrayed the character throughout the show's final two seasons. Thus the production carried on to its logical end, culminating the story of the historical Spartacus in a way that provided a satisfying ending for viewers. Crucially, however, Whitfield's contribution was not ignored, and his image was featured in the series finale's end credits alongside Macintyre. Thus, while the show had adapted to the unforeseen circumstances of Whitfield's illness and death by carrying on, in its final moments it acknowledged this disruption, as well as its solution to it. What this example demonstrates is the degree to which contingency is fully subsumed within narrative television, how it is an expected part of television's narrative development.

These brief examples demonstrate a different type of contingency to that referred to by Ricoeur and Kermode. Rather than necessarily attempt to mime contingency *within* its narratives, television has contingency as a central part of its ontological being. In many ways, TV's narratives are *defined by contingency.* This has its own major

implications for the concept of a TV ending which this chapter seeks to explore. If, as Ricoeur argues, an ending precludes the chance for contingency, how can television, as a medium in which contingency plays such a major part, feature an ending? This raises its own paradox, and this chapter will develop the concept of intra-narrative endings as a possible solution to this paradox. First the chapter will provide a conceptual overview of contingency as it applies to narrative, focussing in particular on Ricoeur's paradox. From here I will move on to provide an overview of contingency in television, providing a number of examples of how contingency and chance exert themselves on television and its production of narrative. Finally I will suggest how the model of intra-narrative endings can be used to solve the paradox represented by the relationship between contingency and endings by again shifting the focus away from the terminus of a narrative text, to various points of structure, meaning, and interpretation throughout the text.

Contingency in Narrative

To begin I believe it is important to demonstrate the relationship between contingency and narrative more generally, in particular how Paul Ricoeur's concept of the "Paradox of Contingency" is manifested across various narrative forms. As I have stated above, Paul Ricoeur's "paradox of contingency" states that attempts to mime contingency in narrative are ultimately illusory, that the overwhelming force of endings in imposing structure and coherence denies true contingency. As Ricoeur argues "a narrative conclusion can be neither deduced nor predicted," in other words, "there is no

story if our attention is not moved along by a thousand contingencies" (174). This, for Ricoeur, is why we are compelled to follow a story along to its conclusion. As a result, far from the conclusion being predictable, it must rather be deemed acceptable in retrospect. As Ricoeur states, "Looking back from the conclusion we must be able to say that this ending required these sorts of events and this chain of actions." In other words, the seemingly contingent twists and turns of the narrative must ultimately be judged "acceptable after all" (174). Consuming a narrative, then, involves a dual movement, both linear and cyclical. While our attention is carried forward by a thousand possibilities and contingencies, come the end of a narrative each event must be judged to have occurred precisely as it did in order to reach that conclusion. At the same time, however, the "spiral movement of memory" (180) encouraged by the ending of a narrative, of reading the end in the beginning and beginning in the end, retrieves the possibilities and contingencies with which the narrative began. As Ricoeur puts it, "we learn to read time itself backwards, as a recapitulating of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences." (180) Contingency in narrative is thus paradoxical, both central to the act of consuming a narrative, but ultimately illusory; revealed in the final reading to be little more than an affirmation of causality and necessity.

Despite its paradoxical status, as Kermode (1967) suggests, narrative has long striven to mime the forces of contingency in order to more accurately reflect the realities of lived existence. What follows are some examples of narratives which have tried, in various ways, to reflect the contingent nature of reality while also illustrating the paradox of contingency at work. While Ricoeur's concept is rooted in literature, I want

to expand the scope of his paradox by applying it to other, more recent, forms of narrative, in particular film and videogames. Each of these forms attempts to mime contingency in various ways, though, as I will demonstrate, both are frustrated by their reliance on endings and the paradox of contingency created as a result. The purpose of the following analysis is thus to demonstrate the paradox of contingency across a number of different narrative forms in order to later demonstrate television's unique relationship to the contingent.

Beginning with film, Allan Cameron (2006) has given name to a certain form of complex film narrative, which he terms "modular film narrative". He argues that films such as *21 Grams* (Iñárritu, 2003), *Irreversible* (Noe, 2006) and *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994) deliberately demonstrate the tension between causality and contingency through their experimental, anachronic narrative structures, which play with the temporal organisation of events. *21 Grams* for example organises its narrative in a seemingly arbitrary way, portraying three individual stories connected by a car accident. Organised into a seemingly random sequence the narrative moves backward and forward through time, gradually revealing the connection between the three individual stories. This creates a situation where, as Roger Ebert (2003) notes in his review, sometimes we, as the audience, have more knowledge than the characters, sometimes less. *Pulp Fiction* is another notable example of a film that presents its story as a number of anachronic vignettes, telling an intersecting storyline from a range of viewpoints across time. Thus the scene that opens the film, featuring two characters exchanging small talk before proceeding to hold up a diner, is later returned to in the film's final sequence, where the continuation of the scene is presented from the

perspective of two other characters. Another notable example discussed by Cameron is *Irreversible,* whose narrative is organised according to reverse chronology, presenting its moral lesson of the pitfalls of vengeance and the irreversibility of time in reverse. Thus the film begins with the protagonist in prison, before moving gradually backwards through time to chart the events that led up to this.

For Cameron (2006), films like these "deliberately create uncertainty regarding the primacy of one narrative temporality over another. (65)" He argues that by doing this, such modular film narratives "confront a crises in the conception of the future, framed in relation to the unpredictability of contingency on the one hand and reified determinism on the other. (66)" However, Mary Anne Doane (2002) has argued that these narratives in fact merely give the illusion of anachrony and contingency. She argues that such films simply "reinforce classical cinema's domestication of contingency. (139)" For Doane, no matter how anachronic a film's narrative organisation appears to be, its narrative organisation is ultimately tied to the basic irreversibility of cinematic time. Flashbacks/forwards for example, while fragmentary and isolated from the rules of chronology, nevertheless consist of segments of forward moving time. Thus, although they are organised according to anachronic rules, they ultimately reaffirm the basic forward movement of narrative (139). This is reflected by Ebert in his review of *21 Grams* where he suggests that, in thinking about the film after the fact, it is the narrative itself we remember, not the way in which it is presented, and in thinking of this narrative Ebert argues we tend to organise it chronologically in our mind.

Similarly, Sean Cubitt (2004) argues that modular film narratives betray a distinctly deterministic turn in cinema, whereby the task of characters within modular narratives is "not to affect change, but to come to terms with their destiny. (237)" Here Cubitt affirms Ricoeur's paradox of contingency. Though events is such films may seem contingent or random, they in fact affirm basic rules of causality and necessity. For Cubitt, the characters in modular film narratives are bound to an irreversible fate, the anachronic organisation of the narrative only serving to create a form of "false contingency", manifested in the form of coincidences which are ultimately "nothing more than a send-up of the classical working through of cause and effect" (249). Modular film narratives then essentially represent exemplars of the paradox of contingency, their attempts to mime contingency ultimately foiled by the forces of structure and coherence. Modular film narratives, no matter how innovative in terms of the organisation of their narratives, must, ultimately end. In their endings the tension between causality and contingency becomes the point. Rather than miming contingency itself, they manifest a sense of false contingency that recall DA Miller's (2002) points on the open narrative, where the narratives very openness becomes an end in and of itself. Modular film narratives thus comment on contingency through the very impossibility of contingency in their own narratives. In a very real sense they represent examples *par excellence* of Ricouer's paradox.

A relatively newer form of narrative which would seem initially to represent a movement towards the contingent would be those narratives which are contained within videogames. At the time of writing, videogames represent perhaps the most popular form of interactive art and entertainment, indeed perhaps the most popular form of art

and entertainment full stop. At the current moment they are certainly the form with the widest cultural reach, however, they too are problematic in terms of the paradox of contingency. In his overview of videogame studies, James Newman (2004) delineates between two broad schools of thought, ludology and narratology. The former describes the study of videogames *as games*, while the latter describes the study of videogames *as narratives*. These categorisations are also useful in terms of delineating videogames themselves. Ludic videogames are free of narrative considerations, representing games in a pure form. Examples might include *Pong* (Atari, 1972), one of the earliest games, or, more recently, games such as *Nobi Nobi Boy* (Bandai Namco Entertainment, 2009) or *Hohokum* (SCE, 2014). These games largely lack narratives, instead providing experiences which are closer to sport or to pure play. *Nobi Nobi Boy*, for example, encourages users to play with various game mechanics in creative ways as they manipulate the titular 'boy', with little in the way of direct objectives.[13] Similarly, *Pong* is essentially a low-resolution rendering of tennis, with players controlling paddles on either side of the screen as they deflect a pixellated "ball" back and forth.

While many purely ludic games receive acclaim, narrative games are far more widespread. Many of the most successful video game franchises are primarily narrative, including *Super Mario* (Nintendo, 1985-), *Halo* (Bungie, 2001-), *Call of Duty* I(nfinity Ward, 2003-), and *Grand Theft Auto* (Rockstar, 1997-). Despite a focus on narrative however, by presenting interactive experiences, these games also posses ludic elements, popularly termed as 'gameplay' by critics and players alike. The relationship between

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13 The gameplay consists of players manipulating two ends of the titular 'boy', a worm-like creature who inhabits a procedurally generated world which he can interact with. The 'aim' of the game, such as there is one, is to stretch the boy as far as possible while interacting with the various objects which make up the world.

the narrative elements of a game and its gameplay is particular problematic in terms of contingency, creating a phenomenon known as ludo-narrative dissonance. This describes the often dissonant relationship between the gameplay (and how the players use this gameplay) and the narrative intentions of the game's creators. This can manifest in two ways. First, the actual ludic elements of a game might seem dissonant in terms of story being presented by the game. This is particularly the case with the shooter genre, in which the often high levels of violence contained within these games often go against attempts at characterisation and theme. A notable, and controversial, recent example of this form of ludo-narrative dissonance is the first person shooter *Bioshock Infinite* (Irrational, 2013). The latest entry in the popular *Bioshock* franchise, the game presents a narrative which touches on a number of themes, such as determinism, racial politics, and metaphysics. As a result, the game was highly praised for its complex narrative, and particularly for the characterisation of its two central characters, the player controlled character Booker DeWitt and his non-playable companion Elizabeth. However, following the release of the game the gameplay was widely criticised for being at odds with the narrative, in particular the game's violence came under attack from a number of critics, not solely due to its gratuity, but also in terms of how much at odds it seemed to be with the narrative. In particular the violence, and sheer body count contained within the game, was felt to detract from the social issues the game attempted to tackle, including issues of class and race. For example, games designer Cliff Bleszinski (2013) argued on his personal blog that the sheer level of violence detracted from the nuanced world of the game.

A wider issue here might be the tension between video game mechanics and the requirements of narrative. Videogames have a number of distinctive genres, and perhaps the most popular at the moment is the 'shooter' genre (based on the success of 1st person shooters such as the *Call of Duty* series). Each genre has its own historically informed gameplay mechanics, for example the shooter genre tends to consist of players navigating their avatar (either in first or third person viewpoints) through a game world, shooting a variety of enemy types as they progress. Such mechanics are informed by early examples such as *Wolfenstein* (id Software, 1992) and *Doom* (id Software, 1993) and have remained remarkably consistent even as the technology and narrative intentions of gaming have become increasingly more sophisticated. Thus the controversy surrounding *Bioshock Infinite* revolved around how the mechanics of the shooter seemed at odds with the nuanced narratives the game was attempting to portray. As one critic of the game's violence argued, "The game's story isn't really about shooting at all, but the player's lived story is, and that collision is hard to overcome." (Hamilton, 2013)

What is at stake here with this form of ludo-narrative dissonance is the way in which the mechanics of a game, the primary way in which the player interacts with the game and its narrative, can be perceived to be at odds with the narrative intentions of the same game. In a sense, the gameplay mechanics of a given game represent the opportunity for players to exert contingency over a game, providing the player with seeming control over the narrative in terms of how they interact with the game. However, this creates dissonance when the intentions of that narrative come up against the opposing force of the gameplay. This has particularly become the case as game worlds have become

increasingly more sophisticated, offering players a far higher degree of freedom. For example: games like *Grand Theft Auto V* (Rockstar North, 2014) and *Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2011) offer players vast game worlds in which to play. Due to the successes of games such as these players have sought greater degrees of autonomy and freedom within game worlds, to the degree that more 'closed' games have been criticised for a lack of freedom. For example, *Final Fantasy XIII* (Square Enix, 2009) was unfavourably compared to more open games of the genre due to the linear nature of its design (Edge Staff, 2013). Significantly, this desire for freedom can be read, in many ways, as a desire to mime contingency within videogames. However, such freedom falls victim to the paradox of contingency, whereby the desire to freely affect the narrative of a game comes up against the totalising forces of order and cohesion.

For example, the *Mass Effect* series seemed to offer players unparalleled opportunity to affect the game world and its narrative through their actions, however, the ending of the series in *Mass Effect 3* (Bioware, 2012) proved that this freedom fell victim to the paradox of contingency. Following the release of the game, many fans and critics complained that the ending failed to fulfil the promise of the player having complete control over the shape of the narrative. Many of the criticisms centred on how similar the game's three endings were, as well as how little their actions throughout the three games ultimately affected the eventual end result (Hornshaw, 2012). One player even went so far as to sue the developers of the game under the trading standards act, complaining that the developers had failed to fulfil their promise of complete freedom (Gregory, 2012). Significantly the controversy and furore surrounding the ending eventually led the developer Bioware to release an "extended cut" of the ending, one

which promised to better represent the choices of the players, but which, crucially, did not make any significant changes to the ending as it already existed. For many players, the problems arising from the ending of *Mass Effect 3* seem to have been that the choices they had made throughout the series did not, ultimately, seem "acceptable after all" (Ricoeur, 1980). Complaints arose because players had been approaching the narrative in a particular way, making choices which were informed by their own playing styles. For example, at key moments throughout the series players could decide to play as a "Paragon" or a "Renegade", reflecting two opposing ends of an in-game moral spectrum. Fans complained that no matter how they had played, the endings they were presented with at the climax of the game were fundamentally the same. While Seymour Chatman (1980) discusses the narrowing of choices in narrative down to a single, pre-ordained one, *Mass Effect 3* confronted players in the end with three choices. However, players complained that these three choices were more or less the same choice with superficial differences, and that no choice radically altered the experience of the game's ending. Thus, for many players, the end of the game did not represent the logical destination of the narrative that *they* had been playing, but rather one that the developers had crafted according to their own narrative intentions. The 'fraud' then was not the ending itself, but rather the promise that players would be able to affect the outcome in real or significant ways. This freedom was revealed to be essentially illusory. No matter what choices players had made throughout the course of the game, they always ended up at the same destination. Their choices, no matter how seemingly contingent on their will, were revealed to ultimately lead to the same, preordained destination.

The *Mass Effect* case is interesting because the game's promises for freedom were rooted in narrative, the promised opportunity to affect the narrative outcome of the game in a similar way to the *Choose Your Own Adventure* novels created by Edward Packard (1979-1998). However, videogames have also been heralded for offering the possibility of emergent gameplay. Emergent gameplay falls somewhere between the ludic and the narrative, seemingly offering the player truly contingent experiences within a wider narrative universe. In this sense they represent an attempt to truly mime contingency, by presenting players with unscripted, chance events within the wider game. However, the concept of emergent gameplay is itself problematic due to the presence of narrative. The concept of emergent gameplay, popularised by open-world games such as *Grand Theft Auto V* and *Skyrim*, allow the player freedom to act as they wish within a vast game world. While these games do feature core storylines, or "quests", players are free to ignore these entirely in favour of choosing their own path through the game. For example, one player created a blog charting his *Skyrim* playthrough in which he attempted to live as an "NPC", or non-playable character, emulating a normal life engaging in such tasks as fishing and mining (Livingston, 2011). In this example, the player resisted the core narrative of the game, which casts the player as a mythical hero and dragon slayer, in favour of testing the limits of the game world, to some limited success. Emergent gameplay then, in theory relies on the agency of the individual player in the creation of narrative. Thus, one player's experience may differ significantly from another's based on the choices each player makes within the game-world, and the core narrative seems, in some ways, more of a suggestion than a forced path.

However the very concept of emergent narrative is problematic. Tom Cross (2009) for example, argues that the concept of emergent narrative through player interaction is essentially illusory. His criticism of the concept lies in the opposing ideas of player agency and an authored narrative. As he argues, the narratives encountered by players are authored by the game designers. No matter how much freedom there appears to be given to the player, each choice the player can make is simply part of a pre-scripted system of choices already accounted for by the game's designers. While the aforementioned example would seem to represent a case of truly emergent gameplay, as the author's blog reveals, the experience is incredibly limiting, with few things to do in the game outside of the core narrative experience. In addition, the game repeatedly attempted to encourage the player back onto the intended path. Cross argues that that emergent moments, such as those instances whereby players test the 'rules' of the game world, are far closer to the act of play than they are narrative. As Cross puts it:

> If I kill a person who I was supposed to help, thus necessitating a firefight with their relatives or friends, then yes, it's "emergent"—something unscripted and procedural happens and I participate. But it isn't narrative except in a world where opaque, meaningless random occurrences between human-like entities, empty of content, can be called "narrative" because we're imagining a user who, like a kid playing with dolls, fills in all the semantic gaps.

Cross is essentially re-iterating Ricoeur's paradox of contingency, arguing that, because of the presence of narrative, emergent gameplay experiences are impossible, while truly emergent experiences cannot be classified as narrative. Thus if we read emergent experiences in gaming as contingent events, Cross argues that they cannot be classified as narrative due to the very contingent nature of their occurrence.

As these examples demonstrate, the paradox of contingency is identifiable across a range of media. Even the most seemingly interactive forms of narrative are prone to it. However, these are all forms of complete narrative wherein attempts to mime contingency are made problematic by the presence of an ending. Television, due to the relationship between its narratives and endings, or rather its problematic relationship, offers new possibilities for contingency. This is made possible by television's specific relationship to contingency, wherein contingency is both an internal part of television's narrative structures, whilst also a force which is exerted *against* television.

Television and Contingency

Television's particular relationship to contingency is rooted in the medium's temporality, particularly the strong link between the time of television and the time of the viewer. Television's temporality is just as messy as its textuality and narrativity. There are numerous different layers to television's temporality, including the time of TV *itself*, the time of the viewer, and the time of the individual narratives contained within television. In this second section I will discuss the relationship between the time of television and the time of the viewer, or experiential time (time as we experience it). I will then move on to demonstrate how these temporal relations open up television to the forces of contingency. Following this I will further discuss contingency in television, providing an overview of the four different levels of contingency that television must overcome, while illustrating the various ways in which television has done this.

In order to understand the relationship between the time of television and the time of the viewer, it is important to understand television's key role as a mechanism *of* time. EP Thompson (1967) has written of the way in which industrialisation revolutionised not only industry, but also our sense of time. He argues that as industrialisation took hold, and as the older, more parochial industries came to be eclipsed by the standardisation of the factory, so too did our sense of time come to be dominated by the idea that "time is now currency: it is not passed but spent. (61)" This concept, which Thompson terms "time-thrift", came to dominate the industrialised society, as the time sheet and chronometer became dominant forces in the workers' day and the division between 'work' time and 'living' time came into effect. As Thompson argues, "In mature capitalist society all time must be consumed, marketed, put to *use*; it is offensive for the labour force merely to 'pass the time'" (91). In the wake of industrialisation, time became something that is measured, something objective, though fascinatingly Thompson relates tales of how factory foremen would manipulate time, manually changing the duration of an hour on the chronometer to squeeze more work out of their workforce. Despite this, the widespread use of timekeeping devices led to the introduction of the concept of mechanical time. As Thompson's example of factory foremen manipulating the factory clocks demonstrates, while mechanical time may easily be conflated with objective time, it is in fact highly referential. Martin Heidegger's (1927) writing on being and time is crucial here. For Heidegger, care, otherwise defined as concern or preoccupation, was *the* marker of being in time. To be in time, he argues, we must reckon with time, and we are only able to do this with outside reference to the world around us. As I illustrated with reference to Kermode's

(1967) Tick-Tock demonstration in the previous chapter, time itself is essentially empty, it is only through our preoccupation with other things that we are able to reckon with it. In the case of Kermode's example, we are able to comprehend the concept of a second in time by describing it in our own terms, with the expression "tick-tock". As Kermode (44) puts it, we make time "talk our language" so that we can understand it. Similarly, as Paul Ricoeur (1980) states, it is only because we say that we have "time to do" *things* that we are able to reckon with time.

Thompson's study of time-thrift offers an important illustration of how this concept of being "in time" developed with the introduction of industrialisation. He illustrates how, before the coming of industrialisation, time was far more personal and dependent on the individual reference points of individual communities. With the introduction of mechanical time, however, the notion of time became standardised *en mass*. Thus, argues Thompson, time was able to be made into a commodity. Television, as a mechanism of time, fulfils an important function as a mass reference point of standardised, mechanical time. As Paddy Scannell and David Cardiff (1987) demonstrate in their extensive study of British Broadcasting, the effect of radio, and later television, on British life was considerable. New national holidays were introduced, along with new customs, due to broadcasting's ability to bring the whole of the nation together as one. As a result of this, the national calendar changed as broadcasting imposed a new sense of calendrical time onto the nation it addressed. A notable example might be the introduction of the Royal Christmas Message on Christmas Day in 1932, a cultural ritual introduced by broadcasting which has become a key part of festive celebrations in Britain.

Television thus provides a shared reference point in time. As Scannell (1996) shows in his later study, one of the primary ways in which we now reckon with time is through the organisation of the television schedule. As Scannell states, "Broadcasting, whose medium is time, articulates our sense of time" (152). For example, the broadcast day is split between breakfast programming, daytime TV, and primetime. One need only switch on BBC News to see the clearest illustration of television's mechanical temporality, an ever-present ticking clock in the corner. In terms of television's role in our daily lives, Scannell argues:

> Our sense of days is always already in part determined by the ways in which media contribute to the shaping of our sense of days. Would time feel different for us without radio, television and newspapers? Would it run to a different rhythm? (149)

Of course, television itself is not responsible for our standardised temporal landscape, it merely reflects a wider, more complex system of standardised time, again due largely to the needs of industrialisation. That said, television fulfils an important function in modern society as a shared temporal reference for its viewers and as a key way in which we understand time.

Returning to Heidegger's notion of care, this concept is central to Scannell's 1996 study of television time, particular in terms of his concept of "dailiness". For Scannell dailiness is "the unifying structure of all (television's) activities - the particular, distinctive, earliest mark of its being" (149). Furthermore he asks:

> What is dailiness? We might begin with what it is to provide a daily service - of say bread or milk, newspapers, trains or whatever. In order to bring it about that an everyday service is produced every day without exception a routinisation of the production of the service is required in such a way that that, precisely, is the outcome. (149)

In order to provide such a service requires a huge investment of labour, or care, on the part of producers, yet, argues Scannell, the specific care-structures of television are such that this labour is hidden from us:

> The huge investment of labour (care) that goes to produce the output of broadcasting delivers a service whose most generalisable effect is to re-temporize time; to mark it out in particular ways, so that the time of day (at any time) is a particular time, a time differentiated from past time-in-the-day or time that is yet-to-come (149).

Dailiness, then, describes a dual care structure: television's care for its viewers, expressed in terms of the great effort expended in providing for us; and our care for television, our concern with it as a temporal reference. For the viewer, Scannell argues, the time of television is always "my time", the present moment in which they are viewing, and to maintain this illusion television expends an incredible amount of work, always being ahead of itself in order to ensure a continual flow of content.

In putting forward this concept, it seems to me that Scannell is dancing around the subject of liveness, one of the core ideas underlying television which, though historically based, has retained much of its currency. In its early genesis television was principally live, due largely to technological limitations in the area of pre-recording. Yet, while television technology has evolved to the point where the majority of production is now transmitted pre-recorded, the technologically determined view of television as live has persisted in TV studies to the point where concepts of liveness and simultaneity are often seen as *the* distinguishing marker of television as a medium. For example, John Ellis (2000) states that television is live in the sense that it is immediate, "transmitted and received in the same moment that it is produced." (132) Similarly

Stephen Heath and Gillian Skirrow (1977) distinguish between television's temporality and that of film.

> Where film depends on the immobility of the frame, television, electronic and not photographic is an image in perpetual motion, the movement of a continually scanning beam; whatever the status of the material transmitted, the image as a series of electronic impulses in necessarily 'as it happens' (53).

However, while television's liveness is historically and technologically based, it is clear that fewer and fewer programmes are broadcast live. Jane Feuer (1983) has argued that the use of the term liveness potentially requires a "slippage". As she puts it, "Clearly, in terms of this simplest conception of the 'live', current American network television is best described as a collage of film, video and 'live', all interwoven into a complex and altered time scheme" (14-15). So while we can argue that early "live" television fulfilled the requirement of simultaneity, current television, for example that of the U.S., represents more of a mixture, within which truly 'live' television is only a part.

However, as Jerome Bourdon (2000) argues in his defence of liveness, the concept continues to have currency in terms of when and how the majority of viewers watch television. Linking back to my points in the previous chapter, despite the widespread adoption of time-shifting and streaming services amongst viewers, the vast majority of television continues to be produced with the schedule in mind. [14]As such the majority of narrative television is intended to be viewed first as part of a planned schedule of content, with other forms of viewing being secondary. As such, narrative television is

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[14] "The Viewing Report" published by BARB in 2015 notes that while other forms of content are on the rise (such as short form internet videos), proportionally speaking they account for a minimal amount when compared to more traditional forms of television.

produced and transmitted in order to primarily be viewed *as live,* that is, as part of an intended schedule. For Bourdon, this intention retains a promise of liveness. He notes, for example, the way in which certain programmes depend on a sense of co-presence, of everyone viewing as live at the same time. While he does not mention it specifically, it seems to me that Bourdon's points are reflected in contemporary "spoiler" culture in online forums and social media. Social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter increase our engagement with popular culture and open us up to new sources of informations. Spoiler culture stems from this as people try to avoid "spoilers", or narrative information, before they have viewed a particular programme. Thus immediately after a popular programme, for example HBO's *Game of Thrones* (HBO, 2011-), has aired in the US in its appointed slot in the schedule, social media outlets will be awash with capitalised shouts of "SPOILER ALERT" or "NO SPOILERS" as people try to insulate themselves from learning anything about the episode they have not yet watched. This, I would argue, demonstrates that the promise of liveness continues to function in television where there is a sense that to not take part in the co-presence of viewing *as live* means potentially missing out.

Taken together, the relationship between television and its viewers, alongside the ever present promise of liveness, creates the condition for narrative television's particular openness to contingency. While television, as with other narrative forms, is frequently preoccupied by a desire to mime contingency, I am interested in contingency as a force that exerts itself *against* television, disrupting it in various ways, and how television is able to work around these contingencies. This exertion of contingency against television has major implications for the study of television narrative, in

particular the concept of endings. As I have discussed, the paradox of contingency is largely imposed on narrative by the presence of endings. However, as I hope to now go on to demonstrate, the forces of contingency exerted against television are subsumed into television and its narratives, becoming major characteristics of television's narratives which, alongside the five characteristics discussed in Chapter Two, create significant problems for the concept of endings in television.

Television's ability to narrativise is dependent on its ability to control and mediate reality. This is a basic point of all narrative, however television's control extends further, and exerts itself over a wider array than is usual for most forms of narrative. For example: in addition to the usual forms and genres of fiction, narrative television also encompasses such forms as sports coverage, the news, documentary forms, reality TV, and so on. The ability to craft an ending is hugely dependent on television's ability to control reality. Television's relationship with time and openness to contingency complicates and, in many places, limits this ability, making an ending in television, at least as far as we traditionally understand them, unlikely.

For example, television is full of what we might term *default endings*, most notably in the form of cancellations. While these are endings by default due to the fact that they are, formally, the end of the text, they typically elicit reactions of frustration and even anger due to their dissimilarity to endings as they are commonly understood. These reactions stem from the fact that these default endings lack the characteristics of structure and closure that have traditionally been associated with endings. However, in many ways, these default endings are *more* televisual than those that achieve closure, precisely because they are borne out of television's specificities. The widespread

presence of such default endings demonstrate the ways in which the concepts of contingency and control exert a problematic force for television's ability to construct narratives, and endings specifically. However disruptive these default endings are to audiences, though, they are rarely disruptive to television itself. Indeed, the cancellation of low rated programmes is a routine part of television, and there is always something to replace the programme which has been cancelled.

Television's Sphere of Control

Television's ability to construct narratives out of reality depend on the various levels of what we might call television's sphere of control. This sphere can roughly be delineated into four categories describing the various levels of control television is able to exert over reality. These four categories begin with absolute control and extend outwards as contingency exerts more and more influence over reality, limiting television's ability to narrativise. However, it should be noted that, arguably, *no* event falls outside of television's ability to craft a narrative. Television is incredibly skilled at accounting for the unexpected. Even those most disruptive and unexpected of events are eventually subsumed by television's ability to narrativise. What is at stake here, however, is not television's ability to narrativise in the face of contingency and chance, but rather its ability to craft an ending due to the influence of these factors.

Level One: Industry

This first level describes contingencies over which television exerts direct control, that is, contingencies instigated by television itself. Such contingencies are still disruptive to television's narratives, however at this level they are imposed on those narratives by the industry itself. Perhaps the clearest illustration of this is in the widespread practice of cancellation. As I have discussed throughout this thesis, ratings still exert an overwhelming force over television and the relative success or failure of a show in many ways continues to be tied to the audience. In other words, the duration of a particular show is contingent on there being an audience. This can be expressed in one of two ways: a popular show might continue to air season after season as long as it maintains its popularity, while a less popular show might find itself "on the bubble" (an industry term describing a programme whose fate is uncertain) or facing cancellation. This means that the duration of a show's narrative cannot be determined by the producers of that narrative. Narrative may be cut short or extended indefinitely depending on the popularity of that show.

This can, on the one hand, lead to the perception that a show has been overextended far beyond any logical conclusion. *Happy Days* (ABC, 1974-1984) is commonly cited as an example of this overextension, birthing the term "Jumping the Shark" to describe a show that is perceived to have outlasted its cultural significance (Hein, 2003). Despite this, the show remained popular enough that it continued on for several more seasons. In contrast, many shows find their planned narrative cut short. For example, *The Event* (NBC, 2010-2011) promised viewers that its narrative had been carefully planned out for several seasons, largely in response to audience dissatisfaction at the ending of *Lost*.

However, the show was cancelled after its first season due to dwindling ratings. As Ryan McGee (2012) argues, the narrative promises of *The Event* were, in many ways, contrary to the industrial realities of television.

> The idea of having a fixed point toward which a show inevitably builds is fine in theory, but false in practice. There are too many variables at play when producing a television show that slavishly adheres to a predetermined finish line. All those breadcrumbs have to lead somewhere. But what if that destination changes along the way? How can one account for the clues already left behind? Assuming that a superior idea won't arise later is simply arrogant thinking, and counterintuitive to any collaborative process. A television show is a living, breathing entity that represents a synergy of creative, cultural, and social forces that simply can't be predicted five weeks out, never mind five years out.

At the same time, as Jason Mittell (2015) notes in his taxonomy of endings in serialised television, the end does not always necessarily mean *the end* in television. Due to the symbiotic relationship between audience and producers, there is always the possibility in television that a previously cancelled show can be brought back, or "resurrected" as Mittell terms it. This practice has gained particular currency recently due to new avenues of television production. For example, the streaming service Netflix has resurrected a number of previously cancelled television series, such as *Arrested Development* (Fox, 2003-2006, Netflix, 2013-) and *Full House* (ABC, 1987-1995). An earlier example from the British context would be *Crossroads* (ITV), a soap opera which initially aired from 1964 to 1988 before it was cancelled. It was later resurrected in 2001, where the revived series only lasted a further two years before its cancellation in 2003.

This first level, then, is defined by the relationship between audience and content producers. As the owners of the programmes produced, television producers reserve the

right to extend or cancel narratives as they see fit. At the same time, however, their

decisions are largely contingent on the audiences demand for, or indifference to, the

narratives produced. While there are other reasons that a show might be cancelled

(famously the programme *Australia's Naughtiest Home Videos (Nine Network, 1992)*

was cancelled half way through its first episode at the behest of Kerry Packer, owner of

the network on which it aired (Casey, 2008)) ratings, and thus the audience, continue to

hold a massive influence over the duration of individual shows, and thus the relative

length of the narratives of those shows is contingent on the relationship between

audience and producers.

Level Two: Personnel

Moving outwards from television's direct control, level two describes contingencies

that are less within the control of producers, but which television typically adapts to

with relative ease. Generally these are related to the lives of those figures who appear *on*

television, whether actors or presenters. At this level the autonomy of the individual

presents possible contingencies that television must overcome. For example, an actor or

presenter may decide to leave a particular show for whatever reason, as was the case

with Jon Stewart, who announced his intention to depart from *The Daily Show* (Comedy

Central, 1996-) in 2015, having presented the satirical current affairs programme since

1999. A popular, in many ways iconic host, Stewart was largely synonymous with *The

Daily Show.* As such his announcement was met with significant coverage in the press,

with many outlets framing his departure as the end of an era (Elber, 2015, Sepinwall,

2015). However synonymous Stewart had become with *The Daily Show*, however, the

show itself did not end with his departure, rather, after a period of intense speculation, Stewart was replaced by South African comedian Trevor Noah in 2015. In this way, while Stewart's departure was framed as a disruption at a wider cultural level, the show itself was able to carry on with a new presenter. Thus one narrative, the narrative surrounding Stewart and his place within *The Daily Show*, was replaced, or rather adapted, to include a new presenter. The disruption, for the show itself, was therefore minimal, even if it was framed as a more major disruptive event in the press.

Another potential contingency is when a particular actor either leaves a show or is otherwise forced to leave. For example, Isaiah Washington, who played the central role of Dr. Preston Burke during the first two seasons of *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC, 2005-)*,* was fired from that show following a homophobic outburst directed at co-star T.R. Knight. In this instance Washington's firing was incorporated into the narrative and the character was removed along with the actor, though he did later return for a single episode in the season 10 finale. Thus, while Washington's firing from *Grey's Anatomy* was motivated by the actor's personal actions, the show itself was able to subsume the context of his firing into the narrative itself.

Another example might be the use of child actors in long running programmes. This represents its own problems, depending on the speed of the narrative, the natural growth of the child performer may outpace the speed of the narrative itself. This was a factor in the abandoned storylines regarding the character of Walt in *Lost ,*whereby the actor's growth spurt during the first and second season made his presence in the narrative no longer logical considering the relatively contracted timeframe of the show (the first two seasons cover only a few months of narrative time). Similarly, the character of Bobby

Draper has been played by no less than four actors over the course of *Mad Men's* seven seasons (AMC, 2007-2015). Both cases demonstrate different solutions to the contingency of ageing child actors, on the one hand *Lost* simply abandoned narrative threads that had ran through the first two seasons, keeping the Walt character offscreen for much of the second season and having him exit during the finale, only returning to these storylines intermittently later in the show's run when a jump forward in time allowed for the show's narrative to, in a sense, catch up with the actor's age. *Mad Men* on the other hand, adapted to the contingency of ageing by simply recasting the role with different performers when the narrative outpaced the age and abilities of the existing performer. This latter solution is also widespread in soap opera where it has become an accepted part of the production. Whereas the casting of Bobby Draper in *Mad Men* has been a running joke for many critics (including in the "25 Casting Fails in TV That They Expected Us Not to Notice" list on *Complex* (Aquino, 2013) the re-casting of Bobby Beale on *EastEnders* passed largely without negative comment, as viewers and fans fully accepted the necessity of recasting over time.

Finally, perhaps the most disruptive, and tragic, example of this level of contingency is the death of an actor or presenter. Examples might include the death of John Spencer, who portrayed Leo McGarry a major character in *The West Wing,* during production of the show's seventh season. Despite the loss of such a major character, the show carried on, incorporating the death into the narrative by having Leo suffer a fatal heart attack offscreen. Even soap opera, perhaps the most concentrated form of fictional narrative on television, has found ways to adapt to the sudden death of its actors. For example, Anne

Kilbride who portrayed Deirdre Barlow on *Coronation Street* died suddenly in 2015,

forcing the soap to quickly contrive a way to account for this within the narrative.[15]

Level Three: Institution

If level two describes television's concern with the individuals that populate its

productions, level three describes larger institutional and industrial contingencies that

fall either within or without television's direct sphere of control. These can take the

form of deliberate actions at a larger institutional scale, such as the buying and selling of

networks, studios, and affiliates. For example, as I have written elsewhere (Bell, 2011)

the behind-the-scenes bidding war between The WB and UPN for the rights to air *Buffy*

the Vampire Slayer (The WB, 1997-2001, UPN, 2001-2003)*,* had a significant impact on

that show's narrative. As UPN won the rights away from The WB to screen the show the

narrative of the show itself underwent drastic changes to reflect its uncertain future. The

season five finale, for example, the last to air on The WB, culminates with the apparent

death of its central character. Buffy is later resurrected in the premiere of the sixth

season, though her characterisation is radically changed, reflecting the new context of

the programme on the new network. Significantly, the season five finale represents a

suitable ending for the show as a whole, as its fate was uncertain. Thus the resurrection

of the character Buffy also reflects the resurrection of the show itself.

Other examples are forced on the TV industries from the outside. One form of this is

industrial action taken by industry workers which can have a considerable effect on

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15 In the immediate term Deirdre was removed from narrative, the reason given that she was staying with a friend, Bev. Bev later appears with news that Deirdre has died of an aneurism caused by her years of chain smoking. A funeral was held for the character on 13 July 2015.

television production. A recent and notable example of this would be the 2011 writer's strike, which largely crippled the US TV industries ability to produce regular programming. Many shows airing during this period were either cut short, or otherwise did not air at all. For those shows that did air, the implications of the writer's strike could be significant. For example, Vince Gilligan, creator of *Breaking Bad* (AMC, 2008-2013), has spoken publicly about how the strike affected the narrative of that show (McFarland, 2013). By shortening the initial first season order Gilligan was forced to re-structure the season, and this in turn led to the decision to not have the character of Jesse Pinkman killed during that season. Jesse would go on to become a major character in the seasons to come. Thus the industrial contexts of the production not only affected that first season, but also the narrative of the programme going forward.

Finally, other forms of industrial contingency might concern decisions made in the wake of controversy, particularly the pulling of specific shows or storylines from the schedule. While this is, in many ways, similar to the practice of cancellation discussed above, the relationship between the audience and producers is here different. While cancellation stems from the relationship between viewers and the show in terms of ratings, at this level the relationship between viewers and institutions is more direct, with viewer complaints directly leading to the pulling of specific shows or storylines from the planned schedule in the face of controversy. This is a particular concern for public service broadcasting, particularly in the UK, whereby complains from viewers can lead to action on the part of broadcasters. This was the case in 2010 when a developing storyline in the soap opera *EastEnders* received sufficient complaints that it was cut short and altered to shy away from the controversial material involving cot

death. Here we see cases of the audience making a direct intervention on the narrative through institutional channels.

Level Four: Outside Forces (The Wider World)

At the final, outer level, we have those kinds of events with which I opened this chapter, those chance events which lie entirely out with television's control. These have been defined by the likes of Mimi White (2004) and Patricia Mellencamp (1990) as moments of catastrophe, moments of extreme disruption which affect not just television, but also wider cultural and historical narratives in general. As I discussed in my introduction to this chapter, however, no matter how disruptive these events appear, television is able to adapt to them and subsume them into the narrative structures of television. Even if such events seem to stun television into silence, as Mimi White notes of news anchors "vamping for time", such silence is only momentary. Thus while such events exert a hugely disruptive force on both television and the culture more widely, television is quickly able to construct new narratives that adapt to the changing contexts brought about by the initial disruption.

I have already discussed this form of contingency in relation to the events of 9/11 and the space shuttle Challenger disaster. A more recent example, however, might be the 2014 bombings of the Boston Rally. The bombing itself initially represented a huge moment of disruption both for television and more widely, as news broadcasts broke the news live. Viewing from a UK context, following the story unfold live on BBC News and Sky News over the days following the initial bombing, the coverage passed through several distinct stages. These stages demonstrate the ways in which the television

coverage, responding to new information emerging from the US, was able to construct a complete narrative over time, adapting to new information and circumstances. Beginning with the bombing itself, the narrative was initially one of confusion, as the news coverage showed, over and over again, footage captured from the site of the attack. Moving on from this initial narrative of tragedy and catastrophe, the narrative quickly became centred on the hunt for the perpetrators, with different suspects and theories emerging in real time as new information was revealed. Once the actual perpetrators had been revealed, however, the manhunt narrative quickly took a more focussed turn, climaxing with the capture of one of the perpetrators, and the death of the other. Finally, following the capture of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, a new, ongoing narrative merged, initially concerned with two strands, the reasons for Tsarnaev's actions, and also the heroism of those that aided authorities at the site.

The four levels of contingency I have sketched above demonstrate how narrative television is extremely open to different forms of contingency. They also demonstrate the fluidity of television narrative in terms of adapting to these contingencies. Contingency is thus a major characteristic of narrative television, a force which is, on the one hand, exerted *against* television, but one which television subsumes and adapts to. In short, contingency represents a major part of television's narrative ontology, and this creates major problems for the concept of endings in TV. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, endings, as we have come to commonly understand and accept them, are defined by their functionality in terms of closure, cohesion, and structure. This functionality, argues Paul Ricouer (1980), is the principle reason for what he terms the paradox of contingency. As his paradox states, any attempts to mime contingency in

narrative is ultimately illusory due to the functionality of an ending. However, as I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, narrative television has contingency as a major characteristic of its ontological being. Thus we are presented with a new paradox, the paradox of endings in television. After all, if an ending precludes contingency in narrative, how can television, with contingency as a major characteristic of its narratives, ever possess an ending?

Conclusion: Intra-narrative Endings and Contingency

This paradox of endings on television can be demonstrated with reference to the endings that *do* exist in television, and particularly how such endings have been received by viewers. To select just one example that I have already discussed, the ending to *Lost* was deemed disappointing precisely because it did not fulfil the expected functionality of endings as we expect them, that is, in terms of closure, cohesion, and structure. However, I would argue that rather than representing an ending in terms of our commonly held definition of endings, what the end of *Lost* was, in fact, was the ending to a *TV show*, one that had been on the air for six seasons and 121 episodes, and whose narrative had adapted fluidly over time to any number of contingent events, including the writers strike, the loss of actors, and the ageing of its child star.

Contingency thus joins the five characteristics discussed in the previous chapter in resisting the concept of terminus based endings and their functionality. However, just as intra-narrative endings could be applied to those characteristics of serialisation,

fragmentation, duration, repetition, and accumulation, to help resolve the problems posed by those characteristics to an idea of an ending in television, so too can it be applied to contingency to solve this new paradox. To briefly reiterate the concept of intra-narrative endings, these are islands of cohesion, structure, and meaning located at various points within otherwise ongoing television narratives. They fulfil much of the functionality of terminus based endings without the requirement for overall closure, cohesion, and structure. They are instead fluid, representing discrete points within an ongoing text in which meaning can be made and structure located.

In many ways, contingency itself can be read as an intra-narrative ending. There is a sense that this already happens. For example, catastrophic events such as 9/11 and the space shuttle Challenger disaster are often read as watershed moments for culture and for television specifically. This is precisely the reason that they have been so widely covered by television studies, and also why they are seen to represent pivotal points in the history of television (see for example, Goodman, 2010). Other examples of contingent events representing intra-narrative endings, drawn from contingencies already discussed throughout this chapter, might include contingencies such as John Stewart's departure from *The Daily Show*, which, as I have already demonstrated, was framed in many places as the end of a particular era in the history and development of that show. Similarly, the final episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* season five represents a transitional moment for the show as it switched networks, but the end of season five also represents an intra-narrative ending for the narrative, most notable with the death of the show's namesake protagonist. As Walter Benjamin suggests in his pivotal work *The Storyteller* (1963), death is the ultimate ending in narrative, the "sanction of everything

the storyteller can tell. (151)" In terms of this, then, the sad and untimely death of Andy Whitfield also represents an intra-narrative ending for *Spartacus,* delineating between two discrete parts of that show's narrative, *Spartacus* with Whitfield, and *Spartacus* with Macintyre and, as stated above, this delineation is something referenced by the show itself in its final moments. Finally, the various stages of the Boston Bombing coverage can be read in terms of intra-narrative endings, with each individual stage as described above representing a different intra-narrative ending within the ongoing narrative of the story as a whole.

Thus, as I have demonstrated with this chapter, due to contingency, the concept of a total, terminus based ending in TV is elusive and problematic. However, the concept of a fluid series of intra-narrative endings, each concluding specific, discrete parts of an ongoing narrative, is not. Thus intra-narrative endings can aid us in resolving the seeming paradox of endings in contingency prone television.

Taken together these introductory chapters have proposed a model of television centred around six characteristics: serialisation, fragmentation, duration, repetition, accumulation, and contingency. This model, developed out of an analysis of US television but intended to be applicable to other national contexts (including, primarily, British TV) presents a vision of television which is inherently opposed to our common understanding of endings with their characteristics of structure, cohesion, and meaning. Furthermore I have proposed a model of intra-narrative endings as one possible way of resolving the tension between my model of television and an understanding of endings. As such, across the following three case studies it is the intention that the reader

understand that this notion of television, consisting of these six characteristics, operates

implicitly behind the notion of an intra-narrative ending.

Chapter Four
"The End of an Earring"
Endings and Soap Opera

Introduction

This chapter is the first in a series of three case studies which explore the concept of intra-narrative endings in relation to specific forms of television. This first case study focusses specifically on soap opera, a form which has long held associations with unendingness and an extreme resistance to closure. To illustrate, Robert Allen (1985), a leading figure in soap opera studies, has stated that the "central aesthetic characteristic of the soap opera is its absolute resistance to narrative closure" (13). Similarly, Dennis Porter (1977) in his essay "Soap Opera: Thoughts on a Commodity Artform" has argued that soap's "purpose clearly is to never end, (783)" while at a perhaps more extreme level, Jerry Palmer (2008) has gone so far as to argue that, "in the instance of soap opera there is no such thing as a text...since the stories in question have no end. (7)" As statements such as these demonstrate, soap opera's relationship to endings is problematic. Simply put, there is no expectation for an ending in soap opera, but rather the expectation is that soaps *do not* end.

However, this attitude is somewhat misleading, ignoring the fact that soap operas *can* and frequently *do* end. For example, in her pioneering work on narrative structure in soap opera (or "the continuous serial" as she defines it) Christine Geraghty (1981) discusses the final episode of the early BBC radio soap *Waggoner's Walk* (BBC Radio 2, 1969-80), a soap which was brought to an untimely end as the result of BBC cuts. More

recent televisual examples might include the final episodes of Channel Four's flagship soap *Brookside* (Channel 4, 1982-2003) and ITV's *Crossroads* (ITV, 1964-88, 2001-03) both of which suffered a similar fate in the face of dwindling audiences. Each of these examples represent an ending in soap opera, the very thing that the above statements argue does not exist. However, while all three represent the kinds of terminus based endings soaps have rarely been associated with, contained within each example is an illustration of why the relationship between soap opera narrative and the concept of endings is so problematic. Each of the examples represents what I have referred to in a previous chapter as an "ending by default". Each was brought to an end not through authorial intention, but by various extenuating institutional circumstances such as dwindling audience ratings and wider funding cuts within their home institutions. Each is, in other words, the victim of contingency, yet while they do represent endings in one respect, not one of them can be considered to represent a "good textual death" (Harrington, 2012) in terms of the common conception of endings I have set out in this thesis. Rather, each indulges in various self-referential, meta-textual strategies for signalling their endings, often self-consciously drawing attention to their status as 'bad' endings (in terms of their inability to fulfil the key characteristics of cohesion, structure, and meaning).

For example, *Waggoner's Walk* ends *in medias res* with a proposal of marriage, a proposal that goes unanswered. As Geraghty (1981:11) notes, the final line of the soap represents a tongue in cheek reference to the impossibility of closure in soap opera, as the character on the receiving end of the proposal responds by asking if she can think about it, to which her companion responds "Of course, you have all the time in the

world." While *Waggoner's Walk* explicitly draws attention to the soap's resistance to closure in its ending, *Brookside's* final episode is almost apocalyptic in its aggressive attempt to impose a sense of closure. Over the course of 90 minutes the final episode sees the evacuation of the titular Close to make way for a new service road, and the final act is particularly aggressive in terms of its attempts at imposing closure as fan favourite character Jimmy Corkhill (Dean Sullivan) exits the Close only after having broken into each of the houses to leave the taps running, painting the words "Game Over" in huge red letters across the fronts of the houses, and adding a D to the Close's sign, so that it reads "Brookside Closed." Furthermore, if the ending of *Waggoner's Walk* figuratively winked at its audience with its self-conscious recognition of the impossibility of closure, *Brookside* features a more explicit moment of self-awareness in its final shot, as Jimmy Corkhill literally winks to camera as the words "The End of an Era…" flash on screen. Finally, in a similarly self-conscious manner, the final episode of ITV's resurrected *Crossroads* rejects any attempt at closure whatsoever by revealing that the entirety of the series had taken place within the imagination of supermarket worker and *Crossroads* fan Angela.[16]

Thus, while each of these examples represent endings in the sense that they are, literally, the end of their respective soaps, in terms of the common understanding of endings I have set out previously, they cannot be considered examples of "dying well" (Harrington, 2012). Instead of displaying the characteristics of structure, cohesion, and meaning, each of the above examples tackles the concept of soap endings by breaking outside of the narrative construction in different ways. *Waggoner's Walk* is

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[16] The series original run (1964-88) ended as the character of Jill (Jane Rossington) left with her lover, John Maddingham (Jeremy Nicholas) to open a new hotel abroad.

perhaps the mildest of the three, however it is telling that the soap can only signal its end by explicitly acknowledging the impossibility of such an ending. *Brookside's* ending on the other hand is defined by attempts at closure which are so aggressive as to cross almost into the realm of parody (there is a strong vein of humour running through the final few moments of the episodes, particularly as Jimmy Corkhill winks to the audience). Finally, *Crossroads'* ending might be defined as an anti-ending, one which is almost subversive in its complete denial of the characteristics of an ending. By revealing the entire resurrected series to have been little more than an imagined reality, the soap's ending denies any form of structure, cohesion, or meaning to the hundreds of episodes which had came before.

What these examples reveal is that while an ending is not impossible for a soap, ending well *as an ending* (as we commonly understand and evaluate endings) is difficult, if not impossible. This is perhaps not surprising given the extreme length and serialisation of soap opera narratives, as well the vast amounts of narrative information that soaps amass over the years and decades of their broadcast. Due to this, it is unlikely, perhaps even impossible, for any single soap opera ending to account for all of this accumulated narrative history, or to culminate with any sufficient, never mind satisfactory, closure. In other words, terminus based endings in soaps, while *endings by default*, cannot be defined as endings in any way that we typically understand them. As Palmer suggests, then, how can we even consider soap operas as texts if they lack the key characteristics of structure, cohesion, and meaning that endings provide?

Intra-narrative endings provide one solution to this question. This chapter co-incidentally shares its title with that of Pam St. Clements' (2015) recently published

autobiography, *The End of an Earring*. This was a phrase that was widely used around the time of St. Clements' exit from *EastEnders,* a reference to her character Pat Butcher's penchant for large, tacky earrings, and the phrase is appropriate for both our purposes. For St. Clement the title represents the end of a professional era in her career, having spent 25 years and six months on the soap, continuously portraying Pat since 1986, in the process becoming one of the longest serving continuous characters in the soap's history (beaten only by Adam Woodyatt who has portrayed Ian Beale continuously from the very first episode in 1985). While St. Clement's use of the phrase marks a landmark moment in her life and career (the autobiography is not solely concerned with *EastEnders*) I use it as my own title because it also marks a watershed moment in the narrative history of the soap, the death of Pat Butcher on New Years Day 2012.

This chapter argues that Pat's death represents a major intra-narrative ending within the wider, ongoing narrative of the soap, an island of structure, cohesion, and meaning which operates across two interrelated narrative levels. The first, as the climax to a storyline that we can define as "The Death of Pat Butcher" (though it was never explicitly referred to as this by the show's producers), while the second, as the culmination of a much wider, 25 and half year narrative of Pat herself ("The Life of Pat Butcher"), and her place within the wider, historical narrative of *EastEnders.* The death of Pat Butcher thus represents a useful case study of intra-narrative endings in soap opera for a number of reasons, not least in terms of its wider cultural impact. The character was well loved by viewers of the soap and over the course of her two-and-a-half decade tenure had become something of a cultural icon, the subject of numerous

parodies as well as something of a shorthand for the soap itself. The character's death then was framed as a significant event in British television culture, and was the subject of a wider cultural discussion.[17] Due to this wider cultural impact, the example of Pat's death presents something of a heightened illustration of intra-narrative endings in soaps. This is also reflected in the extreme length of the character's tenure, wherein the intra-narrative ending represented by Pat's death culminates over 25 years of narrative development. Intra-narrative endings in soaps are rarely as heightened or wide reaching, however, with its high profile, Pat's death offers a useful and clear example for the purposes of this chapter and thesis.

The chapter will begin by providing an overview of the narrative structure of *EastEnders*. While my focus is specifically on that soap, it is intended, in many ways, to be representative of British soap more generally. As such my overview also pays attention to other British soaps that are contemporaries of *EastEnders*. From here the chapter will move on to focus specifically on the relationship between soap opera narrative and contingency. Given the extreme length of soap opera, the frequency of their episodes (often multiple episodes per week), and the closeness of soap production to its transmission, this relationship is particularly key in terms of the ongoing narrative development of soap opera, and invariably plays a role in terms of what intra-narrative endings soaps are able to construct. Finally the chapter will move on to a detailed analysis of the 'Death of Pat Butcher' storyline, providing a reading of it as an intra-narrative ending across two inter-related levels. The first provides a reading of the New

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[17] Soap opera is Britain is typically reserved for fan magazines and websites, rarely crossing over into the mainstream press. The exception is during major events such as the death of Pat Butcher, or more recently, the celebration of the soap's 30th anniversary with its "live week" of episodes culminating in the much hyped "Who Killed Lucy Beale?" storyline.

Years Day episode in which the character succumbs to her illness as the culmination of an immediate but ongoing storyline which had unfolded over a number of months, while the second provides a reading of Pat's death as the culmination of over 25 years of character development, in particular focussing on the complex processes of selection and omission that seek to create a definitive, posthumous narrative from the raw narrative material of the character's two and a half decades on the soap.

Narrative Structure in *EastEnders*

The term Soap Opera has been used to describe a huge range of different forms of narrative television. As perhaps one of the earliest, most distinctive forms of broadcasting, the soap opera is generally defined by its frequency and the heavily serialised nature of its stories, though there is a huge variety of different kinds of soap opera around the world. For example, the US soap opera is typified by the daytime serial, typically concerned with the glamorous lives of the aspirational upper classes (e.g. *The Young and the Restless* (CBS, 1973-)), while South America on the other hand has developed the 'telenovela', a more contained form of soap designed with a definite ending in mind, but which also shares the frequency and lengthy duration of other soap operas (e.g. *María la del Barrio* (Televisa, 1995-1996). In a similar vein, 'téléromans' are successful in French speaking parts of the world, in particular French Canada, and are largely similar in structure to the telenovela (e.g. *La Bonne Aventure* (Société Radio-Canada, 1982-1986)). The form I am specifically interested in exploring in this chapter is the British Soap Opera, a distinctive form of soap which is, I believe, among the

ultimate realisations of the characteristics of television narrative, one which pushes the characteristics of serialisation, fragmentation, duration, repetition, and accumulation, to their extremes.

Created by Julia Smith and Tony Holland, *EastEnders* was first transmitted in 1985 and is, in many ways, representative of the British Soap Opera. According to their book *EastEnders: The Inside Story* (1987:8), the soap was commissioned by the BBC to both combat its (at the time) largely negative and controversial public image, as well as to appeal to a mass/popular audience which was at that time largely dominated by commercial rival ITV. Despite scattered earlier examples, including *The Appleyards* (BBC, 1952-57) and *The Grove Family* (BBC, 1954-57), *EastEnders* was, in many ways, the BBC's first real television soap, and certainly the first to represent a real rival for ITV's *Coronation Street*, which has been on the air since 1960. *EastEnders* proved to be a popular success for the BBC and has aired continually ever since, increasing its output in 2007 to four episodes per week while maintaining a central place in British popular culture.

Like many British soap operas, *EastEnders* focuses largely on the lives of the working class, in *EastEnders'* case the residents of Albert Square, an area in the fictional London borough of Walford. This focus on the working class is typical of British soaps including *Coronation Street* (ITV, 1960-), *Brookside* (Channel 4, 1982-2003) and *River City* (BBC Scotland, 2002-) and is explored through storylines that involve issues of employment and unemployment, community, and resistance to the forces of gentrification. Work, and the struggle to gain employment is a perennial theme for characters in British soap opera, and workplaces typically provide key settings.

EastEnders, for example, includes various businesses, such as those owned by Ian Beale, including a cafe ("Cindy's"), a restaurant ("Lucy's"), and a chip shop ("Beale's Plaice"). Other *EastEnders* businesses include "The Arches", a garage owned by Phil Mitchell (Steve McFadden) and, perhaps most famously, the local pub "The Queen Victoria". Many different characters have passed through these various workplaces throughout the soap's history, providing sources of employment for many of the residents of Albert Square, and therefore key locations of narrative material.

Alongside this focus on the workplace, themes of unemployment, financial struggle and a general suspicion and hostility towards wealth are prevalent in British soaps. *EastEnders*, in particular has a tradition of storylines which focus on the opposition of the residents of Albert Square to the forces of gentrification. An early (1985) storyline concerned the suspicion of the Square's residents to a new, wealthier couple Andy (Ross Davidson) and Debbie (Shirley Cheriton) and the couple's unsuccessful attempts to ingratiate themselves within the community. A recent storyline in 2015 concerning opposition to the forces of gentrification which features various characters demonstrating against the potential close of the local market and the development of new, upscale housing, illustrates how the soap has very much maintained a focus on these themes over its 30 year history. In addition, *EastEnders* has a long tradition of focussing on organised crime and its effects on the community. Gangster characters have been repeatedly used to represent forces of gentrification and wealth. Phil Mitchell, one of Albert Square's wealthier denizens, has been a perennial antagonist for many of the residents of Walford since his introduction in 1990, while other villainous characters are usually associated with money. To provide just a few examples from

recent years: Derek Branning (Jamie Forman), Carl White (Daniel Coonan), and more recently Vincent Hubbard (Richard Blackwood) have all been associated with money, and all have been treated with suspicion. For example, Patrick Truman's (Rudolph Walker) distrust of Vincent, his surrogate daughter Kim's (Tamika Empson) new husband, comes about from him finding Vincent in possession of a large bag of money. Wealth then, and its associations with both gentrification and organised crime, has typically been treated with suspicion by the characters and narrative of *EastEnders*.

An emphasis on the family and community also provide the principle focus of storylines in *EastEnders,* with most of the soap's narrative action focussing on a series of (often large) family units, many of whom have long histories within the Square. As I will discuss below, this complex history is central to the narrative structure of a soap like *EastEnders*, and as such, much of the narrative material comes from generational conflict as older residents come into conflict with their various children and grandchildren.[18] It is rare to find a character in *EastEnders* who is not in some way affiliated to one family unit or another. Those who are independent characters are typically either short lived characters (such as villains or cameo appearances) or else are quickly subsumed into a larger family unit through marriage or other relationships. For example, Dot Cotton (June Brown) was originally introduced in 1985 as the mother of Nick Cotton (John Altman), a primary antagonist in *EastEnders'* early days. As Nick passed in and out of the narrative owing to his various criminal activities, Dot was left as a rare independent character within the soap's milieu. However, in 2002, Dot married

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[18] A unique aspects of soap opera is that characters typically age in real time, though often child characters will often be recast as they grow older, for example the character of Bobby Beale has been portrayed by no less than four actors. An exception to this is Adam Woodyatt, who has portrayed Ian Beale from adolescence to middle age.

Jim Branning, in the process becoming subsumed into the larger Branning family. Later, in 2014, Dot's family was further expanded with the introduction of her grandson Charlie (Declan Bennett), who himself married into the larger Mitchell family. In this way we can see how relatively independent characters are subsumed into much larger family networks through marriage, with the Cotton family now part of a network that includes the Branning and the Mitchell clans. Such connections can render the relationships between soap opera characters complex and often difficult to follow.

EastEnders' narrative is heavily serialised, usually unfolding in at least two to three different narrative threads at any one time. This "interweaving of stories", as Christine Geraghty (1981) has called it, is central to the episode to episode narrative structure of the soap opera genre and is perhaps what makes soap opera so resistant to narrative analysis as it can be difficult to isolate individual narrative threads, particularly in terms of where they begin and end. As Geraghty notes, individual narrative threads will typically overlap, with no two concluding at any given time. Thus while closure can be located at the level of an individual storyline, there will typically be other story lines which are ongoing at the same time. In this way soap opera narrative maintains a forward momentum which keeps the narrative moving forward even while particular threads are arrested and closed off by what Geraghty terms "moments of temporary resolution".

In addition to their extreme serialisation, soaps are also defined by the fragmentation and frequency of their episodes. In contrast to other forms of television drama, which might air a single episode per week over the course of several weeks, soap operas typically air multiple episodes per week, four in the case of *EastEnders*, fragmenting

ongoing storylines into discrete week-long arcs which focus on a particular storyline. This fragmentation of episodes across the week in turn has a significant influence on the fragmentation and structure of the narrative. Each week's worth of episodes will typically feature an internal narrative structure, introducing that week's storyline focus on Monday, which then builds to an initial climax at the end of Tuesday night's episode. This climax then carries over to Thursday's episode, often picking up the action immediately from a cliffhanger. Following this, Friday night's episode will typically provide a denouement of sorts, as the ramifications of Tuesday and Thursday night's episodes are explored and dealt with by the characters involved. A secondary function of the Friday night episode is also to introduce or suggest the direction of the next week's primary storyline focus, providing a narrative follow through to the following Monday's main introduction of that storyline. However, while each week of *EastEnders* has its own narrative focus, the storylines contained within are not discrete, but rather one act of larger, ongoing storylines that often span weeks, months, and even years.[19]

The "Who Killed Lucy Beale?" storyline, which unfolded over the course of several months, from Good Friday 2014 to February 18th 2015, offers a useful illustration of this week to week structure in action. Over the course of the storyline, several possible suspects were identified in the course of the investigation into the murder of the titular Lucy Beale. Early in the storyline much of the narrative thrust of the storyline was concerned with these individual suspects, with each week's worth of episodes focussing on one suspect in particular. For example, the week of 28/04/14 focussed specifically on the character of Jake Stone, his alcoholism, and his relationship with Lucy and her best

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[19] In terms of the writing of episodes, each episode is assigned an individual writer who work within the context of wider planned out storylines. (Collins, 2015)

friend (and Jake's former lover) Lauren Branning. Later in the storyline, the four episodes that aired during the week of 01/09/14 switched focus to new suspect Jay Brown (Jamie Bothwick), and his part in the mugging of Lucy on the night that she died. While it was later revealed that each of these suspects were innocent (Lucy's younger brother Bobby was ultimately revealed to be the killer) this week by week structure allowed the soap to provide a particular focus over the course of the several months in which the storyline unfolded.

However, while each individual week's worth of episodes has its own particular storyline focus, at the same time episodes will also typically feature other storylines unfolding simultaneously. These various narrative threads are in turn organised in terms of a hierarchy of narrative intensity which vary in terms of their individual duration. This hierarchy can be expressed in terms of an ABC structure, which delineates the varying levels of narrative intensity, as well as the particular degree of focus lent to a given storyline at any given time. A-storylines are the most narratively intense, while B storylines typically represent a less intense continuation of former (and future) A-storylines. C storylines, on the other hand, are usually small scale, short, and often humorous, lacking both the intensity of the A- and B- categories, as well as their ongoing duration. While *EastEnders* will typically have only one A-storyline unfolding at any given time, there may be several interweaving B- and C- storylines unfolding simultaneously. In addition, these categories are fluid: what is an A- storyline one week might become a B-, or even C- storyline the next, and vice versa. At the same time, storylines that have at one time held the position of an A-storyline might become B-

storylines for some time, but return to their A-position later as they are reintroduced with a new narrative intensity.

Again, the "Who Killed Lucy Beale?" storyline provides a useful illustration of the fluidity of this narrative hierarchy. The mystery surrounding the murder of the titular character typically provided the main focus of the narrative for the duration of the storyline, often occupying the A-storyline position for weeks at a time. At the same time, however, a number of other storylines were also playing out, and these switched positions in the hierarchy depending on the week and progress of the Lucy narrative. For example the mystery of the apparent death of Nick Cotton and the mysterious appearance of his previously unknown son Charlie provided the B-story during the initial beginning of the Lucy storyline, however, prior to this it had in fact been the primary focus of the narrative, but slipped back into the B position as the more narratively intense storyline surrounding Lucy's murder took precedence. As the weeks went on the Lucy storyline often occupied the primary narrative focus, occupying the A-position, however, as the investigation experienced various, natural lulls, other storylines took over, and the Lucy storyline moved back to a B-position. In this respect, the Lucy storyline continued to represent an ongoing concern, but lacked the immediacy and intensity of the periods in which it occupied an A-storyline position. Instead, there storylines came to occupy the A-position at various points, including Linda Carter's rape, which provided the focus of the A-storyline leading up to Christmas.

In addition to these alternating storylines, there were also a large number of C-storylines during the period of the "Who Killed Lucy Beale Storyline?" These ranged from comic to dramatic storylines of limited duration, and included Mick Carter's fear

of water and his participation in a charity swimming contest, Charlie and Roxy Mitchell's brief affair, and Rainie Cross's drug addiction and her attempts to overcome it. Significantly, while each of these C-storylines were relatively short lived, lasting only a week or two at a time, each fed into larger A- and B-storylines. For example, Mick's fear of water derived from a childhood accident in which he nearly drowned in the bath. It was later revealed that his mother deliberately tried to drown him, and later still, that his mother is in fact the woman that Mick had been led to believe was his sister, Shirley (Linda Henry). This latter revelation formed the core of the A- storyline during the Christmas Day 2014 episode, illustrating how a seemingly minor, humorous C-storyline can feed into a larger scale A-storyline.

   As this overview of the narrative structure of *EastEnders* demonstrates, British Soap Operas are highly complex, featuring interweaving stories and a fluid narrative hierarchy, in which any storyline can shift position to become the major storyline at any given time. In addition, storylines are also long running, spanning months, and often years. As such, the complexity of this narrative structure is problematic for the concept of endings if viewed from the perspective of terminus based endings. However, as Mumford (1995) has argued, closure can be found at the level of individual storylines and this is what my analysis of Pat's death is based on, reading Pat's death as both the ending of the discrete 'Death of Pat Butcher' storyline, as well as the culmination of over 25 years of narrative development.

Soap Operas and Contingency

The above overview of the narrative structure of *EastEnders* demonstrates the five

core characteristics identified in Chapter Two. I want to turn my attention now to the

sixth characteristic discussed in Chapter Three, contingency. Just as British soap opera

represents the characteristics of serialisation, fragmentation, duration, repetition, and

accumulation at their most extreme, so to does soap opera have a particularly intense

relationship to matters of contingency. This intense relationship is largely due to the

specificities of soap opera production, particularly in terms of the extreme duration and

frequency of soap opera narrative. In terms of frequency, generally speaking soap

operas air more episodes per week than most other forms of narrative television. While

most other forms of fictional television might air one episode per week over a number

of weeks, it is typical for British soaps to air multiple episodes a week. *EastEnders*

currently airs four episodes per week, though other examples, such as Doctors (BBC,

2000-) and *Hollyoaks* (Channel 4, 1995-), air episodes every weekday. In addition,

while most other forms of serialised television are organised into seasons, soap operas

are typically ongoing and continuous, typically airing without breaks throughout the

year. As such the production of soap operas is, in many ways, far more intense than that

of other forms of narrative television due to the constant need to produce and broadcast

new episodes. In terms of the production of *EastEnders,* episodes are typically produced

in 'quartets', six to eight weeks ahead of transmission (extending to 12 weeks during

winter months to compensate for reduced daytime hours). Production is continuous and

ongoing, though sometimes production will 'double bank' two quartets of episodes in

order to allow for a break, such as over the Christmas period. This ongoing nature of production, alongside the close proximity of production to transmission, means that a soap opera like *EastEnders* is far more open to the forces of contingency than perhaps any other form of fictional TV narrative.

This close relationship of the time of production and transmission is reflected in the organisation of time within the soap itself, specifically in the way in which the soap seeks to maintain a close relationship between the time of the narrative and that of its viewers. While episodes are produced in advance, significant effort is expended towards maintaining the illusion that the events of the narrative are occurring simultaneously with those of the viewer. This is achieved in a number of ways, both overt and subtle. At a more overt level each episode typically unfolds on consecutive days. While it is rare for *EastEnders* to actually name the day on which an episode takes place, the fact that each episode typically begins in the morning of one day and concludes at night of the same day reinforces the idea that each episode is contained to a particular day, reflecting the daily transmission of the episodes. By not explicitly identifying the days themselves the narrative can also elide those days in which the soap does not transmit (Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday). As such, the soap is both "temporally de-located" (Brunsdon, 1981) while at the same time linked to the time of the viewer. However, at times of particular narrative intensity, these links can be disrupted for specific narrative purposes. For example, it is common for *EastEnders* to play out particularly intense events in a close approximation of real time. This might mean that a particular event crosses over multiple episodes. A notable example would be the week in which Zoe Slater (Michelle Ryan) discovered that her sister Kat was in fact her mother, where the

subsequent fallout from this revelation was played out largely in real time across an entire week's worth of episodes.[20]

While the episodes themselves might not make explicit mention of specific dates, except in instances of public holidays (Christmas Day episodes tend to depict the characters celebrating Christmas, for example), *EastEnders* also uses cultural references to underline the illusion that narrative events are occurring simultaneously with the time of the audience. Of particular note is the use of popular music within the soap. While *EastEnders* typically does not feature extensive use of non-diegetic music, aside from its theme tune or during rare moments of narrative intensity (see my below analysis of Pat's penultimate episode), a large amount of diegetic music can be heard in the various cafes and bars featured in the soap. Typically this music will consist of charting popular music of the moment, allowing the production to maintain an illusion of contemporaneity. This use of music is notable because soaps such as *EastEnders* typically lack cultural references, for example while characters are frequently seen watching television, they typically do not discuss or explicitly mention specific programmes.[21] Similarly, while the production does use popular music, characters rarely discuss it, thus the use of popular music helps to subtly underline the contemporaneity of the narrative while maintaining a certain vagueness in temporal specificity.

These efforts to link the time of the narrative to that of the viewer mean that the production must be mindful of any possible contingencies which might occur in the real

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[20] Since the introduction of Dominic Treadwell-Collins as Executive Producer in 2014 there has been a noticeable shift in this temporal organisation. It is now common for a weeks worth of episodes to depict the events of only a single day, as such the soap has become more pronounced in its temporal de-location.

[21] A rare exception occurred on December 9 2010 when Dot Cotton (June Brown) mentioned rival soap *Coronation Street* as a homage to its 50th anniversary.

world, as failure to account for these would result in a shattering of the illusion. The contingencies that affect soap opera can be classed as either positive or negative, where positive contingencies are those which aid the soap opera in maintaining its illusion of simultaneity, while negative contingencies are those which disrupt this illusion, causing significant problems for the production of the narrative. In terms of positive contingencies, the production can maintain the illusion of simultaneity by including planned real world events within the narrative world of the soap. These events, though contingent in the sense that they lie outside of the control of the production, are planned enough in advance to allow for their inclusion in the narrative. A recent key example would be the inclusion of the 2012 Olympic Games within the milieu of *EastEnders*. As a local games taking place in London, failure to include the Games into the narrative would have resulted in a certain level of narrative dissonance between the soap and the real world experience of its viewers (particularly as the BBC's coverage of the Games already disrupted the usual schedule of *EastEnders*). At the same time, however, the soap could not include specific details of the games themselves as they were happening, as these would be occurring long after the episodes in question were filmed. One way in which the production could recognise the Games, however, was in the inclusion of the Olympic Torch Relay into a specially filmed live segment inserted into a pre-produced episode. Here the torch was carried by the character Billy Mitchell (Perry Fenwick), recreating in a fictional setting the real world journey of the torch through London, and thus underlining the sense that Albert Square exists within the same temporality as that of the viewer.

While events such as these are isolated and preplanned, another obstacle for a soap opera like *EastEnders* is the need to accurately reflect the changing world of its viewers. For example, executive producer Dominic Treadwell-Collins has recently signalled his desire to reflect the changing landscape of the East End within the soap, in particular the perceived gentrification of the area (Deans and Plunkett, 2014). At the time of writing this process has subtly begun as various locations undergo slight changes to reflect the wider cultural changes taking place in London's East End. For example, one episode sees the characters of David Wicks (Michael French) and Carol Jackson (Lindsay Coulson) reflecting on the changes to a cafe they visited when they were younger, noting the difference between the place it was then and how it appears now as a modern, artisan-style coffee shop. Similarly, in a comic C-story, restauranteur Ian Beale focussed on changing the menu of his restaurant to reflect the changing tastes of the area (specifically the trend for gourmet burgers). These positive contingencies are relatively specific to the soap opera genre. While it is possible, it is unlikely that other forms of serialised television will have to pay attention to the changes taking place in the world around them in quite so specific a manner, either because they are more temporally delocalised or because they feature a much more contained setting which precludes the need to acknowledge the world outside.[22]

In terms of more negative and disruptive contingencies, soap opera shares many of those which other forms of serialised narrative also face, for example, industrial contingencies such as the unavailability of an actor or the negative reaction to a planned

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[22] For example, even a heavily serialised programme such a *Lost* is careful to position itself in the past. As such, its major cultural references (such as a Boston Red Sox game which plays a major role in the series) have already taken place as of the time of transmission.

storyline. However, again, given the specificities of the soap opera form and its production, these contingencies are manifested in far more intense ways than they might otherwise be in shows whose production is less intensive. The unavailability of an actor, while disruptive to other forms of serialisation, can be particularly problematic for a soap in which the same actors generally portray the same characters for years and often decades at a time. For example, between 2013-14 *Coronation Street* actors Michael La Vell and William Roach were both involved in criminal investigations into alleged sex abuse, during the course of which they were both absent from the soap. Here the disruption to the narrative was twofold. On the one hand the production was forced to drop planned storylines for the two characters and to edit them out of existing footage while on the other, it was also forced to contrive reasons for their characters' absence (both were ultimately written as being abroad). As two of the longer serving characters on the soap, and in terms of Roach the longest serving in British TV, their narratively unjustified absence was particularly disruptive to long term viewers and created a sense of dissonance within the narrative. Ultimately, both men were acquitted and in 2014 returned to the soap.

Given the long tenure of actors on soap opera it is often unavoidable that older actors will fall ill, or in extreme cases, pass away during production. This is, of course, highly disruptive in terms of planned storylines, but also illustrates the 'vampiric' nature of soap opera storytelling. For example, the death in 2007 of Mike Reid precluded his character Frank Butcher's return to *EastEnders*. Whilst not a regular on the soap since 2000, and having not made an appearance since 2005, such is the nature of soap narrative that the return of absent characters is always a possibility, even when they had

previously been written as having died, as was the case with Den Watts (Leslie Grantham) who returned on 29 September 2003 after a 14 year absence, and Kathy Beale (Gillian Taylforth), who returned on 17 August 2015 during the soap's 30th Anniversary celebration, following a 15 year absence. Despite Reid's death, however, the character did make a posthumous appearance on the soap as the residents of Albert Square held a funeral for Frank (April 1 2008). In this way, Reid's death was both disruptive in terms of any possible return for the character, but at the same time provided further narrative material for the soap as the narrative adapted to the contingency of the actor's death to pay tribute to the character.

Finally, given the efforts expended by soap producers to link the time of the narrative to that of the viewers, the viewers themselves represent a possibly disruptive contingency, particularly in terms of their reaction to planned storylines. *EastEnders* continues to be one of the most complained about programmes on the BBC, and in exceptional circumstances these complaints might lead to the disruption of a planned storyline. For example a December 2010 storyline in which Ronnie Mitchell (Samantha Womack) swapped her baby, who had died of Cot Death, with the living baby of Kat Moon received the most complaints in the soap's history (8,500). In an effort to appease angry viewers, then executive producer Bryan Kirkwood made the unusual move of revealing the conclusion of the storyline ahead of time, while the BBC confirmed that it would bring the storyline to a premature close (Heritage, 2011).

As these examples demonstrate, the relationship between soap opera and contingency is particularly pronounced due to the specificities of soap production. Contingency thus plays a major role in the ongoing development of soap opera narrative, more so,

arguably, than in any other form of fictional television. Due to this, soaps are required to be fluid and adaptable across the full spectrum of contingencies outlined in Chapter Three. In terms of the following case study, the death of Pat Butcher, it can be read as a major contingent event within the soap's wider production and narrative history, one which, while scripted, was precipitated by the desire of Pam St. Clement to leave the soap.

Case Study: The Life and Death of Pat Butcher

My chosen case study is centred around the death of the long running *EastEnders* character Pat Butcher, who had been part of the soap for over 25 years. In this case Pat's death, motivated by the decision of actor Pam St. Clement to retire from the soap, represents a major contingent event in the ongoing narrative of the soap. The case study itself is largely centred on the New Year's day 2012 episode in which Pat succumbs to pancreatic cancer while surrounded by her family. However, given the nature of soap opera narrative, the case study also explores the narrative either side of the episode in question. While my case study focusses specifically on the storyline leading up to Pat's death (consisting of her increasingly poor health and sudden cancer diagnosis) it also pays attention to Pat's long history on the soap. As Christine Geraghty (1981:16) argues, a sense of history is key to soap opera narrative. As such, weaved throughout Pat's death storyline is a strong sense of the character's biography, both that portrayed onscreen, as

well that which extends beyond the narrative itself into a kind of character 'pre-history', revealed through conversations, character biographies (such as those featured in official guides such as *Eastenders: The Inside Story*), and in special flash-back oriented spin-offs, such as the 'soap bubble' *EastEnders: Pat and Mo* (BBC, 2004). At the same time as a character's narrative biography extends back to before the narrative of the soap itself, however, the character's presence also lives on long after they themselves have exited the narrative, as deceased or departed character's histories become subsumed into the overall narrative history of the soap narrative itself. In this sense, characters continue to 'haunt' the narrative as other characters remember and reminisce about them, or their past actions come to bear on the unfolding narrative in unexpected ways. As such I also pay attention to the persistent memory of Pat, particularly as it plays into the next year's Christmas Day episode (2013) as well as how it continues to affect story lines in more subtle ways. In this way I hope to show that while Pat's death can be seen as the end of a particular era of *EastEnders'* history, the narrative of *EastEnders* continues to develop after this intra-narrative ending, incorporating aspects of Pat's narrative into future developments.

While characters constantly come and go in soap operas such as *EastEnders*, given the longevity of Pat's character's presence, her departure was attended by a significant amount of press coverage and was framed as an important event in the soap's history, as well as in British popular culture more generally. As such, focussing on Pat's death offers a particularly pronounced illustration of intra-narrative endings in a soap like *EastEnders*. That said, it is important to recognise that character death is not the only form of intra-narrative ending available to soap opera. While it does offer the most

exaggerated, and perhaps most notable form of closure, intra-narrative endings can also be located elsewhere in soap narratives. For example, other forms of character exit, such as the numerous characters who have travelled abroad (soap shorthand for an extended, if not indefinite exit from the narrative) can also provide moments of structure, cohesion, and meaning within the ongoing soap opera narrative.

Pat's death also offers up closure of a more immediate sort. I have already alluded to the fact that Pat's death was framed culturally as a significant event. As such, the event itself can be approached in different ways. On the one hand it can be approached in its historical context, taking into account the 25-and-a-half year history of the character, while on the other hand it can be approached as an event unto itself. Thus while Pat's death, and the narrative leading up to it, draws together aspects of Pat's time on the soap, at the same time the immediate narrative building up to, and out from Pat's death can be viewed as an isolated storyline unto itself. As such, I want to focus my analysis on the two 'layers' of narrative surrounding the character's death storyline, the immediate and the historical. In so doing I hope to illustrate the complex ways in which *EastEnders* structured a sense of an ending around Pat's death, one which worked in different ways for different kinds of audiences.

The Death of Pat Butcher

In many ways the 'Death of Pat Butcher' storyline formed the final act in the 25 and half year history of the character. While the character died on New Years Day 2012, the storyline began some months earlier, with early indications that Pat's health was failing, and coincided with the arrival of Walford's latest villain, Derek Branning. Derek was

the older brother of three long serving characters Max (Jake Wood), Jack (Scott Maslen), and Carol, the latter of whom was connected to Pat via her past relationship with David Wicks, Pat's son, with whom Carol had a daughter, Bianca (Patsy Palmer). At the time of Derek's arrival Carol and Bianca were sharing a house with Pat, along with several other characters, including Bianca's other children Morgan (Devon Higgs) and Tiffany (Maisie Smith), and step-child Whitney (Shona McGarty). Derek's appearance on the square led to a confrontation with Pat revolving around her son David, who Derek had an antagonistic relationship towards owing to David's past relationship with Carol (Carol fell pregnant with David's child aged 14). Following a tense confrontation between Derek and Pat, the latter collapsed, an early indication of her failing health (episode of the 24/11/11). As the weeks continued Pat's narrative largely played out in a background capacity, occupying a B-story position for much of the time leading up to the Christmas and New Year period. During this period the A-story position was occupied by an ongoing storyline concerning the Masood family, particularly the fragmentation of the family due to the sinister influence of local Doctor Yusef Khan (Ace Bhatti). This storyline formed the centrepiece of the Christmas episodes, climaxing in the fiery death of Yusef on Boxing Day and the reconciliation of the Masood family.

During the time in which this latter storyline was unfolding, much of Pat's storyline centred on her continuing financial woes as she struggled to provide for her extended family and to keep her house, issues exacerbated by her antagonistic relationship with step-daughter Janine (Charlie Brooks). Following the explosive events of the Christmas and Boxing Day episodes, Pat's storyline moves forward in the narrative hierarchy to

occupy an A-story position as Pat's health begins to deteriorate at an accelerated rate, climaxing as Pat again collapses in the episode of the 29th December. Taken to hospital Pat is then diagnosed with stomach cancer, but refuses treatment in favour of returning home (on the 30th) where she has a final drink in the Queen Vic (her signature Gin and Tonic). Following a break for New Years Eve, the narrative resumes on the first January with Pat consigned to her bed, her health having deteriorated still further. This New Year's Day episode was an hour long, and largely chronicled the events of Pat's final hours as various family and friends rallied around her to pay their respects and say goodbye.

Divorced from its obvious historical context, both narratively and culturally, 'The Death of Pat Butcher' storyline was signalled as a particular event by its placement in the schedule. The Christmas and New Year period is a particularly significant one for British broadcasting as it is during this period that broadcasters typically expend considerable money and effort in producing a high number of special episodes for their most popular programmes. As such, this period typically features lavish versions of high-rated shows such as *Doctor Who* (BBC, 1963-89, 2005-), which has featured 'blockbuster' episodes such as "The Christmas Invasion", in which the 10th Doctor played by David Tennant was introduced and "The End of Time", which featured the final appearance of Tennant and the introduction of Matt Smith as the 11th Doctor. While such specials are often divorced from ordinary continuity in favour of attracting a wider audience, these specials can and often do feature major narrative events. For example, the 2012 *Downton Abbey* (ITV, 2010-) (a similarly highly rated show for the

BBC's top commercial rival ITV) special featured the death of the major character Matthew Crawley (Dan Stevens).

As the BBC's flagship soap opera, *EastEnders* has a long tradition of being an integral part of the Christmas and New Year schedule, airing special hour-long episodes on Christmas and New Year's Day. These episodes typically form moments of particular narrative intensity, where long running storylines come to a head. For example, the Christmas Day 1987 episode saw Den Watts present his wife Angie (Anita Dobson) with divorce papers in an episode which remains the soap's most viewed, while the 2007 Christmas Day episode saw the reveal of Max Branning's affair with his son's wife Stacey (Lacey Turner). As such, there is a certain expectation on the part of the audience that these will be particular events, featuring extended periods of narrative intensity, or else major narrative altering events such as Pat's death.

While spoilers are generally poorly regarded in other aspects of pop culture (particularly on the internet where the term "spoiler warning" is now considered a prerequisite for any article discussing pop culture), they are an active and accepted (even sought out) aspect of soap opera viewing. In Britain, television listings magazines feature prominent soap spoilers on their front covers, while websites such as *Digital Spy* feature spoiler sections revealing upcoming narrative developments for a variety of soaps. Even the official BBC website for *EastEnders* features a spoiler section, illustrating just how large a part of soap culture such foreknowledge is. Such foreknowledge plays a major part in the construction of event episodes, for example, the introduction of The Carter family on Christmas Day 2013, was heavily trailed as a significant event in the soap's history, largely due to the presence of well known film

actor Danny Dyer as the family patriarch Mick. Similarly foreknowledge played a major part in the construction of Pat's death as a significant event, with actress Pam St. Clement announcing her departure in July and appearing on television to give various interviews about her departure in the weeks leading up to Christmas. The episode itself was also heavily trailed by the BBC in the run up to New Year's Day, a somewhat atypical practice for the channel which rarely trails its soaps unless there is a major event (similarly the "Who Killed Lucy Beale?" storyline was the subject of a major advertising campaign.

As I have already suggested, Pat was, and remains, a significant cultural icon in Britain, the subject of numerous spoofs and satires, most notably centring on her penchant for large and elaborately designed earrings. Thus more casual viewers may have chosen to view the episode due to the cultural weight of the event depicted. As a result of this, the episode also had to function for more casual viewers, even if it was largely centred on issues of memory and history. As such the immediate context of the Pat's death storyline is focussed on the event itself, being less reliant on issues of memory and history, and more with the status of the episode as a significant cultural event. This is similar to the storyline centring on the Masood family which was more overtly melodramatic and action oriented, representing perhaps a more traditional version of Christmas event television focussed on atypical moments of spectacle such as the house fire which provided the climax to the storyline. While lacking in the visual spectacle of the Masood storyline, Pat's death was no less an event in the soap's narrative history, defined by a significant sense of emotional spectacle which

functioned, in the immediate context as an ending to the 'Death of Pat Butcher'
storyline.

In this immediate context the episodes leading up to New Year's Day featured a
number of things which moved the immediate storyline to a form of closure. These
aspects were largely aesthetic, relying on signifiers of closure such as music and image
rather than memory and history. A notable example is the use of particularly expressive
music and image in the scene which closes the 30th December episode in which Pat has
one last gin and tonic in the Queen Vic having earlier refused treatment for her cancer.
The scene in question climaxes in a shot which begins wide, depicting Pat as she sits at
the end of the bar taking in the bustling atmosphere of the pub. Over the noise of the
crowd Tony Bennett's "The Good Life" can be heard. As I have already discussed,
EastEnders typically avoids the use of non-diegetic music, however, this rule is
subverted in the final moments of the episode as Bennet's song grows louder on the
soundtrack, eventually drowning out all other forms of diegetic sound. This increase in
volume is matched by a slow pan in on Pat as the frame isolates her in the crowded bar.
The music then slowly fades out as the image remains fixed on Pat, isolating her further
in silence, before the familiar "doof-doof" drum beats which signal the end of an
episode lead into the end credits. This atypical use of music for *EastEnders* marks this
as a moment of heightened significance, evidencing a more overtly melodramatic use of
music and camera movement than *EastEnders* typically employs.

This use of music to mark particular moments of emotional intensity continues into
the New Years Day episode itself, most notably in the final piece of music which plays
over the episode's end credits. Dubbed 'Pat's Theme' this is a specially arranged version

of the show's signature theme-tune, refashioned as a mournful piano elegy in tribute to Pat's passing. Significantly the episode does not end with the familiar drumbeat, but rather fades to a brief moment of black screen before the credits roll and Pat's theme plays. The use of Pat's theme is similar to the use of another variation of the *EastEnders* theme, dubbed "Julia's Theme" in tribute to the soap's co-creator Julia Smith. Faye Woods (2012) has connected the rare, if increasingly popular appearance of "Julia's Theme" within the soap to moments of closure and catharsis within the narrative, contrasting it with the narrative rupture presented by the 'doof-doof' drum pattern. While "Julia's Theme" is more upbeat and positive in its instrumentation, typically attached to moments where characters exit the show on their own terms, "Pat's Theme" is notably more melancholy, recasting the theme in a minor-key.[23] Yet its use here is similar in terms of closure. By cutting to black and running the theme over the credits the music underscores the function of Pat's death as a form of closure, this is not a moment of narrative rupture, but rather a full stop on one era of the show. Where the drum pattern typically signifies a cliffhanger and sets up expectations of what is to come, "Pat's Theme", like "Julia's Theme", sets up no such expectation, instead allowing for a moment of reflection before the next scheduled programme airs, thus bringing the more immediate storyline to a definite close.

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[23] Notable uses of the theme include the exit of Peggy Mitchell (Barbara Windsor) and, more recently, Peter Beale (Ben Hardy) and Lauren Branning (Jacquelyn Jossa). Notably the theme was also used during the climax of the live 30th anniversary episode, in which it played over a montage of notable *EastEnders* locations, including a shot of a graffiti tribute to Tony Holland and Julia Smith.

The Life of Pat Butcher

While the immediate storyline worked in a limited capacity as an isolated storyline unto itself, it does so largely as an event, one which is heavily reliant on extra-textual sources which position it as such. It also, however, operates as an event within the ongoing narrative of the soap itself, as a major point of narrative intensity for long time viewers due to its status as the conclusion to over 25 years of narrative development for Pat as a character. Unsurprisingly, then, a large part of the storyline centres on themes of memory and character history, themes which are central to soap opera as a narrative form. As Christine Geraghty (1981:16) notes, many soaps employ a historian to keep track of every event (no matter how small) which unfolds in that soap's narrative. Soaps thus have extensive records of their own narrative history and this history in turn forms the backbone of many of their ongoing narratives. Any event happening in the narrative present will often, whether explicitly or implicitly, be related to some event from the narrative's past. For example, long after the event itself, Pat's death continues to influence the narrative of *EastEnders*. I will develop this further below in a section which explores the various ways in which Pat continues to 'haunt' the narrative of *EastEnders*. Here, however, I want to focus on the ways in which the narrative used themes of memory and history in order to bring Pat's 25 and half year storyline to a close.

This is achieved both in the long and short term, both within the New Year's Day episode itself, as well as in the two month's worth of episodes leading up to that event. My analysis focusses on both, yet, in the interests of clarity, selects specific aspects of

the storyline to focus on. This selection mirrors the similar process of selection which takes place within the storyline itself. Given the sheer quantity of narrative details accrued over Pat's two and a half decades of narrative development (and beyond to her history pre-*EastEnders*) it would be impossible for the narrative to account for it all. Instead there is a clear process of selection at work in Pat's death storyline wherein various aspects of Pat's character biography are privileged over others. In this respect, my analysis will focus on the three main narrative strands selected by the 'Life of Pat Butcher' Storyline, specifically Pat's relationships with her (deceased) ex-husband Frank, her step-daughter Janine, and her biological son David. Taken together these strands move Pat's storyline towards its conclusion in three ways. First, the focus on Pat's relationship with Frank pays tribute to events from Pat's past, as at that point Frank had been absent from the narrative for some years; second, the focus on Pat's often antagonistic relationship to Janine concludes both long and short term story lines, including the long antagonistic relationship between the two and the more immediate, short term conflict which unfolds during the 'Death of Pat Butcher' storyline; and finally, the focus on Pat's relationship with David falls somewhere in between, paying tribute both to the past while bringing that past bodily into the present with the re-introduction of David, and projecting it forward into the future by suggesting David's continued presence on the soap long after his mother's death. In focussing on these three strands my analysis reflects the process of selection which took place in the crafting of the intra-narrative ending represented by Pat's death, while also unravelling the various, complex layers of closure taking place within that ending.

Pat and Frank

Perhaps unusually, one of the central figures in the narrative leading up to Pat's death was defined by his absence. This figure was Frank Butcher, the 'great love' of Pat's life, as the storyline defined him, who died off-screen some years earlier in 2008. Even though Frank was absent from the actual diegesis of the soap, the strong focus on Pat's relationship with Frank illustrates two things: first, the persistence of deceased characters within the narrative of the soap whereby they continue to effect the narrative long after their passing, and second, the strong process of selection which went into crafting the sense of an ending for the character of Pat Butcher.

In terms of the first of these, Frank's continued presence within the narrative was signified primarily through various objects and through the memories that these objects invoke for the various characters within the narrative, primarily Pat. For example, in the weeks leading up to Pat's death, the character is seen a number of times cleaning a plaque dedicated to Frank in the Square. This action ties Pat to Frank physically, signifying her continued affection for him while subtly reinforcing, without words, that Frank is on Pat's mind as her health deteriorates. This plaque operates in a similar way to the bench dedicated to Arthur Fowler, also on the Square, which functions as a continued reminder of one of the soap's original characters. Another object that ties Pat to Frank despite his absence is a family portrait of Pat, Frank, and Frank's biological children Ricky and Janine (Pat's stepchildren) which is centrally located within the sitting room of Pat's home and which, due to its centrality, provides a permanent background fixture for the many scenes which take place in this room. Crucially this image is positioned next to various signifiers of Pat's personal style, perhaps most

notably, a small bar area continually stocked with Pat's signature drink Gin.

Significantly, this bar area became a symbol of Pat's continued efforts to assert her

independence and her struggle against her failing health, climaxing in her collapse on

New Years Day as she attempts to pour herself a drink. The placement of the

photograph featuring Frank near the bar thus ties Pat's memories of Frank both to her

domestic life, due to its central location in the home, but also to her continued struggle

against her failing health.

Outside of the domestic setting, place also plays a central location in terms of Pat's

memories of Frank. Notably, Pat's relationship with Frank extends far beyond the

narrative history of the soap itself, drawing on the 'pre-history' of the character. In

events relayed through anecdotes and a special "soap bubble" episode which delves into

Pat's past via flashbacks, it is revealed that Pat met Frank in Clacton when she was 16,

after winning a "Miss Butlins" contest. Though Frank was in Clacton with his girlfriend

June at the time, Pat and Frank initiated an affair. When June later fell pregnant,

however, Frank married her, leaving Pat heartbroken. Frank later reappeared in Pat's life

in 1987, and they eventually married, a relationship which lasted until 1994 when Frank

fled the Square for the first time in response to a tragic accident involving a fire at his

car lot. This pre-history, centred on Pat's past in Clacton, forms a major part of the

narrative leading up to her death. Notably, one episode sees Pat take her family to

Clacton in an attempt to take their minds off their continuing financial woes. While the

family plays on the beach, Pat and Carol sit in a coffee shop reminiscing about the past,

the conversation centring on Pat's history in Clacton, in particular her early relationship

with Frank. In this way Pat's pre-history, already an established element of her narrative

history, is brought once again to the fore as her narrative reaches its end, ensuring that through his absence Frank's presence continues to be very much felt as an integral part of Pat's storyline.

Significantly, the foregrounding of Frank as Pat's great love is achieved through a process of selection which favours one aspect of Pat's narrative over others. Throughout her 25 and half years on *EastEnders*, Pat has had a number of significant relationships. In fact, at the time of her death her proper name is Pat Evans (having most recently been married to the character Roy Evans), however, as my use of the name Pat Butcher attests, the character continues to be most well known in terms of her relationship to Frank. As such, the focus on Frank during the 'Death of Pat Butcher' storyline pays testament to the way in which Pat is remembered by the culture at large.

By focussing on Pat's relationship with Frank the storyline positions Pat's death in terms of her biographical history. This has the effect of bringing this history into the narrative present, allowing long time viewers to reminisce about significant moments in Pat's narrative history. Several moments shared between Pat and Frank are significant in the context of her narrative. Immediately following the New Years Day episode, BBC3 aired a special retrospective programme entitled *Farewell Pat* (BBC, 2012). This programme featured a series of clips of well known character moments, many of which centred on Pat's relationship to Frank, including their lavish, traditional East End wedding. By focussing on Pat's relationship to Frank the narrative leading up to her death thus re-contextualises Pat's character biography along those lines, providing a longterm interpretative framework which encourages a reading of the character's life in terms of her relationship to her ex-husband.

Pat and Janine

The process of selection begun with the privileging of Pat's relationship with Frank continued with the privileging of Pat's relationship to step-daughter (and Frank's biological daughter) Janine. Crucially this privileging is at the expense of Pat's relationship to step-son Ricky, yet the focus on Janine serves a dual role in moving Pat's storyline towards a conclusion. Originally introduced in 1989, Janine has been portrayed by three different actresses. Leaving in 1998 with her father, Janine returned in 1999, this time portrayed by Charlie Brooks who has continued to portray the character ever since, albeit with a short hiatus between 2005 and 2008. Janine has typically occupied an antagonistic role within the soap and this antagonism has been a constant part of her relationship with her step-mother Pat. Though their history together is long and complex, Janine's ambivalence towards Pat is rooted in her perception of Pat as a bad, even neglectful mother, and this animosity is central to Janine's place within the 'Death of Pat Butcher' storyline.

A central set-piece within the New Year's Day episodes is a long confrontation between Pat and Janine. Immediately prior to the episode, Janine fulfils her usual antagonistic role against Pat and her family: having given Pat a loan, Janine insists that Pat use her house as collateral. She then deliberately moves the collection date forward and, knowing that Pat will be unable to pay, comes to take possession of the house. Believing Pat to be faking her illness, however, Janine is shocked to discover the state of her step-mother and, in a rare display of sympathy, immediately offers to pay for Pat's care. Janine's sudden change of heart leads directly into the long conversation the

two share, a conversation which allows both characters a sense of intimacy which they have historically lacked. The conversation is largely centred around themes of motherhood. During the conversation, Janine admonishes Pat for her failings as a mother, claiming that she never cared for Janine in the same way she did for her own children (David and Simon, and even Janine's brother and Pat's step-son Ricky). At the same time Janine reveals to Pat that she is pregnant and that she must decide whether or not to keep the baby. In this way the narrative connects the two, Pat's failings as a mother and Janine's fears about her own abilities as a parent. This connects Pat's history to current, or in this case future, narrative developments. Pat persuades Janine to keep the baby, giving advice by referring to her own circumstances.

Finally Pat tells Janine "you were my daughter", closing the long standing conflict between the two as Pat finally, and explicitly, accepts Janine as her own. This reconciliation is underlined by the image of Janine curled up beside Pat on her bed which provides a climax to their conversation, an image which is extremely significant in terms of signifying the closure of the long standing conflict between the two. A few weeks prior to this episode Pat had attempted a similar moment of intimacy with Janine by opening up to her about her father Frank's part in a fire which killed a young homeless man. Seeking to bond with Janine through honesty, Pat is instead rebuffed and again becomes the target of Janine's antagonism. As such, the image of the two lying together displays a physical, as well as emotional connection that was seemingly impossible a few weeks prior. While the conversation, and the reconciliation reached through it, move the relationship towards closure, the final image makes it clear in purely visual terms. For a narrative form traditionally considered to be visually

impoverished and over-reliant on dialogue, that final image of Pat and Janine serves to illustrate how powerful images in soap opera can be.

Pat and David

David is Pat's son, and step-brother to Janine. A character on the soap between 1993-96, David returned to *EastEnders* on New Years Day, just in time to be by his mother's side as she passed away. He left the soap again only a week later following his mother's funeral, but subsequently returned in 2013 to become a regular character, before his possibly final exit in 2014. The idea of David re-entering the narrative is set off by the reappearance of Derek Branning in the episode of the 24th November 2011. In that episode Derek, who had previously only appeared in a few episodes in 1996, returns to the square where he almost immediately begins intimidating Pat. Derek's animosity towards, and subsequent threatening of Pat, is rooted in an older conflict with David, who impregnated Derek's sister Carol when she was younger. As someone coming into the narrative from outside, Derek is able to bear the weight of historical exposition, giving an account of part of David's history within the narrative, as well as Pat's strained relationship with her son. At the same time the return of Michael French, who portrays David, to the show, was a major part of the publicity surrounding the Pat's death storyline, something else contributing to its event status. However the reintroduction of David, an older character from the soap's past, operates on a different event level from that discussed earlier. While Pat's death and its status as an event works in the immediate context, the return of David works on a historical level, bringing back a character who had been off-screen for a number of years.

The question of whether or not David will make it to his mother's side on time drives much of the narrative momentum of the New Year's Day episode, introducing a deadline narrative which also subtly moves the episode towards a form of closure. While the episode itself consists of a series of dialogues between Pat and various family members, friends, and enemies, the question of when (or if) David will arrive provides the narrative tension which drives the episode. A recurring motif throughout the episode is the ringing of the door bell. Each time this happens, various characters expectedly open the door looking for David. Each time, however, the episode frustrates this expectation by ushering in a different character. In this sense, each new character who enters the house provides a certain intensification of expectation leading up to David's eventual appearance towards the end of the episode (David is the last character to enter the house).

As stated above, the episode is structured as a series of confrontations and conversations between Pat and her various friends and enemies as each dialogue builds to some form of reconciliation (most notably in the case of Janine) there is also a sense of place clearing as Pat works through each conflict. Within this structure, however, there is also a sense of mounting tension, as each conversation gives way to the one which is the most difficult to reconcile, her relationship to David. Whereas Pat's reconciliation with Janine came in the space of a single, long conversation, Pat's confrontation with her son is fragmented, unfolding over two scenes. As such, the conversation between the two has an ebb and flow, as each of the characters admonishes the other for their past actions. While Pat accuses her son of mistreating his brother Simon (it had been revealed in an earlier episode that David had slept with Simon's

wife), David admonishes his mother for being a neglectful parent (much as Janine had done). Pat also accuses David of always 'running away' when things become too difficult. Towards the end of the conversation David admits this, and without the two reaching the kind of reconciliation the rest of the episode has conditioned viewers to expect, David flees the house. The possibility of David leaving reintroduces the earlier tension of him not being by his mother's side when she passes. It is only via the interjection of Carol that David is convinced to stay. Further tension is introduced, however, by the appearance of a drunken Derek seeking revenge on David for his past actions. A brawl ensues in which David punches Derek and then runs inside, just in time to be with his mother as she passes away. Rushing to her side, David proclaims "I'm not running this time" as he takes Pat's hand and leans in close to hear Pat's last words.

Thus, in her final moments, the two reach the long awaited reconciliation as David both apologises "for everything" and forgives his mother for her past actions, while Pat tells David that she does not want to die and that she is scared. This moment of emotional honesty underlines the new understanding and intimacy between the two in Pat's final moments. Significantly this reconciliation between the two represents the centrepiece of the final minutes of the episode, underlining David's central role within the overall historical narrative framed by Pat's death. This is reinforced visually by the framing of the scene. As David initially enters the room he enters into a shot featuring Pat and Ricky. However, Ricky actually moves out of the shot, moving towards the back of the room where he joins Bianca and Janine. This isolates David with Pat at the centre of the shot, with the lighting highlighting them within the otherwise dark room (the other characters are literally in the shadows). The rest of the scene up until the moment

Pat dies keeps a tight focus on David and Pat, cutting between the two as they share their last words together. Once Pat dies the scene cuts to a wider shot which nevertheless continues to isolate David and Pat. As David looks to the others for confirmation of Pat's death the scene must cut away, first to Carol, and then to the three others. Finally the scene, and the episode, ends on this wider shot of David and Pat, as the image fades to black and the atypically mournful version of the soap's iconic theme tune plays.

David is thus afforded the central role in Pat's passing both through the structure of the episode, but also in the way in which the scene is shot, and David's centrality is key to understanding the scene's function as an intra-narrative ending. Crucially David's presence connects Pat's death to her long history within the soap's narrative. While current characters are present, it is only through a long absent, but narratively important, character that Pat's arc reaches its conclusion. Pat's death therefore does not simply occur in the moment as just another development in the ongoing soap, but rather is framed, via David's presence, as the culmination of a long and complicated narrative arc stretching back decades. The decision to foreground David's relationship with his mother thus reconfigures Pat's narrative biography in a way that allows closure at the level of her relationship with her son, in the process encouraging a retrospective reading of her life along those lines, alongside similar retrospective readings that include both Janine and Frank.

Change and the Passing of Time

As has been suggested, a central theme of the 'Life of Pat Butcher' storyline is the passing of time and the various changes which have taken place over this time. In this, there is a sense that Pat represents a stable figure within a changing world, both in terms of the narrative of *EastEnders,* but also in terms of the world surrounding the soap. Specifically, the weeks leading up to the New Year's Day episode position Pat in a particular way which foregrounds her sense of isolation within a world which has passed her by. Here the passage of time is foregrounded in a number of ways, for example, the episode featuring the trip to Clacton is dominated by a particular sense of nostalgia as Pat reminisces about her time spent in Clacton during her pre-*EastEnders* history. For example, in conversation with Carol, Pat reminisces about how she first met Frank while she competed for the title of Miss Butlins. Again Frank is positioned as central to Pat's narrative biography, however a later scene significantly positions Pat's rose tinted memories as being out of step with the modern Clacton. As Pat gazes out to sea, the image is dominated by the presence of wind turbines, a visual representation of modernity. Significantly these turbines do not exist as part of the real Clacton's coastal view, thus their superimposition onto the shot foregrounds the theme of time's passage, and of Pat's Clacton memories now being located firmly in the past.

The passage of time is also underlined in the New Year's Day episode itself, specifically in three conversations Pat shares with characters who, while not major elements of the episode itself, nevertheless fulfil a crucial role in the storyline. These characters are: Dot Branning (popularly known as Dot Cotton) one of the oldest residents of the Square; Ian Beale, the longest serving character on the soap and the first

person Pat encountered when she debuted in 1986; and Derek Branning, the aforementioned villain of the storyline. Early on in the episode, before the major scenes of reconciliation, Pat is visited by Dot and Ian in separate scenes. Dot is among the first to visit Pat, and their conversation centres explicitly around the passage of time. While featuring none of the conflict of the scenes described above, Dot's scene serves simply to associate Pat with an older era of the soap by having the two characters reminisce about the Albert Square of the past through their shared experience. This sense of the past is further underlined by Pat's conversation with Ian, in which she refers to them as "the last of the old guard." Here Ian's presence does not function to bring their character relationship to a form of closure as in the case of Janine and David, but rather to once again draw associations between Pat and an earlier history of the soap. As Ian was the first character to encounter Pat within the narrative, his presence helps to link the beginning and end of Pat's tenure on the soap, bringing her arc full circle in a subtle, yet appropriate manner.

While Dot and Ian link Pat to the soap's history, her confrontation with Derek serves to look forward to an (at the time) potential future for the narrative following Pat's death. Given the focus of the episode on history and memory, the presence of Derek is seemingly incongruous. Having only recently been re-introduced after a brief appearance some years ago, Derek's presence is the exception to the overall format of the episode. Nevertheless his presence, and continued threatening and mocking of Pat, both draw associations to the past (in terms of Derek's continued reference to David), but also to the narrative future of the soap. Derek's appearance on the square occurs just shortly before Yusef's exit, and it is clear that he will fulfil the antagonistic role soon to

be vacated. Indeed Derek would go on to form the central antagonist figure at the heart of the following year's Christmas and New Years storyline.

Conclusion: Pat's Memory and the Ongoing Story

I have already discussed the ways in which deceased or departed characters can continue to 'haunt' the narrative of a soap like *EastEnders*. Just as Frank continued to haunt Pat's storyline, so to does Pat continue to have a presence within the ongoing narrative of the soap. In the short term, Pat's death continued to form the narrative basis for a number of episodes, most notably the immediate aftermath as various characters came to terms with Pat's death, as well as the episode which depicted her funeral. For example, the episode of the second of January explored the various reactions of Albert Square residents to Pat's passing, including scenes in which Mo Slater (Laila Morse), a character with whom Pat had had a long standing feud, returned her Miss Butlins sash, a continued reference to the theme of time's passage. Similarly, Dot offers to continue cleaning Frank's plaque in Pat's absence, again maintaining the presence of Frank in the narrative. This also occurs in the episode of the third of January in which, while sorting through Pat's effects, Ricky and Bianca come across Frank's infamous novelty bow-tie while, at the same time, there is an effort to connect Pat's passing to the wider world of the soap through reference to absent characters[24]. For example Ian phones Michelle Fowler (Susan Tully) to let her know that Pat has died, while Phil Mitchell informs his

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[24] The significance of Frank's novelty bowtie stems from an infamous moment during the episode of October 2, 2000 when Frank, attempting to woo Pat, turned up at her door wearing nothing but a revolving bowtie.

mother, and longtime rival to Pat, Peggy. Finally Simon (Nick Berry), Pat's other son, appears after the funeral, in a rare post-credits sequence where he lays flowers at her grave and says "Goodbye Mum."

The period between Pat's death and the funeral can be classified as both an extended ending for the character, allowing for a two week period of mourning and reflection before the final conclusion of her storyline, and as a series of grace notes which continually re-affirm Pat's death as an ending to her story. Crucially the process of working through continues in Pat's absence as characters discuss her and the effect she has had on their lives. Ricky and Bianca's sorting through of Pat's effects allow for a discussion of Pat's character through the use of various objects, such as her earrings and Frank's novelty bow tie. Similarly, on the morning of the funeral, Tiffany, Bianca's daughter, gives David, her grandfather, Pat's souvenir ferris wheel from Clacton, an object which allows David to connect to his mother once more before his exit from the narrative at that episode's conclusion.[25] While these scenes continue to maintain Pat's presence in the narrative world, they also re-affirm her absence, she is now only to be remembered through objects and the memories they represent.

Yet while Pat's story itself is now concluded, her continued presence within the soap continues to 'haunt' the narrative in significant ways. For example, when Peggy returned for a rare appearance in 2014 she said her own goodbye to Pat by placing a bottle of gin on Pat's former doorstep. Similarly, when Dean Wicks (Matt D'Angelo) was re-introduced in 2014, one of his first scenes involved him learning of Pat's death, followed by a short scene in which he stood outside her former home in tribute. In

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[25] Significantly the ferris wheel is prominently shown to be hanging from the rear-view mirror of David's car as he drives away from the Square.

addition to these direct references to her continued presence in the narrative, Pat also continues to effect the soap in more subtle ways. For example, the Christmas Day 2013 episode featured a central conflict between David and Janine, whereby David attempted to blackmail Janine over her murder of her husband Michael (Steve John Shepard). Whilst attempting to persuade David to relent, Janine referred to a photo of Pat as a way of appealing to their shared relationship.[26] Similarly a major, ongoing storyline in throughout 2014-15 concerned Carol's battle with cancer. Again, passing reference in made to Pat when Carol refers to how quickly Pat's cancer developed as a source of fear at her own diagnosis. Though passing, this comment links Carol's experiences to that of Pat, ensuring that Pat continues to have an influence over both the narrative, and the audience's engagement with that narrative.

This continued presence is precisely what renders the death of Pat Butcher an intra-narrative ending within the wider, ongoing narrative of the soap. As the above analysis has demonstrated, the death of the character functioned as a complex ending, first as the climax of an immediate storyline ('The Death of Pat Butcher'), and second as a larger historical narrative which condensed 25 and half years of narrative history into a single, authoritative narrative of the character ('The Life of Pat Butcher'). Such an ending demonstrates how soaps such as *EastEnders* can construct endings which feature the core characteristics of structure, cohesion, and meaning, within their otherwise ongoing narratives. Thus, while an overall, terminus based ending might be impossible for a soap, or else achievable only through self-referential and meta-textual games, these intra-narrative endings are a constant, and continual element of soap opera narrative.

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[26] In a comical nod to Pat, that same Christmas also saw Janine decorate her Christmas Tree with Pat's old earrings.

Chapter Five:
An Excess of Endings: The US Sitcom

Introduction

Midway through the series finale of *The Office* (NBC, 2005-13), office worker Pam

Halpert (Jenna Fischer) is asked to reflect on her experiences as part of the fictional

documentary which forms the central conceit of the series.[27] Pam replies that her time

on the documentary has been "like a book that you don't want to end," to which the

questioner replies "you mean like *Harry Potter*?" While a small moment within a much

larger scene (a retrospective Q+A session filmed one year on from the airing of the

documentary) this exchange is highly illustrative of the "narrative architecture" (David

Marc, 1989) of the sitcom as a televisual form, specifically in terms of the form's

relationship to endings. The differences between the narrative structures of *Harry Potter*

(JK Rowling, 1997-2007) and *The Office* are numerous. *Harry Potter* consists of seven

books, each of which represents a discrete story within a much wider, ongoing narrative.

This wider narrative binds the series of books (as well as the film adaptations of those

books) together as a single cohesive story, featuring a clear narrative trajectory which

builds to an ending which the narrative both anticipates and predicts throughout.[28] The

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[27] The series is set in a regional office of the fictional paper company Dunder-Mifflin and is presented in the same 'mockumentary' format of its British predecessor. This stylistic device has also been called "comedy verité" by Brett Mills (2004).

[28] This is done in a number of ways, from the introduction of a villain in book one (who is defeated but not killed) who recurs in each subsequent book (either as an active force or a passive source of foreboding), to the introduction in book three of a prophecy which predicts the final clash between said villain and the series hero, the titular Harry Potter.

climax of the final book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,* represents an exemplary instance of a narrative ending as we commonly understand it, exhibiting the key characteristics of structure, cohesion, and meaning.

The Office, on the other hand, lacks this kind of narrative trajectory, altogether lacking a logical and anticipated endpoint for audiences to reach towards (in a sense there is no "pole" of reading in *The Office* (Ricoeur, 1980)). In fact, at numerous points throughout the series' nine seasons, the show moves past a number of events that audiences might otherwise expect to form a logical ending. For example, a major storyline running throughout the series is the relationship between Jim and Pam, which moves from initial mild flirtation and mutual attraction, to something more explicitly romantic as the series progresses. Their relationship develops through the first six seasons until the episode "Niagara" (season six, episodes four and five) in which Jim and Pam finally marry. Both James MacDowell (2013) and David Grote (1983) have identified marriage as a key signifier of both the 'happy ending', as well as a traditional ending in the comedic tradition. Here, however, *The Office* instead situates Jim and Pam's wedding mid-season, quickly moving past it in order to explore and develop further milestones in their post-marriage relationship, including moments of marital strife as well as the birth of their two children.[29] Another instance where audiences might reasonably expect the series to locate its ending might be the departure of the series' principle protagonist, Michael Scott (Steve Carrell), during the seventh season. However, as important as the character's departure is to the show's narrative, the series nevertheless continues on, with a revolving cast of new office managers (and guest

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[29] In this sense the use of the wedding as a narrative feature in *The Office* is similar to that of weddings in soap operas. (See Jane Feuer (1984) and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (1988).)

stars) taking over from Michael. That a sitcom like *The Office* can overcome such a contingency as the departure of its star is testament both to the durability of its narrative structure and to its roots in an extreme resistance to the kinds of endings and overall closure evidenced in other long running series like *Harry Potter*.

However, *The Office* does not, narratively speaking, represent a radically closure resistant example of the sitcom, instead it is fairly typical of the form and its relationship to overall endings. David Grote (1983) argues, in his book *The End of Comedy: The Sitcom and Comedic Tradition*, that the sitcom represents a form of narrative which is distinct from all other forms of comedy. This difference is rooted, he argues, in the form's narrative architecture, which is described by David Marc, in his book *Comic Visions: Television Comedy and American Culture*, as following the format: "episode = familiar status quo - ritual error made - ritual lesson learned - familiar status quo" (1989, 190-1). As Grote argues, this narrative architecture is radically different from other forms of comic narrative in which the familiar status quo is typically replaced by a new status quo following the resolution of the ritual error. As Grote describes the sitcom:

> Individual episodes may begin with a threat to the equilibrium of the situation, but by the end of the episode equilibrium is restored. But unlike any other form, the sit-com does not reach a new equilibrium; it achieves the equilibrium with which the episode began. (66)

Such a narrative architecture is hugely problematic in terms of questions of endings and closure. As Grote puts it: "Seen as a whole, each series has a plot in which the principle element is the suggestion that nothing important has ever happened." (67) As such:

> The only ending that the sit-com allows is death. Because the series format is designed to last forever without significant change, obviously no ending is planned. But series still must end sometime, and they end in most odd manners When they go off the air, they just do not come on one day. Those series that do choose to make an ending always do so by making a change that destroys the situation. (103)

The Office was able to weather the departure of its star precisely because, while Carrell's departure was, to some extent, disruptive in terms of the dynamics of the show, it does not radically alter the central premise (the 'sit-') of the series: the lives of office workers as captured on camera by a documentary crew. Similarly the marriage of Jim and Pam did not represent an ending because, while undoubtably a major change in terms of their relationship, both characters continued to work at the office for the rest of the series' run.[30] Significantly, in line with Grote's argument, an ending was only achieved for *The Office* once the central situation had been dissolved, both with the in-universe airing of the documentary, and the departure of several key characters, including Jim and Pam, a situation which disrupted the status quo of the series beyond a point where continuation was possible (attempts to extend the narrative into a spin-off series set on Dwight's beet farm were ultimately abandoned (Poniewozick, 2013)).

Whereas Grote's concept is generally correct in terms of the long view of the sitcom (as my case study will testify) it is based on assumptions about narrative closure and endings which favour the macro- over the micro-scale, and somewhat elides the actual content of the sitcom in favour of a grand theory of the form (which admittedly suits Grote's wider polemic against the sitcom and what he sees as its potentially destructive influence over culture). As a result, Grote's argument misses the various degrees of

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[30] Both do leave at different points to pursue other opportunities, but one always remains behind while the other ultimately always returns to the office setting

closure which can be found *within* the US sitcom as a narrative form. Just as a wider view of soap opera casts that form as unending, so too does a wider view of the sitcom seem to bear out the theory that the form evidences a resistance to narrative development and closure. However, where soap opera has traditionally been defined by a resistance to closure, this chapter argues that the sitcom is in fact defined by an *excess* of endings, with episodes, seasons, and series structured as a series of intra-narrative endings at various levels. For example, while the marriage of Jim and Pam does not constitute an ending in an overall sense, in another sense it functions as an ending of sorts (an intra-narrative ending) for that particular stage of the couple's relationship. Similarly, while *The Office* continued on for a further two seasons following the departure of Carrell, that moment is clearly framed as a major moment of closure within the ongoing series.

This chapter represents an attempt to re-orient questions of closure and endings within the sitcom form away from their traditional location at the end of the text towards various points of closure *within* the text (as represented by intra-narrative endings). It does this across a number of levels in the sitcom, from micro-scale structural elements such as individual jokes and gags, to macro-scale structures such as episodes, seasons, and, finally, series. I begin the chapter with an overview of the narrative structures of the sitcom, identifying and analysing each of the individual layers of structure to be found in the sitcom in terms of the functionality of endings (structure, cohesion, and meaning). From here I move on to my case study proper, an analysis of the various levels of intra-narrative endings in the US sitcom *Friends,* focussing specifically on the series' first season, and the episode "The One with the Dozen

Lasagnes" specifically. This case study is intended to demonstrate the specific ways in which *Friends* manifests the various levels of intra-narrative endings to structure its narrative across various levels.

Narrative Structure in the US Sitcom

If soap opera represented the seriality of narrative television at its most extreme, then the sitcom is, in many ways, emblematic of the other great category of narrative television, the series (Fiske, 1987: 116). While the serial format tells a single narrative over the course of a number of episodes, the series format, in its most basic definition, consists of a series of discrete episodes, each with their own stories to tell. However, while individual episodes are discrete, there is also typically a significant degree of connective narrative tissue between them. For example, sitcoms often embed ongoing character relationships or arcs within ostensibly stand-alone episodes, lending seasons and series a sense of cohesion which they would not otherwise have if each episode stood by itself (Jim and Pam's relationship in *The Office* for example). This results in a complex viewing situation in which individual episodes can be watched and enjoyed in isolation, yet where long term, avid viewers will benefit from a cumulative narrative development built up over sustained longterm viewing.[31]

As Brett Mills (2005) observes, the sitcom is a staple of commercial broadcasting, enjoying a position which is different to that of other forms of prime-time broadcasting.

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[31] The episode titles in *Friends* seem to explicitly speak to the fact that episodes can be viewed out of continuity. Each episode title begins with "The One Where…" followed by a brief description of the episodes main theme or a dominant joke/gag. For example, "The One with Ross's Wedding" is fairly self explanatory in terms of the episode's major narrative concern.

As Mills (56) notes, sitcoms will typically be 'stripped' across schedules, often organised into viewing blocks which span different channels at the same time (particularly in the US network TV context). As such, sitcoms occupy a particular role within US broadcasting and commercial considerations dictate and influence their narrative structure, from the length of individual episodes, acts, and scenes, to the manner in which seasons arc and the degree of continuity and serialisation between episodes. I explore these issues in detail in my analysis, but here it suffices to note how these contexts influence my approach to the sitcom in this chapter and how it differs from that of my analysis of the soap opera. In addition to exploring storylines and characters arcs, my analysis here also pays attention to individual scenes, acts, episodes, seasons, and series. I examine all of these individual constituents and attempt to locate the varying levels of closure that can be found within them.

In addition to these constituents of sitcom narrative, there is one other area to consider: the individual jokes and gags which are so central to the sitcom as a form and which arguably distinguishes it from other forms of narrative television. Given the centrality of jokes and gags to the form, it is perhaps unusual that they have been largely overlooked in studies of the sitcom. As Brett Mills notes, studies of comedy seem to "almost fail to acknowledge humour at all" (74). For Jim Cook, in one of the earliest foundational works on the TV sitcom, a BFI Dossier published in 1982, the problem is a methodological one which lies in the difficulty of studying comedy seriously while "still finding (some) sitcoms funny." (1) For Mills, however, the problem is disciplinary, stemming from an incompatibility between the aims of humour studies on the one hand, and media studies on the other. As he argues, the focus on individual jokes in humour

studies has hindered the application of humour theory to broadcast comedy due to media studies continued attention to the complex relations between media and audiences. Media studies, he argues, tends to take a generally broad view of the media, whereas humour studies tends towards a narrower focus on the micro-scale constituents of humour, such as jokes and gags. As Mills states: "If cultural studies has increasingly noted the complex nature of media consumption (particularly its domestic mode and variable viewing patterns), the analysis of something as tiny as a joke seems like a backward step. (75)" In terms of my approach to the subject in this chapter I disagree with this assertion. The study of individual jokes can only be considered a backwards step if attention has already been paid to them, however, as Mills suggests, television and media studies has tended to entirely overlook such small scale constituents despite the fact that they are so central to the narrative construction of sitcoms. As such, my approach here is informed by humour studies insofar as a focus on both the 'micro-' and 'macro-scales' of sitcom narrative, from individual jokes up to full series.

Such an approach is essential in order to explore the narrative structures and levels of closure in the sitcom fully. The relationship between narrative and jokes (or gags) has always been assumed to be separate, with the narrative structure serving simply to provide a foundation for the delivery of humour. However, the relationship between humour and narrative structure in the sitcom is in fact far more complex, with each operating in tandem to create the overall narrative structure of an individual sitcom episode, season or series. For example, Cook (1982) notes the ways in which audiences typically follow a plot, recognising the genre or type of story based on its narrative organisation. At the same time, however, the audience can also follow a story, immersed

in the narrative being presented. It is assumed, he argues, that the audience is engaged in a reading of the text at the level of both structure *and* story content. Often, he argues, these two operations seem to be the same activity, something which is inevitable given that:

> for the last two hundred years the dominant way of apprehending narrative has been an expressive realist one characterised by a privileging for consideration of the 'told' at the expense of the 'telling'; the story content's view of the world at the expense of the narrative structure. (13)

However, comedy, he argues, depends of a "recognition of intention", specifically the intention to cause laughter. Thus comedy, according to Cook, consists of "structures intending significance" wherein the humour is central to the narrative structure of a given comedy. At the same time, however, Cook has difficulty with the idea that certain structures are inherently comedic. Instead he argues that different structures can just as easily apply to other generic forms: "In other words, it is not such narratives in themselves but such narratives organised around comic intention that seem to specify comedy and this comedic intention is evidenced by jokes and comic situations. (15)" As such, any attempt to approach comedy in terms of narrative structure should take care to pay attention to humour, jokes, and comic situations as central constituents of the narrative structure.

Before moving on to my analysis it is worth briefly defining the terms which I intend to use throughout, in particular the distinction between jokes and gags. For the purposes of the following analysis I take a joke to define the smallest, individual unit of structure in the sitcom, one which is constituted by a discrete set-up/punchline structure. Here I use the term 'joke' due to the cultural connotations attached to it (for example joke books or the 'best joke' award given at each Edinburgh Festival). A joke is defined as a

discrete, closed structure in and of itself. In other words, jokes are essentially micro-narratives, providing a useful parallel example of Frank Kermode's (1967: 46) 'tick-tock' analogy. A gag on the other hand, is representative of a longer system of humour, one which develops over time and which can consist of a series of jokes which derive humour from their relationship to one another. Gags can be further separated into two categories, recurring gags, and running gags. A recurring gag represents a gag which is merely repeated, whereby humour arises out of a recognition of said repetition. Catchphrases are perhaps the most obvious example of this kind of gag, though my analysis also extends to repeated sight gags and other forms of repetition. Running gags, on the other hand, represent gags in which the same basic premise is developed over time, incrementally gathering in momentum and complexity in their repetition, with humour arising out of this development. Here repetition is also central, but recognition of development (the same gag in a new form) is just as important. It is this latter form which, I argue, is the basis of much sitcom humour and which supplies the sitcom with its core structuring principle.

Of course, identifying such structural features is, in itself, problematic given the subjective nature of humour. How, for example, do we each define a joke? What might seem to be a joke for one audience member may not be the same for another. This process of identification is made somewhat easier in sitcoms which utilise a studio audience or a 'canned' laugh track. As Mary Douglas (1968, 366) states, a joke must be both recognised and permitted *as a joke*. The use of canned laughter mitigates this somewhat, with the laughter on the soundtrack signalling both the existence of a joke, as well as giving the illusion that the joke has already been permitted as such by an

unseen audience. The identification of humour becomes far more difficult in more recent sitcoms in which laugh tracks are absent. Indeed the laugh track has, in many ways, come to be seen as a signal for 'low brow' comedy while those which lack laugh tracks are categorised as examples of quality television (HBO's sitcoms, for example, typically lack laugh tracks, though *Lucky Louie* (HBO, 2006) uses one for particular, ironic effect.)[32]

Individual Jokes, Recurring Gags and Running Gags

Individual jokes are narratives in miniature. As Jerry Palmer states in his book *The Logic of the Absurd* (1987) "the very form of organisation of a single gag (joke) on the basis of two chronologically distinct stages - preparation and punch line - implies that the single gag (joke) itself is already a narrative, albeit a narrative of a single event." (141).[33] They are the smallest structural aspects of sitcoms, though, on the whole, they are relatively and increasingly rare within the form. Instead the vast majority of gags in any given sitcom arise out of the narrative in the form of running or recurring gags. That is not to say that individual jokes have no place in the sitcom, however their presence is limited to specific contexts.

The first, and perhaps most natural way in which individual gags are presented in sitcoms are as aspects of both performance and characterisation. A great number of

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[32] The BBC comedy *Extras* (BBC, 2005-2007) comments on the perception of the laughtrack as a signifier for lowbrow humour through its sitcom-within-a-sitcom *When the Whistle Blows* which is intended to be a mirror image of Ricky Gervais's celebrated series *The Office,* albeit one whose ambitions are destroyed by the demands of a more commercial leaning (fictional) BBC.

[33] Palmer's use of the terms joke and gag are largely interchangeable, but I have separated them in my analysis for the sake of clarity.

sitcoms are developed around the personas of popular stand-up comics. Popular, long-running examples include *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989-98) (based on Jerry Seinfeld), *Roseanne* (ABC, 1988-1997) (Roseanne Barr), *The Cosby Show* (NBC, 1984-1992) (Bill Cosby), and *Everybody Loves Raymond* (CBS, 1996-2005) (Ray Romano), to name but a few. Such sitcoms are typically inspired by and built around the stand-up acts of their central performers, and said performers typically either a) play characters that fit into these acts (Ray Romano as Ray Barone), or b) play (thinly) fictionalised versions of themselves (Jerry Seinfeld as 'Jerry Seinfeld'). In the former case, the relationship between the public persona of the stand-up and the character they play is blurred, but also maintains a clear delineation between, say, Cliff Huxtable the character, and Bill Cosby the stand-up comedian. In the latter case, however, the boundaries are less clear, with the stand-up playing a fictionalised versions of themselves. In both cases the delivery of individual jokes takes on a performative aspect, whereby the skill of the comedian in crafting and delivering jokes or gags is a central element to both their characterisation, as well as the structure of the sitcom. This is perhaps clearest in examples wherein stand-up comics play versions of themselves while also performing stand-up routines as part of the series. One of the most notable examples of this is perhaps *Seinfeld,* wherein each episode is bookended by Jerry Seinfeld performing stand-up, with a deliberate blurring of which Seinfeld is on stage, the real or the fictional. Here the jokes performed as part of the routine work both independently *as* jokes, but also structurally insofar as the routines often serve to introduce the core themes of a given episode. A routine on airline food ("What's the deal with airline peanuts?"), for example, introduces the episode "The Airport", which is largely set on a plane. At the same time, Jerry's status as a stand-up

comic is central to his characterisation. This is something which is self-consciously reflected in the fourth season episode "The Visa" in which Jerry is obliged to 'play serious' during a double date at the behest of best friend George, who worries that his date Cheryl will be more attracted to Jerry's personality than his own. Here Jerry's joking nature is seen as so intrinsic to his character that George and Elaine believe that Jerry will be incapable of being serious, something the episode plays with by having 'serious' Jerry becoming a source of humour as he overplays, ultimately attracting Cheryl with his 'dark and brooding' personality. The humour in the scene thus arises from the fact that, for the audience, even 'serious' Jerry is funny.

One other way in which contemporary sitcoms include individual jokes is in the form of 'cut-aways', a form of humour popularised in the animated sitcoms of the '90s and '00s, including *The Simpsons* (1989-) and *Family Guy* (1999-). These jokes typically take the form of brief, and often absurd, sight gags or one-liners, typically forming the punchline to a set-up spoken by a character. The scene will then briefly cut-away to the punchline, often in flashback. Perhaps the most notable example of this kind of joke is in its use as a stylistic device in the animated sitcom *Family Guy*, indeed the show has become so synonymous with cut-away gags as sources of humour that it has become a source of parody (most notably in the *South Park* (Comedy Central, 1997-) episode "Cartoon Wars"). A typical *Family Guy* cutaway usually involves one character mentioning something only for the scene to then cut away to a separate scene illustrating that thing, often in an unexpected or absurdist fashion. For example, in the episode "Mind Over Murder" from the first season, Peter complains that he has been

watching television for so long that all the shows seem to be melding together. This is illustrated by a cutaway to a show titled "Homicide: Life on Sesame Street".

While cutaway gags are key elements of animated sitcoms like *Family Guy* and *The Simpsons*, more recent examples of live action sitcoms have also employed them as a core sources of humour. A notable example is *30 Rock* (NBC, 2006-2013) in which the cutaway gag is so intrinsic to the show that it is a core source of parody in the series' second live episode, "Live from Studio 6H" (season six, episode 19). Here the show's usual reliance on cutaway gags is parodied in a scene which plays up the difficulty of replicating the style in a live setting as the action cuts from Liz Lemon (Tina Fey) and Jack Donaghy (Alec Baldwin) to a flashback also featuring Liz, however in this case Liz is played by Julia Louis-Dreyfus. The humour of this comes from both the recognition of Louis-Dreyfus, herself a well known sitcom star (most notably as Elaine in *Seinfeld*) as well as of the self-deprecating nature of the gag in terms of the show's reliance on the cutaway as a source of humour.

Recurring gags fall somewhere between individual jokes and running gags in that they are structurally discrete as humorous utterances or instances, but their effectiveness relies on repetition. Perhaps the most obvious example of a recurring gag is the catchphrase, a simple phrase often attached to a particular character that is repeated time and again throughout the run of a series. Examples might include: "What'chu talkin' about Willis?", popularised by Arnold Jackson (Gary Coleman) on *Diff'rent Strokes* (NBC, 1978-1986), "Did I do that?" by Steve Urkel (Jaleel White) on *Family Matters* (ABC, 1989-1998), or, more recently, "Suit up!" by Barney Stinson (Neil Patrick Harris) on *How I Met Your Mother* (CBS, 2005-2014). Such catchphrases rely on the

recognition of their repetition, as well as on the knowledge of their initial contexts. "Suit up" for example, is first introduced in the pilot episode of *How I Met Your Mother* as Barney's instruction to Ted prior to a blind date. Subsequent uses of the phrase are divorced from this context, becoming a simple phrase that forms part of Barney's characterisation, though for long time viewers the original context of the phrase may still retain some of its humour. In this respect catchphrases operate in terms of inclusivity, or the "consolidatory function" of humour noted by Steve Neale & Frank Krutnik (1990: 242) whereby the humour arises out of a sense of 'getting' the joke.

In addition to catchphrases recurring gags can also operate as repeating visual gags. For example: Kramer's characteristic entrances to Jerry's apartment in *Seinfeld* or the repetition of a character falling on a broken step in *Modern Family* (ABC, 2009-). In terms of the latter this is always accompanied by the family patriarch Phil Dunphy's insistence that he will fix the step, humour arising from the acknowledgement on the part of the audience that he never will and that the slapstick gag will repeat time and again. In terms of the former, Kramer's characteristic entrance is usually accompanied by applause on the part of the studio audience. However, one episode of *Seinfeld* derives humour in its subversion of this as Jerry locks his door, causing Kramer to collide with the door offscreen. Here, humour arises from the subversion of expectations, as the usual repetition and recognition of the gag is denied the audience, who instead find humour in this one off deviation from repetition.

While recurring gags may operate in terms of recognition and inclusivity, in some cases they can also be used to lend a sense of cohesion to otherwise non-serialised sitcoms. This is particularly true of animated sitcoms like *Family Guy, South Park* and

The Simpsons where the internal chronology and consistency of events between episodes is often unclear. In all three examples characters may experience growth in terms of relationships or personality, but time itself seems to stand still. For example, over the course of 525 (and counting) episodes not one of the Simpsons has visibly aged, and the events of many episodes seem to contradict those that have gone before. However, some episodes may share recurring gags, such as Mr Burns' continued failure to remember Homer's name. Recurring gags can therefore serve to knit episodes together through repetition, even if said repetition is often bizarre. Another notable example from *The Simpsons* is the repeated misfortune which befalls the character Hans Moleman in which with each appearance Moleman suffers painful, often seemingly fatal accidents, only to return, seemingly unscathed, in following episodes. Similarly, *South Park* is famous for its catchphrase "Oh my God, you killed Kenny!" whereby a recurring gag from episode to episode is the painful, often gruesome death of the character. This gag repeats in each episode of the show's first five seasons up until the seemingly final death of the character in the film *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut* (Trey Parker, 1999).

Running gags differ from recurring gags in terms of their development over time. Where recurring gags are simple repetitions of the same joke, running gags change and evolve over time. As such they can often be extremely long running, sometimes permeating whole seasons or even series. They also have a far more central role to play in terms of sitcom structure. This is most clearly evidenced in the way that running gags can form the structure of an episode whereby the gag is introduced in the beginning and recurs throughout the episode, leading to a punchline of sorts come the episode's end.

An illustrative example of this is the *The Andy Griffith Show* (CBS, 1960-68) episode "The Sermon for Today" which begins with a visiting pastor delivering a sermon on the necessity for slowing down in life to enjoy simple pleasures. This gag runs throughout the episode as the efforts of the townsfolk to follow the pastor's advice are contrasted with their slowly growing agitation at their repeated failure to put on a relaxing evening concert. For example, Andy fails to whip the band into shape, while Gomer's efforts to fix the bandstand ultimately lead to its collapse. The punchline comes at the end of the episode when the pastor reveals that he himself is in too much of a rush to make it back to New York to stay for coffee. Here the running gag is synonymous with the conceit of the episode but also forms an evolving gag by itself, with multiple set-ups and punchlines contained within it. [34] Another illustrative example is the *Seinfeld* episode "The Marine Biologist". Here the episode is structured according to two separate running gags which come together for the punchline which forms the episode's climax. The first involves George's efforts to impress a new girlfriend by pretending to be a marine biologist (his fantasy career), while the second involves Kramer's efforts to practice his golf skills by driving golf balls into the ocean rather than at a range. The climax of the episode occurs when, while walking along the coast with his girlfriend, George comes across a beached whale. When someone yells out for a marine biologist, George wades out into the ocean rather than reveal his true identity. Later, while relating the incident to his friends, George delivers a famous speech which climaxes with the reveal of one of Kramer's golfballs as the cause of the whale's distress.

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[34] In many ways this is similar to the narrative hierarchy of a soap such as *EastEnders,* which I discussed in the previous chapter. In this way running gags could be viewed in a similar way to C-storylines within the week-to-week structure of *EastEnders*.

In addition to structuring individual episodes, running gags can also form core elements of characterisation. For example, a running gag in *Happy Endings* (ABC, 2011-13) involves the character Dave's penchant for V-neck t-shirts, something which plays into the character's general vanity, while a running gag in *Parks and Recreation* (NBC, 2009-) involves the character Andy's imaginary alter ego Bert Macklin, an FBI agent. This latter gag both plays into Andy's childlike character and, ultimately, his aspirations towards a career in law enforcement. It is important to distinguish here between running gags as characterisation and more general aspects of character. Running gags such as those used above are running gags by virtue of their specificity, they are single elements of characterisation used only occasionally for the purposes of humour. This is distinct from more fundamental aspects of characterisation such as, for example, Frasier's snobbishness in *Frasier* (NBC, 1993-2004), or Sam's alcoholism in *Cheers* (NBC, 1982-1993).

Finally a running gag may also serve to structure a story arc which develops over several episodes and even whole seasons. Perhaps the most popular example of this is the 'will they/wont they" story arc whereby a romantic pairing are continually kept apart by a series of humorous events. For example, Nile's unrequited love and constant attempts to woo Daphne on *Frasier*, or the on/off relationship between Mindy and Danny on *The Mindy Project* (FOX, 2013-). The running gag here is not the storyline itself, but rather the development of the same gag again and again, typically represented by an event which keeps the couple apart. For example, Danny's attempts to woo Mindy towards the end of season two of *The Mindy Project* are continually foiled by misunderstandings and poor timekeeping. In these instances running gags serve as the

foundation for ongoing story-arcs, underlining Cook's idea that narrative structure and humour are connected in the sitcom, the individual gag creating the underlying structure of the storyline rather than simply servicing it.

Scenes, Acts & Episodes

In his essay "Television Situation Comedy" Mick Eaton (1978) argues that any analysis of the sitcom should be mindful of paying attention to the context of said sitcom's original broadcast. This is due to the sitcom's status as a commercial product and thus its historical and production context is a factor in its construction. This is most notable in terms of scenes and acts, whereby the length of a scene or act is determined by commercial considerations. For example, in the context of the US sitcom, earlier examples followed a two act structure in which two acts of equal length were separated by one long commercial break. Newer sitcoms, however follow a three act structure featuring shorter acts separated by two commercial breaks. At the same time, commercial considerations contribute to episode length. For example, within a half hour slot, older sitcoms such as *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (CBS, 1961-66) or *I Love Lucy* (CBS, 1951-57) could be expected to be between 24 to 26 minutes in length, while newer examples such as *The Mindy Project* and *New Girl* (Fox, 2011-) air only 20 minutes. In addition to this, the basic structure of the sitcom has changed over time. Older examples like *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and *The Andy Griffith Show* typically begin with an opening credits sequence and air both acts before ending with closing credits over blank backdrop. Later sitcoms, however, added a pre-credits cold open, typically consisting of a short skit or scene setting up the narrative of the episode ahead,

and climaxing with an end of episode 'stinger' to maintain viewer interest during the end credits. This is due, as Brett Mills (2005) notes, to the network practice of 'stripping' sitcoms across the schedules on the same night. As such, one sitcom can usually be expected to be followed by another, and the stinger thus maintains the flow of comedy into the next programme.

Due to the above, scenes in contemporary sitcoms are typically shorter, around one or two minutes, while older examples feature longer scenes of three to four minutes or longer. For example: The episode "The Return of Happy Spangler" from the first season of *The Dick Van Dyke Show* features an extended sequence in which Van Dyke's character Rob Petrie performs a sketch he and his former mentor Spangler have just finished writing. This sequence, an extended riff on the idea that modern audiences feel distaste for slapstick but laugh at it despite themselves, features Van Dyke delivering a sober speech on the nature of humour while acting out seemingly accidental pratfalls. Significantly the scene is over four minutes in length and focusses almost entirely on Van Dyke's performance, with a few cutaways to his colleagues' enjoyment. By contrast the longest scenes in newer sitcoms like *The Mindy Project* and *New Girl* are just over two minutes in length and typically form the major dramatic climaxes in their respective episodes. Other scenes, on the other hand, hover around the one minute mark.

Despite these differences, individual sitcom scenes typically possess a fairly rigid structure whereby each scene ends on a 'tag' of some form, whether comedic or dramatic. This tag typically forms the climax of a running gag, or else feature a callback to a gag from earlier in the scene. For example, a recent episode of *The Mindy Project* features a sequence in which the character Dr Jeremy Reed worries about an

immigration investigation which has been brought against him ("I Slipped" Season

Three, Episode Four). Reed, a British ex-pat, reflects that he cannot return to England as

he has forgotten the words. This develops as he attempts to remember the English word

for elevator, settling on 'blift'. The scene continues as Reed is joined by another

character and the conversation shifts. However, the scene ends as the character of

Morgan enters the scene out of breath, stating "Did you guys know that the blift is out

of order?" Here the tag for the scene is represented by a call back to the earlier joke.

In addition to such tags it is usual for a sitcom scene to end on some form of

transition to the next scene. Typically the end of one scene is followed by some form of

musical motif accompanied by an establishing shot of the location in which the next

scene is set. Such transitions can also function in order to signal both the passage of

time, as well as the tone in which the next scene should be read. For example, *Seinfeld*

typically features establishing shots of Jerry and Kramer's apartment building

accompanied by an upbeat slap-bass motif, thus signalling that the scene is intended to

be comic. Not all sitcom scenes follow this formula, however, and it is also common for

sitcoms to simply cut to the next scene *sans* transition. In these cases this is typically to

establish a close relationship between one scene and another, either in terms of temporal

or geographical proximity. More recent sitcoms, such as *30 Rock* or *Scrubs* (NBC,

2001-08, ABC, 2009-10) feature a much more hyperactive editing style featuring

cutaways and rapid cutting back and forth between scenes. In terms of act structure, acts

leading into commercial breaks (as is the case for the majority of U.S. sitcoms) typically

end on cliffhangers. Said cliffhangers often end mid-scene, resulting in a form of double

take featuring some degree of repetition between the end of one act and the start of the next.

End-credit stingers often function as extended versions of scene ending 'tags', riffing on or reflecting humorously on the events of the preceding episode. These scenes are typically of low narrative importance as they tend to play during the end credits. It is typical for the end credits to be superimposed over these scenes, though more modern sitcoms demarcate between the credits and the programme itself. Examples include: *Community* (NBC, 2009-) which often features the characters of Troy and Abed in a running joke where they present their own fictional (and imaginary) TV show "Troy and Abed in the Morning"; *Arrested Development* (FOX, 2005-07, Netflix, 2013) which uses a distinctive "next time on *Arrested Development*" running gag whereby the teases are original gags in themselves and do not look forward to the next episode; and *Frasier* which often features a silent skit as its stinger which plays under the closing credits and which often revolve around the actions of Eddie the dog. More recently in examples like *The Mindy Projec*t and *New Girl* the credits are formatted in such a way to reduce their disruptive impact. As a result credits often play over the climax of episodes, often beginning mid-scene. As a result, shows like these often lack end of episode tags, with the actual climax of the episode forming the ending of said episode.

Having already discussed the actual endings of sitcom episodes in terms of the end of episode stinger, I want to now focus on more general features of structural closure within individual episodes. The obvious starting point here is in terms of the cyclical narrative that is assumed to be the defining feature of individual sitcom episodic structure whereby each episode features a 'hard reset' and a return to the status quo with

which the episode began. Mick Eaton (1978), in discussing the narrative architecture of the sitcom, distinguishes between inside and outside forces, wherein the outside forces are the drivers of the narrative of individual episodes which must be overcome in such a way as to allow the inside forces (the status quo) to repeat unmolested. The example of "The Sermon for Today" provides a useful example of this at work in *The Andy Griffith Show* wherein the narrative of that episode revolves around the appearance of the visiting pastor as an outside force which puts the narrative in motion. While the pastor's words set up the events of the episode, by episode's end he has exited the narrative milieu of the show, thus allowing for the next episode to begin from a state of relative stability.

However, assumptions about the cyclical structure of individual sitcom episodes overlooks the degree of serialisation that can also be located in many sitcom examples. I will deal with this matter of serialisation in more detail in the below section on the series finale, however here I want to focus on how it is manifested in terms of individual episode endings, most notably in terms of the end of episode cliffhanger. Such cliffhangers typically tie two episodes together which are explicitly marked as being related to each other. Here, said episodes are typically demarcated as being two-part episodes and explicitly off-format from the usual structure of the series. In addition the cliffhangers of these double episodes are usually explicitly marked by text or voiceover, such as "to be continued". Notable examples would include the explicitly, and self-consciously marked "The One with the Two Parts" from the first season of *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004), or "Cartoon Wars" from *South Park*, which itself parodies the conventions of two-parters via a hyperbolic "previously on" segment at the beginning of

the second episode. More contemporary sitcoms are likelier to feature more significant degrees of serialisation and are far less likely to explicitly mark their cliffhangers due to assumptions on the part of the audience that the narrative will continue in the following episode. This may be due to shifts in sitcom viewing facilitated by the influence of so-called 'binge' viewing in which viewers watch several episode in sequence. While broadcast networks continue to air their sitcoms week by week, binge viewing has become a major force in the wider culture of television viewing and it is evident that broadcast television has begun to adapt to these new viewing contexts. As such, newer sitcoms such as *The Mindy Project* are produced in such a way as to be consumed both week by week and also in quick succession.

Seasons & Series

While two part episodes are relatively few and far between within individual sitcom seasons, the cliffhanger is a far more common feature of season finales. For example, the season five finale of *The Office* climaxes as Jim infers that Pam is pregnant, leaving the question open until the start of the sixth season, while *Seinfeld's* third season climaxes with Kramer moving to L.A. to pursue a career as an actor. *How I Met Your Mother* featured a particularly self-conscious take on the cliffhanger by splitting the character Barney's "Legend…ary" catchphrase across two episodes, while even *The Simpsons,* a sitcom with very little in the way of serialisation, utilised the season ending cliffhanger in its two part "Who Shot Mr Burns?" storyline. In all cases the cliffhanger functions to arrest narrative development, leaving it in a state of limbo between seasons while encouraging viewers to return.

While the cliff-hanger ending is a usual, and even expected feature of sitcom season finales, it is not the only option open to sitcoms. Many older sitcoms, for example, feature season finales which are indistinguishable from any other episode. For example *The Dick Van Dyke Show* episode, "The Return of Happy Spangler" and *Leave it to Beaver's* (CBS, 1957-1958, ABC, 1958-1963), "Cat Out of the Bag" represent self-contained episodes in their own right which do not lead explicitly into the next season. Though cliffhanger endings became something of the norm during the '80s and '90s, contemporary sitcoms often do still end their seasons on non-serialised notes. For example: *Modern Family* season one concludes with a family portrait being taken, while *Cougar Town* season one climaxes on a subdued note as the central couple Jules and Grayson reveal their relationship to the support of their friends and family. In both cases the expected drama and narrative tension commonly featured in a cliffhanger is absent. In cases where seasons end on a non-cliffhanger this is likely due to commercial imperatives such as low ratings. For example, *30 Rock's* season four finale "I Do Do" features a plot which resolves many of that season's long running character conflicts, such as Liz's relationship with Wesley and Jack's difficulty in choosing between two women. The show had continually been 'on the bubble' throughout its run, though following the end of its fourth season it did eventually return for another two seasons.

Thus far I have discussed intra-narrative endings in sitcoms. Moving on, however, I want to turn to a more traditional ending as it has been dealt with in the past (notably by Grote), that is, the end of a series. I have already discussed the problematic nature of sitcom endings, yet it is an inescapable fact that sitcoms can, and do end on their own terms, crafting finales which provide a level of closure beyond anything that could be

considered accidental. Grote's assertion that sitcoms simply end is therefore somewhat outdated and in need of revision, and I want, in this final section of my initial analysis, to explore some of the ways in which sitcoms construct their intended endings. Considering my objection to Grote, it is perhaps worth beginning with his observation that sitcoms typically end with the removal of the initial situation. While I disagree with many of Grote's points on sitcom endings, this one is sound in terms of its application to various sitcom examples. However, the process is typically more subtle, and far less violent, than Grote implies. In his analysis, Grote refers to *Three's Company* (ABC, 1977-74) as the archetypical example of a situation comedy, noting the extreme lengths to which the sitcom goes in maintaining its internal situation. Grote is also astute in observing the relatively shaky foundation of this situation, and its increasingly illogical existence as the show went on. However, an analysis of the *Three's Company* finale reveals a remarkably subtle narrative which brings about the removal of the situation in a logical and natural way whereby each of the characters go their separate ways on a mutual understanding, while hinting at the opportunities for new situations to be developed in the future.

The concept of the removal of the central situation relies on a definition of that situation, and what we find in many sitcom finales is both a removal of said situation, but also a restatement of that situation. In certain examples, such as *M.A.S.H* (CBS, 1972-83)*, the situation is explicitly clear, and that sitcom comes to an end with the removal of the field hospital at the heart of the narrative coinciding with the end of the Korean War. However, in other cases the situation is more opaque, and the final episode undergoes a process of restating the primacy of said situation. In *Cheers* for example,

the final episode revolves around the coupling of Sam and Diane, however, the episode culminates in a sequence which restates the primacy of Cheers the bar as the central situation, rather than the relationships that happen within it. Other sitcoms, such as *Seinfeld* are even less clear in terms of defining the 'sit-' aspect of the sitcom. Famously the "show about nothing" *Seinfeld* appears on the surface to be little more than a series about four friends spending time together. The final episode, therefore, goes to excessive and self-parodying lengths to restate its status quo, in particular by removing its four central characters from New York and, ultimately splitting them up as they are imprisoned as a result of their amoral, selfish attitudes.

The case of *Seinfeld* is also useful in terms of demonstrating the key role played by self-referentiality in sitcom finales. As Morreale (1983: 279) argues, "the biggest conversation taking place in the *Seinfeld* finale is between the show and its audience". As she points out, the finale is ultimately little more than a series of in-jokes and references to past episodes, including a seemingly endless procession of past guest stars. Indeed, the final scene is a repetition of the very first scene from the pilot episode. While *Seinfeld* was a particularly self-aware sitcom, the theme of self-referentiality is key to sitcom series finales as a whole. Another example might include the finale of *30 Rock* with its closing musical montage set to a song taken from the musical version of "The Rural Juror", a reference to a film that appeared in an episode from the show's first season. Such self-referentiality is not solely the domain of newer sitcoms as might be expected. Older examples such as *The Dick Van Dyke Show* and *The Phil Silvers Show* (CBS, 1955-59) also culminate in remarkably self-referential episodes. The former brings the narrative full circle as Rob Petrie delivers his memoirs for them to be

produced as a TV series, an event which mirrors the real-life context of the show's creation, while the latter ends with the core cast imprisoned as Colonel Hall watches them via CCTV. Watching them Hall quips "It's a wonderful show, and as long as I'm the sponsor, it will never be cancelled" only for the show to end then and there, as Bilko waves to the camera and says, "Th-th-that's all, folks!"

While these latter examples illustrate Grote's assertion that sitcoms can only end by the removal of the core situation, the above analysis has also demonstrated that the functionality of endings and closure can also be demonstrated across several different layers of the US sitcom's narrative construction. As such, rather than being defined by the absence of an ending, sitcoms are demonstrably defined by an *excess* of endings across different levels, from the micro-scale, such as individual jokes and gags, to the macro-scale, including full season and series arcs. These many different forms of intra-narrative endings fulfil the key functionalities of structure, cohesion, and meaning in the sitcom, lending the form a complex narrative structure that is defined by the intersection of humour and narrative. Having provided an overview of these various endings in the sitcom, I now want to explore these endings in relation to a specific example, the US sitcom *Friends*.

Case Study: *Friends*

Thus far my analysis of closure in sitcoms has taken a broader view, however I want to move on in the remainder of this chapter to narrow my focus and to apply my above analysis to one particular example. I have chosen *Friends* as my case study because it is,

in many ways, a transitionary example, falling somewhere between what we might call the traditional and the contemporary US sitcom. Shot on film in the multi-cam set-up popularised by MTM, *Friends* is, formally speaking, very traditional, featuring a laugh track and studio based filming before a live studio audience. At the same time, however, it is also an early example of the so-called 'hang-out' genre of situation comedy wherein the focus is neither explicitly domestic or workplace, but rather oriented around a group of friends and their interactions. This genre has become extremely popular in more recent examples which also feature a different, 'single-cam' aesthetic. As such, *Friends* provides a useful representative example of the sitcom on which to base my analysis. On the other hand, however, the humour and narrative structure of *Friends* is particular to that show and as such, the following case study in not intended merely to apply my above analysis to a particular example, but rather to examine the ways in which the varying levels of closure discussed above are refracted through that example.

Created by David Crane and Marta Kauffman, *Friends* aired 236 episodes over 10 seasons. The series follows the lives and loves of six New Yorkers: Joey (Matt LeBlanc), Chandler (Matthew Perry), Ross (David Schwimmer), Rachel (Jennifer Anniston), Phoebe (Lisa Kudrow), and Monica (Courtney Cox). *Friends* was a major cultural force from the mid-90s to the mid-00s, up to its series finale which is amongst the most viewed episodes of television in US TV history (along with the finales of fellow sitcoms *M.A.S.H* and *Seinfeld*). The narrative of the series was largely limited to a fixed number of sets, including the three apartments shared by the six friends in different configurations over the course of the series, as well as the coffee shop "Central Perk" where the friends typically 'hung-out' on their usual couch. As the series grew in

popularity the narrative implemented more and more outside locations, most notably in the fourth season finale, which was filmed on location in London.

In terms of storylines, *Friends* is notable for the relatively high degree of serialisation it evidenced throughout its run. This is most apparent in the various long developing relationships at the heart of the story, including Chandler and Monica's relationship, which eventually turned romantic towards the end of the series' run. Perhaps the most notable element of serialisation was the famous "Ross and Rachel" relationship which spanned the entire series, beginning with Rachel as the unrequited love of Ross in early seasons, and moving through various stages, including their romance in season two, their 'break' and subsequent break-up in season three, a drunken marriage in season five, an unexpected pregnancy in season eight, and their final coming together in the series finale. Additionally, *Friends* featured a high degree of running and recurring gags, including Phoebe's abortive music career, the inability of anyone to remember Chandler's job, and Joey's promiscuity.

For the purposes of this case study, I have chosen to focus on the first season of *Friends*, and to focus my analysis of the micro-endings of sitcom in one episode in particular, the season's 12th episode "The One with the Dozen Lasagnes." My reason for this is to provide a sharper focus to my analysis, and my chosen episode is particularly useful as it represents something of a turning point in the season, particularly in terms of the developing relationship between Ross and Rachel. The episode also introduces a number of elements which would recur throughout the first season, as well as the series as a whole, particularly the introduction of a 'foosball' table purchased by Joey and Chandler.

Season one of *Friends* introduces many of the major narrative elements and gags that would recur time and again throughout the show's 10 seasons. The series begins with an episode which sets up the status quo of the series, with many of the aspects which make up the series already in place. In fact, the one missing element in the beginning is the presence of Rachel, who only enters into the narrative during the pilot episode. Rachel, an old high school friend of Monica's has run out of her wedding and is seeking a place to live. Monica reluctantly allows Rachel to stay with her and the core group dynamic of the series is established. The pilot also introduces a number of other narrative threads which would run throughout the series, including Ross's relationship to his ex-wife Carol, who prior to the events of the series has left him for another woman, Susan. The pilot also establishes Ross's attraction to Rachel, an attraction which pre-dates the series and which is rekindled by her re-appearance. By the end of the pilot Rachel has procured herself a job at the coffee shop and the central conceit of the first season, and of the series as a whole, has been established. As the first season continues a number of narrative threads emerge and develop. Ross discovers that Carol is pregnant with his child, who is later born in the season's penultimate episode. After much disagreement between Ross, Carol and Susan, they decide to call the child Ben after the name on a janitor's overalls donned by Phoebe when she, Ross and Susan are trapped in a utility cupboard in the hospital as Carol gives birth. Several of the episodes in the season focus on the various stages of Carol's pregnancy, and Ross's uncertainty both about his role as father and his ability to be there for his unborn child given their familial situation. Other narrative threads include Phoebe's short lived relationship with scientist David (Hank Azaria) which is cut short when he moves to Minsk on a research trip. Phoebe also

contends with her twin sister Ursula in the season's only two-part episode after Joey begins a relationship with her. Chandler experiences a change in circumstances after he is promoted at work, taking on new responsibilities and contending with the fact that his colleagues no longer like him now that he is their boss while, feeling lonely, Ross adopts a pet monkey named Marcel, which he is eventually forced to give up late in the season so that Marcel can be taken to a zoo.

As already suggested, perhaps the most prominent narrative thread running through the season is Ross's attraction towards Rachel, in particular his unrequited feelings for her and his continued attempts to woo her. This is set up in the pilot and moves through various stages as the season progresses. The biggest obstacle to this comes in the season's seventh episode "The One With the Blackout" in which Ross's attempts to woo Rachel are disrupted by the appearance of Paulo, who lives in the same building and who Rachel develops an attraction to (despite his inability to speak any English) Rachel subsequently dates Paulo for several episodes until they break up in the season's 12th episode "The One with the Dozen Lasagnes" (see below). Following the break up, Rachel 'swears off' men, while Ross's attempts at dating are foiled time and again for various reasons. Later, in the season's 20th episode, "The One with the Evil Orthodontist" Rachel begins dating her ex-fiancee Barry again, only for her to discover that he is still in a relationship with her former friend Mindy. Rachel breaks off the relationship and later, in the season finale, learns that Ross is in love with her after Chandler lets slip the fact during her birthday party. Ross is absent, on a research trip to China, however Rachel rushes to the airport to meet him, ready to take a chance on a relationship with him. The season ends by revealing that, while on his trip, Ross met

someone who he is now dating, effectively turning the relationship on its head as Rachel

takes up the unrequited role in the second season. This basic outline of the first season

of *Friends* gives an idea of the complex and interrelated storylines that run throughout

the season. In terms of my chosen episode "The One with the Dozen Lasagnes"

Appendix One provides a more detailed, scene by scene description of that episode,

with details of recurring and running gags featured throughout

Analysis: Individual Gags, Recurring Gags and Running Gags

Most gags in *Friends* tend to spring from the narrative. Unlike many sitcoms, the

cast of *Friends* lacks a central figure, and definitely lacks a stand-up comic. Instead the

cast was drawn from relatively unknown young actors, though as a result of the show all

went on to varying degrees of success. As such, there is no performative aspect that

requires or facilitates the delivery of individual gags. However, there are isolated

examples of individual gags throughout the series. A notable example occurs in the

opening "skit" from the episode "The One with the Dozen Lasagnes". Though almost

two minutes in length, this sequence is really one extended joke, with set-up (*The Odd*

Couple theme) and punch line (Chandler's reaction to Ross's attempt to repeat the joke).

However, this kind of sequence is relatively rare within *Friends*, as most pre-credits

sequences tend to set up the narrative focus of a given episode. For example, the

previous episode "The One with Mrs Bing" opens with a short scene in which Phoebe

and Monica are inadvertently responsible for a man in the street being hit by a car. A

major arc in the episode that follows is the extreme lengths that Monica and Phoebe

then go to to care for the man and later to vie for his romantic attentions. Here the

opening scene both sets up a narrative, but also provides the opportunity for the episode to set up a running gag as Monica and Phoebe's actions become more and more comically extreme. Again this points to *Friends* commitment to combining narrative and humour, as the isolated skit featured at the start of "The One with the Dozen Lasagnes" is a relative oddity in the series run.

Another way in which individual jokes are delivered in *Friends* is through characterisation. Though not played by, or characterised as, a stand-up comic, the character of Chandler is the (self-)appointed 'funny one' of the group. As such he is prone to telling jokes, though, again, these jokes typically arise out of the context of the narrative. For example, the episode "The One with the Fake Monica" features a scene in which Ross is discussing the need to get his pet monkey Marcel into a zoo, to which Joey replies "How do you get a Monkey into a zoo?" In response to this Chandler says "I know that one…no that's Popes in a Volkswagen." For the remainder of the scene Chandler attempts to remember the punchline to the joke, which when he does he blurts it out to the recognition of Phoebe. Here the use of an individual, discrete joke is put to the service of characterisation, as the humour arises both from the joke itself, but also the fact that Chandler is the one telling said joke, as well as the way in which the joke is structured within and structures the scene. The use of the joke, then, is far more complex that it would be if the joke had merely been told as a simple set-up and punchline, instead becoming an example of Chandler attempting to maintain his role within the group via his insistence on remembering the punchline.

Friends also features a number of recurring gags which, over time, became catchphrases as characters develop. On the whole this is largely reserved for later

seasons and, as such, the first season largely lacks recurring gags. However, as the overall comic style of the show developed in later seasons, the existence of recurring gags becomes much more frequent. For example, perhaps the most well known example is the line "We were on a break." This is a reference to an event which takes place in the third season wherein Ross and Rachel's relationship breaks down and they decide to go 'on a break'. However, each of them understands this differently and Ross sleeps with someone else, leading to the eventual break up of the relationship (in the episode "The One the Morning After.") This phrase, first employed by Ross as a defence for his actions, goes on to become a recurring gag in later seasons, including during a key moment in the series finale where it is used self-referentially as a joke about Ross and Rachel's past (see below). Another notable example of a recurring catchphrase is Joey's chat-up line "How you doin'?" However, this latter example again illustrates how humour typically arises from the narrative or characterisation in *Friends*. Joey's chat-up line is one aspect of how the character was developed over the course of the series. In season one, Joey is portrayed as a fairly rounded character, however, as the series goes on, he is gradually reduced to a series of character 'tics'. I will expand on this in the next section, but here it is enough to note that the use of Joey's catchphrase was a central part of this process, as Joey's behaviour increasingly became a series of repeating character tics including his seemingly insatiable desire for women and his lack of intelligence (the character is eventually reduced to almost childlike behaviour in the final season).

"The One with the Dozen Lasagnes" offers a useful illustration in its B-plot of the way in which a running gag can structure a sitcom episode. Here the B-plot is a

continually developing gag with a number of punchlines within it, leading up to a main punchline, and finally concluding with a post-script punchline of sorts in the episode's stinger. The B-plot is introduced in scene two with a discrete gag as Joey's actions lead to the table collapsing. Here Joey reflects that he and Chandler will need to purchase a new table, to which Chandler replies "oh, ya think?" Here the scene elicits two laughs on the soundtrack, first with the sight gag of the table's collapse, and then with Chandler's reaction to Joey's obvious statement of fact. This scene is thus both set-up for the rest of the running gag, as well as a sequence of two gags in its own right. The gag develops in scene four as the B-story takes on a new aspect as the conversation turns to the discussion of shared ownership and Chandler's ex-roommate Kip. Here the humour arises out of substitution as the conversation follows the familiar rhythms of a romantic dispute, with Kip standing in for the figure of an ex-partner. This style of humour is something of a *Friends* mainstay, repeated throughout the series, most notably in the second season episode "The One with the Breastmilk" wherein Monica and Rachel enact a very similar scene. The Kip discussion adds a new element to the running gag and continues in scene eight as Joey and Chandler shop for tables. Here, Chandler's reference to Kip functions as a callback within the running gag, acting as a punchline to both the scene and to the gag set up earlier. Finally the running gag reaches its punchline with the reveal of the foosball table. Here the humour arises out of a subversion of expectations and the absurdity of the situation. It also operates out of an understanding of the characterisation of Joey and Chandler as somewhat juvenile figures, an understanding which relies on a prior knowledge of the series and its characterisation of the two roommates. However, this climax is not the end of the

running gag, but rather, marks a moment where the gag once again develops into a new direction as Monica's proficiency at the game is revealed. This is set up in scene nine and recurs in the end of episode stinger, where it forms its own gag as Monica is ejected from the apartment only for Joey and Chandler to play on.

In this example we can see how a relatively simple running gag concerning the purchase of a table develops over the course of the episode. We can also see how this development is structured in terms of several discrete punchlines. These punchlines function as intra-narrative endings within the storyline, each providing key points of structure, cohesion, and meaning within the relatively short space of the half-hour episode. As the above description illustrates, the gag develops across a number of distinct stages, each time adding something new to the gag as the episode goes on. Not only do the punchlines (or intra-narrative endings) structure the gag and the storyline, but also provide key points of structure to the episode itself, each punchline delineating between this B-story and the A-story concerning Ross and Rachel.

In addition to structuring storylines within episodes, the development of running gags throughout the first season of *Friends* also illustrates the way in which they form the structure of ongoing, cross-episode storylines. This is particularly notable in the case of the will-they/wont-they storyline revolving around Ross and Rachel. Here the gag is less 'will they get together' and more a running gag of all the ways in which fate intervenes. A repeated motif of the first season finds Ross and Rachel on the balcony, typically with Ross preparing to reveal his feelings to Rachel only to be prevented in some way. In the episode seven, "The One with the Blackout" this is because of a cat, which attacks Ross, while in episode 12, "The One with the Dozen Lasagnes" it is

because Rachel swears off men due to her experiences with Paulo. This running gag reaches a climax in the episode 24, the season finale ("The One Where Rachel Finds Out") where Rachel hallucinates Ross on the balcony instead of her date. The balcony and the pairing of Ross and Rachel therefore represents a running motif throughout the first season, and forms part of the wider Ross/Rachel storyline that runs throughout the season and which is inverted at the start of the show's second season (see below). Again, the running gag is structured as a series of punchlines which in turn provide key moments of structure, cohesion, and meaning, within the ongoing storyline. For example, Rachel's hallucination provides a climax to the will-they/wont-they question that has run through the first season. However, rather than signify an overall ending to the storyline, it is rather an intra-narrative ending within the wider storyline as a new obstacle, in the form of Ross's new girlfriend, is introduced at the episode's climax.

Analysis: Scenes, Acts and Episodes

Friends, like many of its contemporaries, features a hybrid two-to-four act structure featuring two main acts, with a pre-credit teaser and an end of episode stinger bookending the episode (though the stinger is sometimes missing, most notably in the season one finale where the credits play over a repeat of the opening credits montage). Scenes are typically quite short, averaging one to two minutes often leading up to a longer scene towards the end of the episode. This scene typically forms the narrative climax of the episode and is typically the most dramatic scene with the lowest frequency of gags. "The One with the Dozen Lasagnes" is a good illustration of this, featuring a series of scenes of relatively short length leading up to a final scene of over

four minutes. Most scenes are limited to a single setting, with the exception being the final scene which features cross-cutting between the interior of the apartment and the exterior balcony set. The act break comes mid-scene as Phoebe reveals her story, with the break occurring on a cliffhanger as Phoebe explains "Paulo made a pass at me." When the show returns for its second act it returns to the coffee shop for the continuation of the scene.

Scene changes in *Friends* are typically signalled by the use of a musical motif and an establishing shot of whatever location the scene is set in. The show also typically uses a limited range of locations, most often the friends' apartment building and the coffee shop Central Perk. These establishing shots both designate the setting for the scene, but also signal the passing of time between scenes and the time of day in which the scene takes place. "The One with the Dozen Lasagnes" is somewhat atypical in that one establishing shot serves an added narrative function as it portrays Rachel throwing Paulo's clothes to the ground below. Scenes are also structured in such a way that they end with tags, either comic or dramatic. These tags are most often a repeat of, or punchline to, a running gag set up in the same scene, though, as in the case of the mention of Kip in the shopping scene from "The One with the Dozen Lasagnes", they may also callback to an earlier running gag. "The One with the Dozen Lasagnes" also features a dramatic tag to a scene in which Rachel decided to break up with Paulo. Here music plays a central role as a minor keyed piano plays a short tune signalling the transition to the more explicitly comic scene that follows.

Friends is distinguished amongst similar shows of its era due to its fairly large degree of serialisation, though this serialisation is rarely overt. "The One with the

Dozen Lasagnes" is a good illustration of this. Its A-story lines, Ross's attempts to avoid knowledge of his unborn child's gender, and Rachel's break up with Paulo, are both elements of wider, ongoing story lines which run through the whole of the first season. The former represents one stage in the ongoing development of Carol's pregnancy (first introduced in the season's second episode), while the second represents a turning point in the Ross/Rachel relationship, removing the obstacle of Paulo while instating a new one, Rachel's swearing off of men. In terms of its narrative structure, however, each of these stages is presented as relatively discrete and contained within this single episode. The enigma of the baby's gender is introduced in the episode's third scene and resolved by the end of the episode with Rachel's reveal to both Ross and the audience, while Ross's latest attempt to woo Rachel is subverted by her newfound attitude towards dating. The central situations of the episode are thus resolved, as is the B-plot involving Joey and Chandler's table. Significantly, however, these resolutions are open enough to allow for repetition in future episodes. Just as this is not Ross's first attempt to woo Rachel, so too it is not his last this season. Similarly, the resolution of the gender enigma leaves the narrative open to future stages in Carol's pregnancy, and subsequent episodes deal with pre-natal classes, name choice, and, eventually, the birth itself.

While this structure is typical for *Friends* generally, the first season does feature one two-part episode which disrupts this structure in favour of a more overt cliffhanger ending to part one. The two episodes, collectively titled "The One with the Two Parts" feature, as a narrative through line, Joey's relationship with Phoebe's twin sister Ursula, and Phoebe's resistance to this. The first part concludes with a cliff-hanger ending as Phoebe comes face to face with Ursula, who answers Joey's front door (implying that

Joey and Ursula have slept together, something discussed earlier in the episode as a sign

that Joey is serious about the relationship). This ending is presented as self-consciously

off-format, both by the two episodes' collective title, as well as by the title card "to be

continued…" which appears onscreen as Phoebe and Ursula face off. These two episode

are thus presented as special cases within the first season of *Friends*, with the title

drawing explicit attention to the two-part structure. Interestingly the two episodes aired

on the same night, which suggests that the two part structure is a deliberate aspect of the

episodes construction. If we factor in the fact that the second of the two episodes

features cameo appearances by Noah Wyle and George Clooney, well known actors

from the medical drama *ER* (NBC, 1994-2009)*,* a contemporary of *Friends,* then it is

fair to assume that the two-part structure is a deliberate attempt to mark the two

episodes out as a special event within the larger first season, perhaps due largely to the

episodes status as a 'sweeps' episode.[35] As such, the overt serialisation of the two-parter

is make out as exceptional in the overall format of the show, a special case design

specifically in the context of the episode's broadcast.

Analysis: Seasons and Series

Here I want to open up my analysis to explore both the ending to *Friends* season one,

but to also consider the endings of subsequent seasons, before moving on in the next

section to consider the ending to the series as a whole. The ending of *Friends* season

one is multi-faceted, and represents a fairly contained conclusion to the season as a

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[35] 'Sweeps' is an industry term in US television for periods in which ratings data is traditionally
collected. As a result, networks typically schedule special episodes of their hit programmes
during this time in an effort to boost ratings, including crossovers between hit programmes such
as the example discussed above.

whole. However, in analysing this ending it is misleading to examine only the season's final episode, as a significant degree of the season's narrative closure occurs in the penultimate episode of the season. Here it is useful to return to the two major narrative threads that run through the season, Carol's pregnancy and Ross and Rachel's relationship. Significantly, the season does not attempt to conclude these two narrative threads within the same episode, but instead affords them an episode apiece.

The resolution to the first thread, Carol's pregnancy, occurs in the season's penultimate episode, 'The One with the Birth". This episode constructs a sense of closure, but also signals a way in which the narrative thread can continue to develop. In terms of closure, while the birth itself is a clear signal of the end of the narrative process which the season has followed, another source of closure comes in the seeming reconciliation of Ross and Susan. Throughout the season these two characters have been in conflict, from their clear disagreement on wanting to know the baby's gender, to a disagreement on baby names. Closure, or semi-closure, is signalled by their agreement on Ben as a name for the newborn baby boy. At the same time, however, the storyline is left open, or rather, re-opened by Ben's birth. The final scene of the episode represents an unusually extended stinger, shot from Ben's perspective as first Ross, and then the rest of the group, look down on and talk to Ben. Ross's lines focus on the future, that if he ever goes away he will always return. Following this monologue the faces of the rest of the group come into view as they make faces at, and talk about Ben. This sequence underlines the involvement of the entire group in Ben's future life, thus opening up the narrative to further development with Ben as a baby, and in later seasons, as a young child.

While the resolution of Carol's pregnancy storyline is an important source of closure and continuation within the season its position within the season structure mirrors its introduction in the second episode. It also suggests that the Ross/Rachel relationship has primacy within the season, as it was introduced in the pilot episode and concludes (somewhat) in the finale. The final episode itself hinges on Ross's absence and Chandler's inadvertent reveal to Rachel of Ross's feelings for her. Here Ross is absent for much of the episode, appearing only in the first few scenes and later in the final scene as he returns from China with new girlfriend Julie. This final scene, set in the airport where Rachel awaits Ross's return expecting to start a relationship with him, is left on a cliffhanger as the audience is given knowledge of Ross and Julie which is withheld from Rachel. The cliffhanger, then, is not whether or not Ross and Rachel will end up together, but what Rachel's reaction will be to Ross and Julie. It also instates a reversal, or the expectation of a reversal, for the second season as Rachel takes on the role that Ross has held throughout the first season. Significantly, the episode does not feature an end of episode stinger, but rather features the end credits playing over footage from the opening credits. This disrupts the usual function of the stinger as an epilogue of sorts, leaving the episode, and the season, in a state of uncertainty.

Cliff-hangers such as these are typical of *Friend's* season finales, excepting the second season which ends on more of a closed note after Monica breaks up with boyfriend Richard. Subsequent seasons end on more pronounced cliff-hangers in which mystery and suspense figure heavily. Season three, for example, presents Ross with a choice between two doors, each representing possible relationships with either Rachel or girlfriend Bonnie. The episode concludes as Ross enters one door, leaving the

audience to wonder whom he chose. While the final two episodes of season one form a *de facto* two-part finale of sorts, from season four onwards each finale is marked by a two-parter, beginning with "The One with Ross's Wedding". This ending marked a turning point in the structure of *Friends'* season finales as they became grander in scale, both in terms of production, but also in terms of narrative development and intensity. Filmed on location in London, the episode revolves around Ross's wedding to Emily, a character introduced in that season's 14th episode "The One with Joey's Dirty Day". The episode, and the season, conclude with a cliffhanger as Ross says the wrong name ("I take thee Rachel") at the alter, ending on a shot of Rachel's shocked face. From this point on, season finales were structured and framed as major narrative events within the wider show. The season five finale, for example, takes the friends out of New York and relocates them to Las Vegas, where Monica and Chandler's plans to elope are thwarted by their witnessing a drunken Ross and Rachel celebrate their own wedding. Subsequently season six concludes with Chandler's proposal to Monica, a rare case in later seasons of an episode not ending with a cliffhanger, though this is reinstated in season seven with the reveal of Rachel's pregnancy. The 8th and 9th seasons both also end on cliffhangers, though in both cases their causes are introduced late in the season and resolved almost immediately. In the first, Joey finds an engagement ring amongst Rachel's things and she mistakenly reads the moment as Joey proposing. The episode ends with her saying "yes", an event witnessed by Ross. The season nine finale, on the other hand, concludes with Joey and Rachel kissing. The relative haste with which these latter cliffhangers were both introduced and resolved suggests that, by later seasons, the

use of cliffhangers had become somewhat formulaic, with little in the way of narrative justification.

The final season of *Friends* is unusual in regards to the rest of the series. On the one hand it is truncated at only 18 episodes as compared to the standard 24 episodes per season for the previous nine seasons, however, on the other hand, it also features a number of double length episodes of 42 minutes each. These longer episodes coincide with particular moments in the narrative, most notably in the season premier and in the episode "The One with Phoebe's Wedding". The series finale itself is presented not as a double length episode, but as two separate episodes in the two part episode tradition. Self-referentially titled "The Last One" the episode revolves around two major events. In the first Chandler and Monica await the birth of their children (although they expect only one child) via surrogate, while in the other Ross races to the airport to convince Rachel to stay in New York rather than leave for a job in Paris. By the episode's end Rachel has chosen to stay in New York with Ross, the surrogate Erica has given birth to twins, and Monica and Chandler prepare to leave the apartment for a life in the suburbs. The episode ends with the friends together in Monica's apartment as they survey the now empty room and reflect on their time there. As they decide to head out for coffee, Chandler jokes "Sure, where?" as the camera pans around the room while the song "Embryonic Journey" by Jefferson Airplane plays.

This episode, and the events depicted, rely on an increased stress on serialised storytelling throughout the final season. The storyline involving Monica, Chandler and the surrogate mother Erica, is introduced early in the season in episode two, "The One Where Ross is Fine", and develops a plot line from as early as the end of season one,

that is, Monica's desire to have children. The other aspect of Chandler and Monica's move to the suburbs, is first introduced in the episode "The One Where Chandler Gets Caught" and developed in the episode "The One with Princess Consuela" as the friends come to terms with the move. Finally, Rachel's opportunity to move to Paris is also introduced fairly late on in the series in the same episode. Taken together all three events represent a deadline for the narrative of the season, and all coalesce in the finale creating a situation where the core situation, re-iterated in the final shot as the apartment, is removed.[36]

As suggested, self-reference is a key element of the *Friends* finale, most notably in the repetition of the "we were on a break" line during the emotional climax of the Ross/ Rachel storyline. Here Rachel appears before Ross having gotten off the plane and they share the following exchange:

> Rachel: I do love you.
> Ross: I love you, too, and I am never letting you go again.
> Rachel: Okay, because this is where I want to be. Okay, no more of this, I don't wanna mess this up again.
> Ross: Me either, okay, we are done being stupid.
> Rachel: It's you and me, all right, this is it? You and me, this is it.
> Ross : This is it. Unless we're on a break.
> [awkward pause]
> Ross: [to himself] Don't make jokes now...

As is evident from this exchange, the line is explicitly identified as a joke in the context of the scene, and this further marks it as a piece of self-referential humour and a recurring gag which has now reached the end of its use. Other aspects of self-reference include the dash to the airport by Ross and Phoebe, echoing the similar scene in the

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[36] This meets Grote's formula, but again Grote's formula misses the subtleties of closure running throughout the series as a whole.

season one finale in which Rachel is the one to rush to the airport for Ross. Similarly, in a call back to the first season Chandler and Joey are forced to dismantle the foosball table when the chick and duck Joey had purchased for Monica and Chandler get trapped inside (the chick and duck are themselves a reference to earlier pets owned by Joey and Chandler). Finding themselves unable to destroy the table due to their sentimental attachment to it, they ask Monica to do it, which she gleefully does. This scene represents a fairly complex callback to "The One with the Dozen Lasagnes", from the acknowledgment of the sentimental connection to the table and the roots of this in their shared past, to Monica's aggressive attitude toward the table. Such self-references, linking back explicitly to the first season, give an impression of circularity to the narrative, of a return to the beginning via running and recurring jokes. Again this demonstrates the complex ways in which the constituents of humour, in this case an extremely long-running gag, intersect with the narrative to impose a sense of cohesion and structure onto the show's narrative, in this case binding the show's ten seasons together within one overarching design. As such there is a real sense of an ending here in terms of the function of endings as discussed in Chapters Two and Three. However, as my analysis has demonstrated, this sense of an overall ending comes as a result of a complex layering of intra-narrative endings throughout the 10 season history of the *Friends* as a whole.

Conclusion

The sitcom has traditionally been defined as problematic in relation to two areas. Firstly in the relationship between humour and narrative, and secondly in the relationship between the narrative architecture of the sitcom and the concept of endings. This chapter has sought to explore these two issues and to shift an understanding of them by exploring them in relation to the concept of intra-narrative endings. As I have shown, rather than be defined as being in opposition to the concept of an ending, the sitcom is in fact defined by an excess of endings across various levels. Endings and their functionality provide key points of structure, cohesion, and meaning throughout the sitcom. While the architecture laid out by Marc (1989) may hold true for many sitcoms at an episodic level (including *Friends)*, an approach like Grote's, which focusses only on terminus based endings, obscures the fact that the functionality of endings can be demonstrated *across* the sitcom, from micro-scale endings such as individual jokes and gags, to macro-scale endings such as those found at the end of episodes, seasons, and series.

Furthermore, this chapter has demonstrated that far from being separate entities, the constituents of humour, such as jokes and gags, are closely related to narrative structure in the sitcom. In fact these two elements intersect to create the narrative structure of sitcoms like *Friends.* As my analysis of that show demonstrates, running gags, with their intra-narrative punchline structures, provide key structural elements that bind a sitcom together as a cohesive narrative. As such, shifting the concept of endings from a terminus based one, and relocating endings to various points within the sitcom text,

allows for a re-reading of sitcom narrative structure, one which re-addresses the two

problematic areas of sitcom narrative study.

Chapter Six
Sport Opera: Endings in Sports Television

Introduction

> Here comes Hurst, he's got… Some people are on the pitch! They think it's
> all over! It is now, it's four!
>
> (Wolstenhome, 1966)

This statement, spoken by football commentator Kenneth Wolstenhome during the

closing moments of the 1966 FIFA World Cup Final between England and Germany, is

perhaps one of the most famous endings in the history of televised sports. There are two

narratives at work here. The first concerns the narrative taking place on the pitch, a

narrative of sporting competition unfolding over 90-plus minutes as two teams compete

against each other at the climax of a fortnight long competition to determine the winner

of the FIFA World Cup. This narrative has its own structure, one determined by the rules

of the game which impose a set narrative trajectory. However, this narrative, on its own,

is fairly banal, a 90 minute game (plus extra time), split into two equal halves, in which

two teams strive to score more goals than their opponents. Yet any fan of football will

argue that the sport is far from banal. This is because, as illustrated by Wolstenhome's

excitable commentary, there is another narrative taking place, this one unfolding in the

commentary box, and in the imaginations of the viewers watching at home. This

narrative is more heightened, it is a narrative of titanic struggle, one that pits two old

sporting foes against each other in a contest for supremacy. It is a narrative of national

pride and prowess, one in which the home team (in this case England) competes not

only for individual glory, but for the glory of the nation. Wolstenhome is both describing the action as he witnesses it, note how his flow is distracted by the fans storming the pitch, but at the same time he is crafting a story, one which will be remembered to this day and which will go on to become synonymous with English sporting history via constant references and parodies (it will even, in 1995, become the name of a BBC comedy panel game). In short, what Wolstenhome's commentary presents us with, is 'sports opera.'

The suffix "opera" is familiar to us through its use to describe various narrative forms, perhaps most notably soap opera and space opera. As Robert Allen (1985, 8) notes, the term soap opera originally associated the form to its sponsors, soap manufacturers, however the term also has a derisive ring to it. As Allen suggests, the terms soap and opera signify a deliberate contrast, between the highest and lowest forms of culture. This contrast, however, is also indicative of the kinds of stories contained within the form. As Allen notes, opera is concerned with myths and legends, larger than life figures in extreme situations, while soap, on the other hand, is mundane, an everyday household substance used for the simple act of cleaning. In combining the two words Soap Opera presents us with the mundane writ large and lent almost mythic proportions. Space opera is similar, couching theoretical concepts such as faster than light travel and the search for extraterrestrial life, concepts thought up in the mundane surroundings of laboratories and lecture theatres, in mythic stories of brave knights battling evil empires in the depths of a galaxy far, far away.

Sport Opera, then, is an appropriate name for what occurs when the relative mundanity of professional sport (what could be more mundane than sporting prowess

achieved through years and years of repetitive training?) with the mythic storytelling potential of television.[37] Nowhere is this clearer than in the subject of this chapter, The Olympic Games, whose very name represents an overt attempt to link human sportsmanship with the subjects of ancient myth and legend. Specifically, this chapter is concerned with one Olympics in particular, the 2012 London Games, which have much in common with the 1966 FIFA World Cup. Both represent 'home' games for British television audiences, and just as the 1966 World Cup came to represent a kind of national (if largely English) narrative, so too did the 2012 Olympics seek to spin a new narrative of national pride and achievement.

Even in a television landscape saturated with sports coverage, The Olympic Games stands out as a particular television event. This was particularly the case in 2012, where the Olympics dominated British television in a way that few other broadcast events do. Prior to the Games, the BBC boasted that it was committed to screening each and every moment of the action across a complex range of formats, including television, radio, the internet, and on smartphones. Such a commitment was revealing. This was not, the BBC seemed to suggest, something that the British people would want to miss. As this commitment suggests, the 2012 Games were a major event in British culture, and across the 5000 hours of coverage that the BBC boasted of airing, a vast and multi-layered narrative unfolded over the course of 19 days (25 July - 12 August.)

This vast narrative consisted of a number of interweaving threads which varied in size and focus. One the one hand the Games themselves presented an international narrative of sporting competition (a sport opera), something foregrounded in the Parade

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37 Barbara O'Connor and Raymond Boyle (1993) have also drawn a comparison between sports coverage and soap opera, describing sport as a "male soap opera".

of Nations which took up a large part of the opening ceremony. As the ceremony also made clear, however, there was also a major narrative of national identity. Danny Boyle's "Isle of Wonder" ceremony featured tributes to British popular culture, history, and institutions like the BBC and the NHS. This nationalist narrative was a particular focus of the BBC's coverage, with Team GB featuring heavily. At the same time, the BBC's coverage also offered a competing narrative of the BBC itself, and its reputation as a broadcaster of large-scale outside events. Finally, amongst all of these ur-narratives, were the narratives of individual sporting accomplishment, discrete episodes within the unfolding sport opera of the Olympics, which focussed on individuals such as British pentathlete Jessica Ennis, Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt, and US swimmer Michael Phelps. This last category is the primary focus of this chapter.

As the above suggests, the narrative of the 2012 Olympics was vast, multi-layered, and unwieldy. Despite the BBC's commitment to broadcasting every minute of the games, it was impossible to watch it all. As such, this chapter is interested in how the games were structured by the BBC's coverage via a range of individual narratives, and particularly how a sense of an ending was constructed within a specific moment of 'liveness'. To this end, this chapter looks at two individuals in particular, the track cyclists Chris Hoy and Victoria Pendleton. Focussing on these two figures is useful for a number of reasons. First, the individual narratives constructed by the BBC coverage around these two figures both culminated in the final events in their careers. It was known beforehand that Pendleton's race would be her last, while speculation was rife that Hoy would also retire after competing. Thus these two events both offer up a useful example of endings within wider sporting narratives, both in terms of the Games

themselves, but also in terms of the wider careers of each cyclist. Relatedly, both individuals were also significant and celebrated figures in British cycling, as such, their respective endings were framed by the BBC's coverage in terms of a wider nationalistic narrative, to a greater degree than those of other British athletes such as fellow cyclist Laura Trott, a relative newcomer. In contrast Hoy and Pendleton's national narratives possessed a certain degree of historical weight based on their past successes, and the full extent of this was brought to bear on their individual narratives by the BBC in its coverage of their final events. Finally, each individual also offers a useful contrast in the way the BBC structured its narratives in terms of victory and (perceived) failure, Hoy winning Gold in his event, and Pendleton taking Silver.

This chapter situates the final events of Hoy and Pendleton's competition as intra-narrative endings within the wider narrative of the 2012 Games itself. As such, I consider the individuals in terms of the various layers that made up the ur-narrative of the Games, from the national narratives of British sporting prowess, to the individual narratives of Hoy and Pendleton themselves. In this sense, Hoy and Pendleton's narratives can be considered discrete storylines within the larger sport opera of the 2012 Olympic Games, storylines which reach moments of structure, cohesion, and meaning which are, in turn, constructed by the various layers of the BBC's Olympic coverage. At the same time, my analysis is centred on a specific moment of liveness within the wider BBC coverage, with a particular focus on the final events of both cyclists as they occurred. As such, my analysis focusses on the various ways in which the BBC's coverage of the Games constructed the sense of an ending *as the events unfolded.*

I begin this chapter by exploring the complexity of this coverage, focussing in particular on the complex set of relationships which existed between the BBC and the OBS (Olympic Broadcasting Commission), a set of relationships which determined the level of control allowed to the BBC over the Games. From here I go on to provide an overview of the BBC's coverage itself, focussing specifically on the branching structure employed by the broadcaster across its various venues. Having unpacked the complexities of the BBC's coverage, I then move on to consider the importance of media templates and sporting 'stars' in the construction of televised sports. Finally I move on to my case studies, exploring the various ways in which the BBC's coverage constructed a multi-layered narrative around the final events of Chris Hoy and Victoria Pendleton's Olympic careers.

The Olympics and the BBC

As Britain's primary public service broadcaster, the BBC has consistently been awarded the exclusive rights to broadcast the Olympic Games in Britain.[38] The 2012 games were of particular significance for the BBC, not only did they come at a time where the corporation's commitment to sport was being challenged, having lost, or given up, the rights to broadcast major events such as Formula 1, but the Games also came at a time when the wider reputation of the BBC was under scrutiny following the so-called "Sachsgate" scandal, as well as its widely criticised coverage of the Diamond

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38 At the time of writing it was announced that the BBC had lost the rights to broadcast the Olympics from 2022 onwards to rival broadcaster EuroSport, though the possibility remains that Discovery, EuroSport's parent company, may lease some of the rights back to the BBC. (BBC News Online, 2015)

Jubilee celebrations.[39] This last controversy was particularly significant because it called into question something which the BBC had built its reputation on, namely its capacity for staging large outside broadcasts (see Scannell and Cardiff (1987) for an account of the significance of outside broadcasts to the BBC's early reputation). At the same time another major point of significance was the fact that the 2012 Olympics represented a home games, with the Games returning to Britain for the first time since 1948. Thus the status of the BBC as a national institution was inextricably bound up with the success or failure of their coverage of this hugely significant national and international event. As such, there was a sense that the 2012 Olympics were a chance for the BBC to reclaim its reputation as a broadcaster, something which was reflected in the corporation's commitment to broadcast each and every moment of the Games across a range of platforms.

However, the specificities of Olympic broadcasting meant that the BBC was unable to directly cover the games itself, instead having to enter into a complex partnership with the Olympic Broadcasting Service (OBS). Created in 2001 by the IOC (International Olympic Committee), the OBS was set up to fulfil the role of host broadcaster for every subsequent Olympics, Winter Olympics and Youth Olympics, with the stated goal of providing unbiased, "multilateral" coverage of every Olympic event (OBS, 2012). What this means in practice is that the OBS is in charge of providing all video and natural sound feeds of Olympic events, which are then broadcast through

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39 The so called "Sachsgate" scandal revolved around a phonecall and subsequent answer phone message made live on radio by British media personalities Russell Brand and Jonathan Ross to Andrew Sachs in which Brand made a series of lewd comments about Sachs' granddaughter Georgina Baillie. This event caused significant controversy for the BBC and led to the suspicion of Ross and Brand, a BBC Trust Ruling, and reaction from politicians. The Diamond Jubilee celebrations were also harshly criticised, drawing 4,500 complaints from viewers. (Dowell, 2012)

ITVR (International TV and Radio) signals, or "World Feed". This World Feed is intended to avoid the kind of national bias that might be expected of national broadcasters, with a commitment to avoid concentrating on any one athlete or country at the expense of others. In addition, the OBS is also in charge of developing and maintaining a distinctive and consistent look for the World Feed, including graphical overlays (for results, standings, and so on), as well as for ensuring a robust infrastructure and adequate facilities for national broadcasting teams (such as media centres, commentary boxes, and so on).

As a Right's Holding Broadcaster (RHB) the BBC necessarily entered into a partnership with the OBS whereby it was provided with access to the World Feed, which in turn provided the 'base' of the BBC's coverage. Due to the hybrid institutional nature of Olympic broadcasting, the BBC's role in broadcasting the Olympics was effectively limited to that of framing and mediating the games. As such, the BBC's ability to craft narratives around the games was hampered by a lack of control over what footage was actually captured. This led to a certain degree of tonal dissonance as the OBS's stated commitment to objectivity competed against the BBC's desire to showcase British talent and the progress of Team GB. While, in general, the World Feed sought to focus on a range of athletes, in some cases, such as the Gymnastics (in which several events took place simultaneously) commentators seeking to focus on British athletes were forced to describe events taking place offscreen, as the camera feed instead focussed on athletes of other nations.

The BBC's coverage can thus be defined as a continual process of negotiation between the OBS and the BBC, as the BBC continually strove to impose its own

distinctive presentation onto the games and to construct its own complex set of narratives focussing on individual (British) athletes and themes of national pride and success. The coverage was comprehensive and near constant. In addition to the coverage on the flagship channels (BBC One and Two), the BBC also extended the air-time of its digital channel BBC Three to allow it to broadcast Olympics coverage during the day (typically BBC Three does not begin broadcasting until 7pm). Similarly, BBC Parliament was temporarily suspended for the duration of the Games to make way for a digital channel specifically intended to broadcast Olympic coverage. In addition to this coverage (available to all viewers with a Freeview signal) the BBC also broadcast Olympics coverage over 24 separate channels made available to cable and satellite subscribers, or to stream online. This online coverage made up much of the BBC's commitment to broadcasting every event of the Games. Online availability was four times greater than that of the Beijing Games in 2008, and online coverage was available across a range of platforms, from the BBC Sport website to a dedicated BBC Olympics app for tablets and smart-phones.

As well as being comprehensive, the BBC's coverage of the Games was also highly structured. Despite the variation in sports and their different requirements in terms of coverage, the structure of the BBC's TV coverage remained fairly rigid throughout. The following schedule gives a good illustration of this:

09:00-midnight - Every Olympic sport from every venue through up to 24 simultaneous, HD-quality, live Olympic streams on the BBC Sport website. 24 channels are also available to cable and satellite viewers through the BBC Red Button.

06:00-09:00 - Olympic Breakfast, BBC One/BBC One HD. A combination of Hazel Irvine and Bill Turnbull or Chris Hollins and Sian Williams start the morning with a look at the main stories from the day before and the expected highlights of the day ahead, also incorporating national and regional news and weather.

09:00-11:30 - Olympics 2012, BBC One/BBC One HD. Mishal Husain brings the first of the day's live action from the athletics, rowing and swimming heats. Venue presentation from Matt Baker, Clare Balding, Jonathan Edwards, Jake Humphrey and John Inverdale.

09:00-19:00 - Olympics 2012, BBC Three. Manish Bhasin, Rishi Persad or Sonali Shah will complement BBC One with some of the best action on offer from the 26 sports at the Games.

11:30-13:45 - Olympics 2012, BBC One/BBC One HD. Live action continues into the afternoon with Matt Baker, Clare Balding or Hazel Irvine. The focus remains on athletics, rowing and swimming heats plus other events including the men's triathlon. Coverage switches to BBC Two 13:00-13:45.

13:45-16:00 - Olympics 2012, BBC One/BBC One HD. Clare Balding, Jake Humphrey or Hazel Irvine take up the baton, focusing on the conclusion of events such as the cycling road races, tennis finals, equestrian and diving.

16:00-19:00 - Olympics 2012, BBC One/BBC One HD. Sue Barker brings us action from the track cycling, gymnastics, tennis and equestrian events. Coverage switches to BBC Two 18:00-19:00.

19:00-22:35 - Olympics 2012, BBC One/BBC One HD. Gary Lineker takes us through the evening and into the night with action including athletics and swimming finals. Coverage switches to BBC Two 22:00-22:35.

19:00-23:00 - Olympics 2012, BBC Three. Jake Humphrey presents the best of the live action from the football, hockey, boxing and basketball.

22:40-midnight - Olympics Tonight, BBC One/BBC One HD. Gabby Logan, in the company of star guests from the world of sport and beyond, focuses on the

stories and personalities that have dominated the day and looks at the sport still in progress.

00:15-01:00 - Olympic Sportsday, BBC One/BBC One HD. Dan Walker rounds up the main stories from the day's action.

(BBC Sport Online, 2012)

An analysis of this day-to-day structure is highly useful in terms of revealing the myriad ways made available to, and by, the BBC in terms of how it set about narrativising the games. As the above schedule illustrates, the BBC's coverage of the games was structured around a series of studio based 'hub' programmes. These were closely identified with a primary presenter, though some hubs, such as the ones which aired around midday, would often have a number of alternating presenters. Thus, although the BBC was committed to almost continuous coverage of the Games, its coverage was in fact rigidly segmented throughout the day, with clear breaks delineating different parts of the coverage. In addition to segmenting the day's coverage these hub programmes performed a dual role. At one level they were discreet programmes unto themselves, featuring presenter led content, including previews of upcoming events, post-event analysis, interviews with athletes, and myriad others (see below). However their primary function was to act as 'gateways' to the main content of the BBC's coverage, the events themselves.

These events were themselves framed by venue based coverage which was also strongly tied to particular presenters. In these segments effort was made to match presenters to specific events, for example, Matt Baker, a former children's TV presenter with a background in gymnastics, was selected to present the gymnastic events. Here we see an effort to attach both vocationally and televisually trained presenter to the events,

in an effort to lend the coverage a certain air of authority (Bennet, 2010). In turn the events themselves were presented with commentary, as well as action replays and other technological innovations such as a so-called 'bullet time' effect whereby action was arrested in order to be analysed from multiple angles.

The BBC coverage can thus be visualised as a branching structure with the studio based hubs at the centre with the other segments radiating out from them. The BBC coverage would typically begin in the hub, before giving way to venue based coverage which in turns gave way to the events themselves. At the same time, the movement of the coverage within this structure was also cyclical, with the coverage always inevitably returning to the central studio hub. To illustrate: during the coverage of the swimming events, the coverage began in the studio hub with Gary Lineker introducing the event. The coverage then branched off to the swimming venue where Clare Balding introduced and framed the event itself. The coverage then switched to the actual event, which was shown plainly via footage captured by the OBS with BBC commentary overlaid on top. Following the event, coverage then returned to Balding in the venue, where she, and any guests, discussed the event that had just taken place. This structure was repeated for however many events took place in that venue at the time (swimming events typically consisting of a number of daily short events competed in succession). Once all events had taken place, the coverage then returned to Lineker in the studio. However, during the swimming event the coverage might return to Linker at any time in order for him to introduce another, separate event, whereby the venue/event structure is repeated.

Again, this coverage was defined by a negotiation between the coverage of the OBS and that of the BBC. As such, each segment can be defined in terms of spheres of

control similar to that discussed in Chapter Three in relation to contingency and television's sphere of control. In this case, the relationship between the OBS and the BBC can be described in terms of institutional contingency, in which the institution of the OBS presented an obstacle to the control of the BBC. For example, both the studio based hubs and the venue based segments were explicitly within the control of the BBC, however any actual footage of athletes competing was within the control of the OBS. However, the BBC was still able to exert an influence over footage of the events due to the presence of BBC commentators. These commentators, an expected part of any sporting event, fulfilled a particularly crucial role during the BBC's coverage of the 2012 Games by providing continuity between the BBC and OBS footage, as presenters would 'hand over' to the commentators, often referring to them explicitly by name. In certain cases presenters fulfilled a dual role as both presenter and commentator, as was the case, again, with Matt Baker. Thus, while cases of dissonance, such as those described above, were frequent, the BBC exerted an effort into giving the illusion of fluidity between the two different types of coverage. In a sense, this effort to control the footage of the OBS is comparable to the efforts expended by television to control contingent events. Whilst television can typically exert very little control over a live sporting event, in this case the BBC's control over the events was further limited by the fact that the broadcaster had no direct control over what was shot and how it was shot. Yet even here we can see that the BBC sought to exert control over the events.

While this general structure gives an idea of the flow of the BBC's coverage of the games, it is worth exploring each segment in detail in order to further break down the myriad ways in which the BBC constructed a series of narratives, both an overall

narrative of the Games themselves, (including strong nationalistic themes), as well as a huge number of individual narratives focussed on particular athletes or 'stars'. The following analysis is thus intended to provide a thorough illustration of the narrative structure of the BBC's 2012 Olympics coverage as a grounding for my analysis of how the coverage constructed the sense of an ending during the cycling events involving Chris Hoy and Victoria Pendleton. Such a detailed analysis is essential both due to the relatively under-examined nature of narrative architecture in sports coverage, as well as in order to provide the detail needed for my analysis of the events themselves.

Studio Based Hubs

The studio based segments formed the centre of the BBC coverage, providing a gateway to all other aspects, including the sporting events themselves. The studio based hubs were themselves partitioned into discreet segments of airtime, each one closely linked to a specific presenter, or team of presenters as in the case of the daytime coverage. There were two main studios used by the BBC, and their positioning and proximity to the Games were illustrative of the function of the hubs themselves. The first studio, primarily used throughout the daytime coverage, was located at the centre of the Olympic Park, with the backdrop providing a view of many of the venues, including, prominently, the Olympic Stadium. Presenters would use this view to point out specific locations within the park, continually underlining the central and privileged position of the studio. This positioning also underlined the function of this first studio as a multi-purpose space within the coverage of the Games, a more general space which

then gave way to more specific spaces, such as the venue based studios and the events themselves.

The second studio was located within the Olympic Stadium. Generally used in the evenings or when a particular event was underway in the stadium (such as athletics events like the 100m Sprint or Heptathlon), this second studio retained much of the first's generality, whilst also adding a degree of specificity. This space, and the view of the park visible through the window which provided the backdrop, brought the coverage closer to the actual sporting action. Crucially however, as a self-enclosed space, it differed significantly from the more open, more proximal spaces of the venue based studios. While close to the action in the sense that it was located within the Olympic Stadium, this second studio remained crucially separated from the events unfolding on the track below. As such it was able to continue to act as a gateway to more specific spaces within the coverage. Sound was key to this sense of proximity yet separation. As the gateway hubs gave way to the more specific, proximal spaces, the sounds of the crowd gradually increased, culminating in the noise of the events themselves. Venue based studios also featured significant crowd noise, but remained somewhat separate due both to their location within the venues (typically towards the back, often partitioned off from the rest of the crowd) and the use of microphones by presenters. Still, even here presenters often were forced to raise their voices to be heard over the sounds of the crowd, creating a significant sense of being part of the action. The second studio on the other hand was almost entirely devoid of crowd noise, despite its location within the stadium. As such, the degree of noise that could be heard in a given space

signified its proximal location to the Olympic action, even if this proximity was somewhat symbolic.

As multi-purpose spaces within the BBC's coverage, the studio based hubs fulfilled a number of roles, including:

- To camera framing and contextualising: in which the presenter addressed the audience directly on a range of topics. For example, the presenter might introduce a different segment, tell the viewer what was coming up later in the day, or review the progress of athletes (in particular those of Team GB) thus far.

- Athlete Interviews: typically retrospective in nature, featuring predominantly British athletes talking about their successes, though sometimes other athletes were included i.e. those who missed out on a medal or those of different nationalities.

- Punditry: whereby special guests were interviewed on the events of the day, the prospects of particular athletes, the progress of "Team GB", and so on. A large component of Gabby Logan's hub programme which involved the use of celebrities, which can also be included in this category.

- Pre-Recorded Segments: these were often highly stylised short films based around individual athletes and historical events. For example, a much repeated short film concerned human rights issues in past Olympics, highlighting the Black Power salute during the 1968 Olympics. Other segments served to contextualise individual athletes, for example one short film summarised Jess Ennis's career to that point and framed her as Team GB's great hope for athletics gold.

Venue Based, Presenter Led Coverage

The venue based coverage formed something of a middle ground between the more general space of the studio and the perceived proximity of the events coverage itself. These segments differed from venue to venue, but in general featured miniature studios located within the venues themselves. The mini-studios were much more open to the surroundings of the venue, to the point where presenters were forced to raise their voice to be heard over the noise of the crowd. Again, these were a mixture of vocationally and televisually trained presenters (Bennett, 2010). The aforementioned Matt Baker is a case in point, as was the use of Steve Redgrave to present the coverage of the rowing. Even in cases where specific athletes were unavailable, more generalised presenters were joined by experts in the sport. For example, Mark Cavendish and Jamie Staff, current and former cyclists respectively, joined Jake Humphrey for coverage of the track cycling events. This matching of an experienced presenter with a sporting expert was, in general, the pattern for the whole of the coverage. In this sense the venue based coverage sought to suggest proximity not only physically, but also in terms of specific knowledge. This can, again, be contrasted with the more general function of the hub spaces, where figures such as Sue Barker, Gabby Logan and Gary Linker served as presenters. While all experienced former athletes in their own right (in tennis, gymnastics and football respectively) these presenters rarely exhibited, or were called on to exhibit, the degree of specific knowledge that could be evidenced in the venue based coverage.

The venue based coverage served mainly to carry on the work done in the studio based hubs, though again at a more specific level. Venue side presenters continued to frame and contextualise the events, going over details of past competitions and

identifying specific competitors for viewers to watch out for. For example, much of the

pool side discussion during the Men's Swimming events centred around the US

swimmer Michael Phelps, the reigning Olympic Champion. Similarly the venue based

studios also served as spaces for punditry and interviews. The aforementioned expert

presenters were, in their own way, pundits, with a high degree of knowledge about the

events they were discussing. While the proximity of the venue based studios to the

events, both spatially and temporally, did not allow for the kinds of interviews with

athletes conducted in the hubs, other figures were brought into these spaces to provide

their opinions on events. For example Claire Balding interviewed Bert Le Clos, father

of South African swimmer Chad Le Clos, after his son's surprise victory over Michael

Phelps (Bert became something of a focus on the swimming coverage due to his

emotional reaction to his son's victory). Yet while the venue based studios themselves

could not allow for interviews of the kind found in the studio based hubs, another aspect

of the venue based coverage consisted of floor based interviewers, who often questioned

athletes seconds after they had competed. While the studio based interviews were

typically more considered, having taken place some time after the events in question,

the venue based interviews were far more immediate. These interviews were often far

more emotional than those of the studio based segments, with competitors asked to

comment on their success or failure in the moment. This sense of immediacy was

underlined by the fact that these segments were shot using handheld cameras.

Interestingly these segments were firmly within the control of the BBC, constituting the

only event based coverage not controlled by the OBS. As such there was a sense of

privileged access, with the BBC able to exert some degree of control over the aftermath

of events via their interviewers. In these cases the kinds of questions asked could seek

to direct or engage with a particular narrative. For example, following her gold medal

win in the Heptathlon, the BBC interviewer frames Jessica Ennis's victory in terms of a

triumph over adversity following an earlier injury.

The Event Itself (Commentary and Graphics)

While the studio based hubs provided the centre of the BBC's coverage, they, along

with the venue based coverage, were ultimately subservient to the focus on the Games,

the sporting events themselves. Yet this illustrates the problematic nature of the complex

institutional context of the Games. While the events themselves were the focus, they

were also the one aspect of the coverage that the BBC had very little control over, not

only in terms of the outcome of the events, but also in terms of what coverage was

captured. I have already discussed how the disparity between the OBS and BBC

coverage sometimes affected the BBC's intended narrative (particularly in terms of a

desire to focus on British athletes). The OBS's control over the coverage of the events

left the BBC with only two ways in which to narrativise the events themselves, through

commentary and onscreen graphics.

Commentary is a familiar, and expected part of televised sports coverage. Seemingly

a holdover from radio commentary, it has managed to retain its centrality as an integral

part of any televised sporting event. A series of studies undertaken by Jennings Bryant,

Dan Brown, Paul W. Comisky, and Dolf Zillmann (1982) demonstrate that sports

commentary is not merely descriptive, but in fact works to dramatise the event. Using

American Football as their template, the researchers sorted the sentences used by commentators into four categories: descriptive, dramatic, derogatory and humorous. Analysing American Football coverage across different US networks they found that the instances of dramatic utterances far outweighed the rest. These dramatic utterances typically set up rivalries between players. The researchers suggest a correlation between this and viewer enjoyment of the sport, arguing that the greatest enjoyment for spectators occurs when "opponents are perceived as hated foes, rather than as good friends or as neutral opponents" (117). Significantly, they also suggest that sports commentators embellish play, encouraging spectators to see fierce competition where it does not necessarily exist. Stephanie Marriott (1996) has also discussed the function of sports commentary in terms of subjectivity and narrativisation. She argues that, in addition to "exterior", "objective" reporting, commentators often produce "interior" or "subjective" statements (terms she borrows from Morris and Nydahl, 1985: 107) in which they speculate on the outcome of the event and the thoughts and feelings of individual sporting individuals. In this sense commentators are narrating, rather than reporting, inventing speculative statements which are not necessarily visible to the viewer onscreen.

Pre/Post-Games Programmes and Cross Coverage Elements

These three elements (studio, venue and event) are not the limit of the BBC's coverage, which extended beyond the temporal dimensions of the Games themselves. The BBC's coverage began at six am with a programme entitled "Olympic Breakfast", which co-opted the format of the regular BBC One Breakfast show, including its regular

presenters Bill Turnbull, Chris Hollins and Sian Williams. This show was explicitly Olympics focussed, but also retained certain elements of the regular show, including national and regional news and weather. Similarly, the day's coverage concluded with two programmes, "Olympics Tonight" and "Olympic Sportsday". This first was created and produced specifically for the 2012 Olympics, though it aired at 22:40, immediately following the conclusion of most of the day's events. Presented by Gabby Logan the programme took a somewhat lighthearted look at the day's events, featuring guest stars and discussion of the "stories and personalities that have dominated the day" (BBC Sport, 2012). "Olympic Sportsday" on the other hand was another example of a regularly scheduled programme being co-opted for the Olympics. In this case "Sportsday" is a short, usually half-hour long programme which provides an overview of the day's sporting events. Usually this programme airs on the BBC News channel, here, however, it was moved over to BBC One in order to round off the day's Olympic coverage.

This co-opting of programming extended beyond the specifically Olympics focussed coverage, extending into a number of BBC programmes and thus creating a sense of dominance of the Games over the full output of the BBC. For example, though the Games coverage temporarily moved to BBC Two to make way for the news, the lead stories in the news were typically Olympics focussed, often providing summaries of events which had ended only moments before. As I discussed in Chapter Four, the Olympics even found its way into the BBC's fictional programming, perhaps most notably in the case of *EastEnders* in which one episode featured a live segment featuring the character Billy Mitchell carrying the Olympic torch through Albert Square.

As the above overview demonstrates, the BBC's coverage of the 2012 London Olympic Games was multi-faceted and complex. This complexity in turn provided the BBC with myriad strategies of narrativisation across the full range of its broadcast output. The following analysis goes on to analyse the different ways in which the BBC's coverage sought to create the sense of an ending in terms of the specific narratives of Chris Hoy and Victoria Pendleton, paying attention to how these narratives were developed across the full range of the BBC's coverage.

Sporting Stars and Narrative Construction

As Gary Whannel (1999) argues, sporting narratives focus on individuals, crafting them into the image of the sports star. The sports star in turn fulfils the role of hero within the narrative. This relationship between star and narrative is reciprocal, as Whannel puts it "If stars are the central figures of sport representation, it is only through transforming their doings into the form of stories that they come to signify (250)." These narratives are partly directed by the star themselves, though the construction largely happens in the media. While television has a particularly strong role to play in the construction of sports narrative, it is important to recognise that these narratives are the complex creations of wider cultural forces. Coverage in the press and the dissemination of this through gossip (particularly, now, online) are important factors in the development of the star persona. The development of sports narratives are couched in the interplay between magic moments and golden memories. Whannel lists the following: England's winning goal in the 1966 World Cup, Sebastian Coe winning gold

medal at Moscow, Ali knocking out Foreman in 1974, and so on. These moments are instantaneous at the moment of happening, but, as Whannel puts it, "immortal in the space of memory - constantly retold, reprinted and re-screened." This interplay between moment and memory is central to the construction of sporting narrative.

Such narratives are part of a wider cultural force, one disseminated through different means, in the process becoming part of the cultural capital for sports, particularly and historically, as Whannel argues, for men. These wider cultural aspects are couched in media templates. These templates are used to contextualise, explain, and make sense of the star persona. A media template, for Jenny Kitzinger (2000), is defined by its "lack of innovation, status as received wisdom and by their closure". They are key historical events which are later used retrospectively to frame and make sense of a later event, explaining current events by way of comparison. Crucially, for Kitzinger, these comparisons are closed, limited to a single primary meaning rather than allowing for multiple interpretations. In this case the original template is taken as received wisdom insulated from reinterpretation. For Kitzinger the implications of the use of media templates are that the media may blur details and obscure contradictory details and facts that might not fit within a given template. For Kitzinger the use of media templates is typically retrospective, however, Hoskins and O'Loughlin (2013) argue that the contemporary media environment allows for these templates to work in a much more dynamic way. As they argue, "Media professionals - and increasingly amateurs - edit, remix and reconstitute news events iteratively on an ongoing basis. (94)" In this sense, events are remediated and retranslated continually through different media forms, this in turn shaping the media templates themselves over time.

Sports narratives, particularly those centred on individuals, can be read as media templates. On the one hand there are a set number of sporting templates which are simply updated for new stars. For example, Whannel (1999) draws comparisons between the narratives of "new laddism" and older discourses of masculinity in sport. On the other hand, however, certain sports narratives are continually evolving. The 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, for example, featured a number of new events in which female athletes could compete (such as Women's Ski Jumping). As such, older narrative templates around masculinity were being challenged and updated in response to a new status quo within the sport itself. Television fulfils a special role within developing sporting narratives owing to its temporal proximity to the events which form the centre of sporting narratives. This is because television is uniquely able to visualise the heroic figure of the sports star, fully embodying those magic moments. While Hoskins and O'Laughlin (2013) argue that media templates now happen alongside developing narratives, in terms of sporting narratives much of the narrative material continues to happen speculatively or retrospectively, radiating out from those magic moments into the realm of golden memory. Television is able to visualise the event itself, the moments of particular narrative intensity and through its various narrative strategies, construct narratives of sporting heroism in real time.

Star Narratives: Chris Hoy and Victoria Pendleton

In the scale of the BBC coverage, Chris Hoy and Victoria Pendleton were notable figures for a number of reasons. Both are veteran British cyclists with previous Olympic success (as well as elsewhere). In this sense their seniority defined them as ambassadors of British Sport at the 2012 Olympics (this was particularly true of Hoy who was flag bearer during the opening ceremony). Their respective events were also heavily hyped as being their last, either in terms of the Olympics, or in the case of Pendleton, her career (there was also significant speculation that Hoy would also retire following his race). In addition their events were held close together, in the same venue at alternating times so they also offer a useful, sustained analysis of the BBC's coverage.

In many ways their events were discrete episodes within the larger sport opera of the 2012 Olympics, and my analysis reads them as such, focussing in particular on the climax of the events as intra-narrative endings within the wider Olympic narrative crafted by the BBC. The two events which I base my analysis around are the Women's Sprint Final and the Men's Keirin Final, the final events for both Victoria Pendleton and Chris Hoy respectively. The two events are very different in terms of structure, and these differences are central to the narratives constructed around them. The following descriptions of each event are from the BBC Sport website set up especially for the 2012 Olympics:

Sprint Competition Format

> The sprint is a race between two riders over three laps of the track.
> The two riders start side by side, and on the starting signal set off, usually
> very slowly, before building up to a full-on sprint finish. It is an extremely
> tactical event, with some riders not wanting to be in the front for the full
> race, which is why they may slow down and use the full width of the track.

The event starts with a 200m time trial to determine the rankings for the 16 riders in the first round. From then on the competition is a knockout, going to quarter-finals, semi-finals and the final, which are all the best of three heats. (BBC, 2012)

Keirin Competition Format

The race is conducted over eight laps of the track. Riders compete in a sprint after following a motorised pacer who leaves the track just over 600 metres before the finish.
Riders line up along the start line, their positions drawn by lot. The motorbike approaches on the inside lane and as it passes the start line, the rider on the inside must take up position behind the derny unless another rider takes the position first.
The motorbike crosses the start line at a pace of 30km/h (25km/h in the women's race) and achieves a maximum speed of 50km/h (45km/h in the women's race), with the riders pacing behind.
With 2.5 laps of the track left to go the pacer pulls off and the riders sprint for the finish. The first rider to cross the line is the winner.
The event starts with heats (with repechages), with the best 12 riders progressing to the second round. The top six riders go through from the second round to the final, with the bottom six competing again for 7th–12th place rankings. (BBC, 2012)

The events both took place on Tuesday the 7th of August. Three track cycling events were competed that day; The entirety of the Men's Keirin, the final events of the Women's Sprint, and the Women's Omnium. The Men's Keirin unfolded over the course of the day with the other events taking place in between heats. The two final events that I want to focus on specifically took place within a short while of each other, with Pendleton's event taking place first, followed by Hoy's. As I also noted in my introduction it is significant that Hoy claimed Gold in his event, thus continuing his run as Olympic Champion and bestowing on him the title of most successful British

Olympian, while Pendleton claimed Silver, following a relegation in her first race. While my analysis will make reference to the earlier events of both the sprint and keirin competition, its primary focus will be on these final events themselves. Here they will be used as particular 'moments' within the narratives surrounding both Hoy and Pendleton, moments of particular narrative intensity which focus the wider narratives surrounding both cyclists.

The narratives under study consist of five dimensions which vary in terms of their temporal proximity to the events themselves. Briefly these dimension are: the larger framing narrative, the immediate framing narrative, the event itself, the post-event retrospective/speculative stage, and a wider retrospective stage. While the events themselves are the key moments in the construction of the endings to the sporting narratives of both Hoy and Pendleton, these other dimensions provide the actual narrative material focussed by these events. The wider framing narrative can be described as the developed narrative up until the point of the event. This includes any personal and professional details deemed worth including in the narrative. This includes any previous 'magic moments' and 'golden memories' associated with the sports star. The immediate framing narrative on the other hand is used to frame and contextualise the event at hand. In this way it builds certain narrative expectations into the event itself, though crucially the issue of the result is not always important in the case of endings. This is due to the fact that the retrospective narrative which follows the event is always, in some way, predetermined. As I argue in my third chapter, television production is geared towards the management of contingency. As such, no matter what the result is, televised sports coverage is always prepared for whatever outcome. This is

particularly true in the case of endings which, as the final 'magic moment' of the star's sporting narrative, is geared less towards the result, and more towards retrospection and celebration. In Hoy's case a Gold medal was almost incidental, if not welcomed by the BBC coverage.

The wider retrospective narrative is somewhat different from these other stages. In my analysis of *EastEnders* I analysed the various ways in which the character of Pat Butcher continued to exert an influence over the narrative long after her death. The wider retrospective narrative of sporting narratives works in a similar way, stretching outward from the symbolic death of retirement so that the individual sports star's sporting career can continue to influence future narratives. For example, Sebastian Coe, a former Olympian, is now associated with a narrative which casts him as a British Olympic Ambassador and was, in many ways, the official face of the 2012 Games. This narrative continued through to the 2014 Sochi Games in which he was typically presented as a figure of Olympic knowledge and authority during media appearances. More recently Coe has been appointed the chairman of the British Olympic Commission, as well as a member of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games Coordination Commission, further ensuring his status as an expert on Olympic matters.

At the same time it is also important to recognise that Hoy and Pendleton's personal sporting narratives were couched within a wider ur-narrative of the Games themselves. In terms of the BBC's coverage, this means that they were part of a wider national narrative of British success, whereby their medal victories were added to an overall tally of British accomplishments. This ur-narrative contributed significantly to their personal sporting narratives as their Britishness became a large focus. This ur-narrative thus

belongs to both the wider framing narrative and the more immediate framing narrative of the events themselves. In terms of the wider framing narrative, both athletes' past Olympic successes were significant aspects of their sporting narratives, while in the case of the immediate framing narrative the BBC coverage sought to add more British success to the wider narrative of the (British) Games.

Wider Framing Narratives

The wider framing narrative is where the bulk of the contextual work is done in the construction of sporting narratives. It is also evolving, changing as new successes or failures, both professional and personal, unfold. It is also characteristically (in terms of sport) gendered, particularly in terms of personal biography. For Hoy, his wider framing narrative focussed on traditional masculine roles of strength and fitness, including a discourse focussed on his training regime. In terms of his personal life, Hoy's wider framing narrative focussed on two elements, his status as a family man and his Scottishness. In terms of the latter Hoy was nicknamed "Braveheart" and "The Real McHoy", while in terms of the former his family, in particular his wife and parents, became well known figures in their own right due to their frequent appearances at his events. In terms of Pendleton, however, her wider framing narrative was somewhat more negative, despite her past success. In particular it focussed on her controversial personal life, specifically involving her relationship with teammate Scott Gardner. This relationship was framed as unprofessional and Gardner was obliged to leave the team when it became publicly known (BBC, 2012). Thus as we can see, the personal and

professional are tied together within the sporting narrative, with personal biography impacting on sporting success.

The wider framing narrative is diffused and decentralized. Stemming out from a 'magic moment' (though this term may not be appropriate in terms of more negative discourses such as Pendleton's) the narrative is then constructed over time across a vast range of media as well as through gossip and discussion. In a sense, sports narratives recall John Ellis' (2000) concept of "working through", as those singular moments are worked over again and again via different channels. Thus they cannot necessarily be traced back to a single source beyond that original moment itself. As suggested above, the wider framing narrative is also evolving, continually updated with each new success, failure or scandal. The intra-narrative ending, however, offers a conclusion to this evolving process, a point at which the process stops, only to begin again as the sports star moves from their sporting career to whatever they choose to do next. At this point the narrative transforms into the wider retrospective narrative, the specific details and moments of the sporting narrative becoming retrospective background details for the next stage in the star's life. Once again the intra-narrative ending represented by retirement and the final event offers a point of structure and conclusion to an otherwise unfolding narrative, while at the same time leaving that narrative open to further development.

Immediate Framing Narrative

The immediate framing narrative has a complex operation within the wider sporting narrative of individual stars. On the one hand it must be part of that wider sporting

narrative, incorporating that narrative into the immediate narrative of the event in question. On the other hand, however, it must also strive to make a distinct identity for itself and to frame the event in question as a particular event in its own right. In order to illustrate these operations I want to take each individual separately and look at how the BBC coverage sought to construct a particular narrative. Beginning with Pendleton, she was framed primarily in terms of her immanent retirement from professional cycling. As such the BBC coverage sought to continually reiterate her career up until that point. This career was framed in two ways, first by means of a short film, and second by presenter Jake Humphrey. Both elements framed Pendleton's career in the same fashion, beginning with her success at the Beijing games, while stressing a subsequent "dip in form." As such the individual sprint event was framed not only as the ultimate event of her career, but also as a chance for her to "bounce back" after that dip. The other prominent aspect of Pendleton's immediate framing narrative involved her supposed rivalry with Australian cyclist Anna Meares. Again a short film was used to underline this rivalry. The film featured talking head interviews with both Pendleton and Meares, with both athletes talking in fairly positive terms about the other. However, the video also sought to frame Pendleton as the more veteran rider, with Meares paying tribute to Pendleton's legacy and imminent retirement. Meares also made clear that she wanted to take the title away from the defending champion. The video therefore fulfils a dual operation. On the one hand it fits in with the primary narrative of Pendleton's retirement, while on the other hand making it clear that this is still a competition between two rivals.

One final thread of Pendleton's immediate framing narrative tied in with the Olympic ur-narrative constructed by the BBC which sought to locate her within a narrative of national success. One sequence in particular illustrates this through its use of commentary over OBS footage of the athletes. The shot consists of a slow panning shot which begins on Meares before panning over to show Pendleton as the velodrome announcer introduces them to the crowd. The camera movement matches the announcer's words, panning to Pendleton as her name is called. Significantly this shot features no commentary from Humphrey who had, up until the footage cut from him to the OBS footage, been talking about the aspects described above. It is only following a loud cheer which accompanies Pendleton's name that Humphrey breaks his silence, stating "That was the roar we've been waiting for." By presenting the shot of the two cyclists without commentary, Humphrey is able to construct an air of reverence. Whether or not the roar of the crowd was expected by the presenter (this being a home games, expectation of such a reaction was not unreasonable) was irrelevant, rather he reacted in real time to the crowd's own reaction to Pendleton. In this way Humphrey transitions the narrative focus from the immediate framing narrative towards the impending event itself. This is further underlined by the lack of discussion about Pendleton's personal life, a major component of her wider framing narrative. Instead Humphrey states that Pendleton belongs "here, on the track". As such, the wider framing narrative is momentarily suspended in order for the event, the next 'magic moment' to unfold.

The immediate framing narrative for Hoy is largely similar in structure, but with one significant difference. Where Pendleton was framed as coming back from a dip in form,

Hoy is instead framed as being at the peak of his career. Once again this is demonstrated both by the use of short films and by Humphrey's reiteration of Hoy's career both in commentary and in studio presentation. The short film is particularly interesting, featuring a number of abstract shots of Hoy at various events. These shots are abstract in the sense that they are removed from their original context, but also due to the fact that many of them are close-ups of Hoy's face, played back in slow motion. The purpose seems less to be on showcasing Hoy's sporting achievements and more on the man himself and his physicality. The second half of the film showcases Hoy's training regime. This is shown to be extremely gruelling, with focus given to footage of Hoy collapsing in pain. The film therefore underlines the extraordinary efforts Hoy puts into his training, as well as the physical toll it has on him, implying a particular discourse of masculinity based on physical strength, something which is notably absent from the discourse surrounding Pendleton. Cutting back to the studio, Humphrey then frames the keirin event as representing the culmination of all that hard work, as well as of Hoy's Olympic career as a whole.

Interestingly there is no repeat of the Pendleton announcement and subsequent spectator reaction sequence, with Humphrey instead talking over a similar shot of the various cyclists being introduced. Humphrey's commentary here ostensibly introduces the different competitors, and with input from Mark Cavendish and Jamie Staff they speculate as to potential dangers facing Hoy from the other racers. Significantly, however, there is no one competitor who is singled out as a rival for Hoy in their discussion. Instead the focus remains firmly on Hoy, framing this as more of a personal test of his athletic abilities. There is a real sense here that the rest of the competitors are

simply incidental to the narrative being constructed around Hoy. The commentary is thus in tension with the footage itself supplied by the OBS which gives equal screen time to each individual competitor.

The Event Itself

'Magic moments' as Whannel (1999) terms them, typically take the form of discreet moments within the larger structure of a given sport, for example a winning goal or a knockout punch. The two events which I am focussing on here, however, are distinguished by their brevity. Though Hoy's keirin event is slightly longer that Pendleton's sprint, both are over in a matter of minutes. As such, each event can itself be defined as a moment unto itself. The brevity of the races leaves little space for narrativising except for within the spaces between them. Pendleton's event consisted of two individual races, while Hoy's event was a single, uninterrupted race. However, given that both took place within a short while of each other, there are spaces for narrativisation, both in terms of reflection and speculation. However, these spaces belong to other aspects of the wider narrative structure, both immediately framing and retrospectively discussing the event which has just unfolded. Given the centrality of the events as moments to the construction of sporting narratives, it is therefore remarkable how little space the events themselves leave for narrativisation. While longer sports, such as football or ice hockey, leave more room for narrativisation (the setting up of rivalries for example) the events under analysis here are able only to comment on the action at hand, or else simply reiterate the wider and immediate framing narratives.

This is achieved through commentary which unfolds both over the action and over action replays. Here Marriott's (1996) assertions about sports commentary hold true, with commentators Chris Boardman and Hugh Porter restricting themselves to the action unfolding onscreen, despite their privileged position within the velodrome. As Marriott notes, this is essential to maintaining the illusion of co-presence, and the perceived relationship between the commentary and the viewer at home. However, the commentary also demonstrates the limitations placed on narrativisation by events as short as the keirin and sprint. The commentary here has two modes: on the one hand it merely describes the action unfolding onscreen, while on the other it continually reasserts the framing narratives. This latter is the only mode which allows for narrativisation, though here it is simply through reiteration of already known material. For example, the commentary refers to Meares as Pendleton's "nemesis", attempting in the short time available to underline what had already been set up in the immediate framing narrative. The purely descriptive language, typically used towards the ends of the three races, is narratively redundant, simply describing what the viewer can see. Yet a certain degree of narrativisation is achieved through the modulation of tone, as well as the clear excitement felt by the commentators during the final moments of each race. Here the clear excitement is directed towards Hoy and Pendleton and their chances of success. This excitement clearly betrays a bias towards the British athletes, a bias otherwise avoided by the OBS footage. This bias also reiterates the BBC's ur-narrative of British success and national sentiment, placing both Hoy and Pendleton in the context of national pride without the use of explicit statements to these effects.

Immediate Retrospective/Speculative Narrative

As soon as the event itself finishes the coverage immediately turns to a dual process of retrospection and speculation. The degree to which this happens, and the format it takes, depends highly on the format of the event itself. In the case of the Hoy event, which consists solely of a single race, this dual process begins instantly as soon as the race has finished with the commentators beginning the process over the OBS supplied footage. Here once again the stress is on the commentary to provide the narrative details. In Hoy's case they frame his victory as a significant public event. For example, the commentary stresses the momentous atmosphere in the venue, stating "we're lucky to see all this." However, as in the event, the commentary is set against the OBS supplied footage. While there is a significant increase in focus on Hoy's victory celebrations, the footage continues to cut back and forth to the other competitors. While the footage advantageously (for the BBC's narrative) largely maintains a focus on Hoy and his victory celebrations, it also continues to focus on the silver and bronze medal winners, principally due to the confusion raised by the photo finish. Once again, per Marriott, the commentary is forced to discuss only that which can be seen onscreen by the viewer at home, thus their discussion alternates between Hoy and the other competitors. Interestingly we can see in the immediate post-event coverage the various ways in which Hoy and his team are themselves part of the narrative process themselves. This includes a number of post-event rituals which are acted out by Hoy and his team, and which place them firmly in the nationalistic and career-end narratives constructed by the BBC. For example, Hoy's team forms a "guard of honour" for him to ride through following his victory lap, whilst Hoy himself poses in front of the crowd

draped in a Union Jack. In this way we can see that the narrative construction surrounding Hoy is not as simple as the BBC imposing it on him, but rather, it is far more fluid and less clearly delineated. However such rituals as those described above have been acted out by Hoy before, as well as by other British winners in the 2012 games. As such, we can say that they belong to the wider framing narrative surrounding Hoy, and thus were available to, and somewhat expected by, the BBC to use in constructing the narrative surrounding the keirin event.

With these rituals played out, the coverage now returns to Humphrey in the venue studio, where the process of retrospection continues in a more pronounced way. The final moments of the race are played repeatedly as Cavendish and Staff discuss them. The two narrative threads that frame this both in terms of being a major national event, and also as an ending, are continued through Humphrey's use of phrases such as "this has been a remarkable story to follow, so glad we're here for the final chapter," and "If you could only be here…", this latter directed at the viewers at home. The nationalistic narrative is further underlined by a cut to footage of supporters watching on a big screen outside of the Olympic Park. This latter shot is particularly interesting as it belongs to the BBC coverage, not that of the OBS. As such, the BBC imposes its own narrative onto the footage of the OBS, threading it through the OBS footage in a way which is intended to obscure the intrusion. Tellingly, the coverage turns to Hoy's family, particularly his parents, with repeated shots of them in the crowd at the moment of victory. Special focus is given by Humphrey to a flag held up by Hoy's father which features the nickname "the real McHoy." Here a new aspect of the narrative is introduced. While the pre-event framing narrative focussed only on his training, here we

are re-introduced to a narrative of Hoy the family man which is such a part of his wider framing narrative.

There is also a speculative aspect to the coverage here. For example discussion turns to whether or not Hoy will continue on to the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. Humphrey also asks Cavendish to explain what British cycling loses by Hoy's retirement from Olympic cycling. This last part in particular demonstrates the dual role of the post-event coverage. Cavendish's reply is both retrospective and speculative in that not only does it consider Hoy's legacy as an "ambassador" for cycling, but also looks forward to the "next generation" of cyclers he has inspired. This speculative aspects of the post-event coverage are on full display in the track-side interview with Hoy conducted by Jill Douglas that the coverage then cuts to. Douglas asks Hoy what she frames as the "Steve Redgrave question", whether or not he will continue his cycling career. Here Hoy reveals his intention to participate in the Glasgow games, ending the speculation (though it would be revealed a year or so later that Hoy was in fact retiring from the sport all together.) This interview also underlines another aspect to the narrative surrounding Hoy, that he is now the most successful British Olympian, a title previously held by Steve Redgrave. At this point Redgrave himself emerges to embrace Hoy in a symbolic 'passing of the torch', in a moment clearly set up by the BBC in the event that Hoy won the gold.

The post-event coverage of the Pendleton/Meares event is somewhat different to that of Hoy, owing to the format of the event itself. That is, the three heat format of the event necessitated a short gap between heats, though in this instance only two heats actually take place (due to Pendleton's relegation the final heat was unnecessary). What we find

in these gaps is a combination of the immediate speculative/retrospective narrative with a reiteration of the framing narrative. Immediately following the first heat the coverage turns to a retrospective analysis of the race. This is especially pronounced due to the neck-and-neck finish, where it is initially unclear who the victor is. The coverage then replays the finishing moment over and over from various angles (including a computer simulation) with the commentary speculating on which way the result will go.

As soon as the result is given to Pendleton the coverage returns to the studio where a process of speculation takes over as Humphrey asks Cavendish and Staff to give their expert impressions of what Pendleton might be thinking going into the second heat. Interestingly at this point we get a perfect illustration of how the BBC coverage fluidly switches narratives when it is revealed that Pendleton has been relegated due to a technicality. Here the coverage switches immediately from speculation as to the upcoming heat, returning to a retrospective analysis of the final moments of the race in order to discover the reasons for relegation. Here the narrative is altered, from an initially triumphant one, to a return to that of the framing narrative, in particular the rivalry between Pendleton and Meares. This time however the rivalry narrative is deepened as the experts in the studio seek to place the blame for Pendleton's relegation on Meares "bumping into her, as she always does." Here Meares' physicality is underlined, and though it is not explicitly stated, there is an undercurrent to the narrative that frames her as unsporting when contrasted with Pendleton.

At this point the coverage briefly switches to footage of Laura Trott's gold medal ceremony. When the coverage returns to the venue studio an effort is made to insert Trott into Pendleton's narrative. This is achieved through an image which is shown

onscreen which shows a young Laura Trott posing with Victoria Pendleton. This, and Humphrey's subsequent comments, seeks to make a connection between Trott as the emerging talent, and Pendleton as the veteran. The coverage then returns to the track for the second heat. Here the commentary underlines the above mentioned narrative, going so far as to call the relegation "unjust." However, as an effect of the relegation Pendleton is returned once again to the "comeback" position she occupied within the earlier framing narrative, with the commentary suggesting she "recovers better" than Meares. The event itself plays out just as the first heat with Meares emerging as the winner, however, following the race the coverage is markedly different to that of Hoy, mainly in terms of tone. The obvious difference is that whereas Hoy won his event, Pendleton came second. Furthermore, due to the knowledge that Pendleton was to retire, there was little room here for speculation as to her future. Instead the coverage takes on a decidedly retrospective nature, one which highlights the end of Pendleton's career, and also the emotional qualities of said ending. Interestingly however the narrative focusses less on the result, and more on the fact that this is the end of Pendleton's career. She is framed as going out gracefully, for example the commentary proclaims, "(she) very sportingly accepts defeat. Very last time we'll see her in competition..." Similarly there is repeated reiteration of her career to that point, this time however with a greater stress on the positives. For example, "this draws an end to what has been a glittering, glittering career." There is also a strong stress on emotion, both in terms of Pendleton and on those watching. The commentators state how "absolutely shattered" they are, while coverage turns to speculation as to Pendleton's mental state. For example phrases such as "(I) wonder how Vicky feels," and "(I) can't imagine how she must be feeling."

Wider Retrospective Narrative

If the 2012 Olympics were a soap opera, the wider retrospective narratives surrounding Hoy and Pendleton function in a similar way to Pat Butcher's continued presence on *EastEnders* following her death. In a sense, the final events of both Hoy and Pendleton represent the symbolic deaths of their Olympic Careers. However, while the two will no longer have any direct competitive presence at future Olympics (e.g. Rio, 2016), their presence in the narrative can be expected to continue if judged on the basis of their continued presence in national sporting narratives. For example, while Hoy did not compete in the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games, he remained a significant presence. For example, he was a major part of the opening ceremony, and one of the venue was named after him (the Sir Chris Hoy Velodrome in Bridgeton). In a sense, Hoy, like other sporting figures Sebastian Coe and Steve Redgrave before him, has gone on to become something of an ambassador for British support, appearing throughout the BBC's coverage of the Commonwealth Games in an official capacity as such (though here the national narrative was complicated by the fact that each British nation competed separately, thus Hoy's Scottish citizenship somewhat complicated his association with specifically British sport).

Similarly, while Pendleton retired from cycling immediately following the 2012 Games, she has since gone on to a career as a media presence on television, notable on dance competition *Strictly Come Dancing* (BBC, 2004-), charity event *Sports Relief* (BBC, 2002-) and an appearance on soap opera *Emmerdale* (formerly *Emmerdale Farm*) (ITV, 1972-) in 2014. While no longer directly connected with cycling,

Pendleton, like Hoy, has maintained an implicit connection with it, her previous success always factoring into her subsequent appearances, (for example, she appeared for the start of the Tour de France in her *Emmerdale* appearance.) While no longer a cyclist, in 2015 Pendleton announced her intention to train as a Jockey, making her public debut at the Betfair Novice Flat Amateur Riders' Handicap in which she finished second. In 2016 she performed in the Foxhunter Chase as Cheltenham where she finished fifth.

The wider retrospective narrative then can be considered as a form of narrative afterlife, expanding beyond the boundaries of the BBC's official 2012 Olympics narrative, but feeding into other, subsequent sporting narratives such as the 2014 Commonwealth Games. It can only be expected that come the summer of 2016, both Hoy and Pendleton will figure in some way in the BBC's coverage of the Rio Olympics, whether connected to cycling specifically, or else to wider narratives of British sporting success.

Conclusion

This chapter, the last of my three case studies, has expanded the concept of intra-narrative endings from fictional forms of television, to the non-fiction form of sport. Here I have characterised the 2012 Olympics as a particular 'sports opera' within the wider network of sport coverage on the BBC. Within this wider sports opera I have provided a reading of two discrete storylines, the competitions of Chris Hoy and Victoria Pendleton. Avoiding the flashier, more overt ending of the closing ceremony, I have instead provided a reading of the final events in the careers of these two British

athletes as intra-narrative endings, both in terms of their careers, and in terms of the overall BBC coverage of the 2012 Games. This analysis has demonstrated the complex ways in which the BBC constructed its narratives, both at a macro-Olympics wide level, and at the more specific level of Hoy and Pendleton as individual competitors. By providing an overview of the BBC's Olympic coverage, I have been able to explore the specific application of this to Hoy and Pendleton in particular, exploring the complex ways in which the BBC spun narratives of national and individual success (and failure) around the brief "Golden Moments" of the events themselves.

Chapter Seven
Conclusion: The End?

There is an inescapable irony in reaching this conclusion and being faced with the task of crafting an ending to this thesis *about* endings. Having spent the greater part of 80,000 words arguing for the need for television studies to re-think the role and function of endings in relation to the medium's narrative structures, it is extremely tempting to put my concept of intra-narrative endings into practice. One way might be to conclude this thesis in a manner similar to that of British radio soap *Waggoner's Walk*, with a question awaiting an answer, another to perhaps follow the example of *The Sopranos,* and to simply stop.[40] However, this thesis is not a television narrative, rather it is a narrative *about* television, and as such it is subject to academic standards which discourage me from such an approach. As such, this conclusion represents a more traditional kind of ending, one which features the requisite characteristics of cohesion, structure, and meaning, and which will function both as the "pole" of reading as Paul Ricoeur (1980) might put it, as well as a framework through which the whole might be read.

At the same time, however, I do feel that it is important to maintain something of the character of my concept of intra-narrative endings within this conclusion. Having argued for the need to re-think the concept of endings throughout this thesis I feel it is only appropriate that I carry that argument through to my conclusion. Thus this conclusion, while acting as a larger ending in itself, will also apply some of the ideas that I have argued for throughout this thesis. As such, this conclusion represents both an

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[40] Indeed, the final moments of *The Sopranos* provide the inspiration for the title of this thesis.

ending in a traditional sense, but also an intra-narrative ending of sorts. Therefore, while this conclusion will fulfil the requirements of cohesion, structure and meaning, it will also frame the thesis as one part in a larger potential project concerning the re-thinking of the relationship between endings and television, and as one part of a much larger study of narrative television as a whole.

As stated in Chapter One, the idea for this thesis grew out of an increasing awareness of the seemingly inherent incompatibility between the realities of television production and reception, and what I have come to term our common, shared conception of endings. As such, the key aims of this thesis have been to both explore and demonstrate this incompatibility, and to propose an alternative method of approaching the matter of endings in television in such a way as to pay attention to the specificities of the medium, whilst still retaining the essential characteristics of endings. To this end this thesis has proposed a model of intra-narrative endings, narrative features which maintain the essential characteristics of endings whilst at the same time relocating them to various points *within* the narrative text. In so doing I have attempted to adapt the concept of narrative endings in a way that maintains the specific characteristics of narrative television which I have argued are: serialisation, fragmentation, duration, repetition, accumulation, and contingency.

Taken together, Chapters Two and Three have set out the theoretical framework of the thesis as a whole, making the case for the incompatibility of television and existing models of narrative endings by analysing the essential characteristics of both. At the same time the two chapters have also proposed a concept of intra-narrative endings as a potential way of resolving this incompatibility. From there my three case studies have

sought to demonstrate the applicability of this concept across three very different forms of narrative television, Soap Opera (Chapter Four), the US Sitcom (Chapter Five), and British Sports Coverage (Chapter Six).

Couched in Michael Newman's (2006) description of television as a "story machine" Chapter Two has made the case for the incompatibility of television and existing conceptions of narrative endings at the level of narrative structure. Drawing from a common understanding of endings based on literary theory, popular criticism, and viewer reactions, I have identified three core characteristics of narrative endings: cohesion, structure, and meaning. At the same time, based on Newman's description of television, my analysis of narrative television has positioned it at the intersection of commerce and art by arguing, as Newman does, that the industrial and institutional demands and limitations of television's production have an overwhelming influence on the stories that television can and does tell. Conversely these demands and limitations also influence how television is received by its viewers and therefore how its narratives are consumed. To this end I have identified five core characteristics which are dominant across the majority of narrative television: serialisation, fragmentation, duration, repetition, and accumulation. Chapter Two has demonstrated the presence of these characteristics across a range of different televisual forms, demonstrating the various ways in which they are largely incompatible with the characteristics of narrative endings.

Having made the case for the incompatibility of television with existing definitions of narrative endings at the level of narrative structure, in Chapter Three I have moved on to explore the unique relationship between narrative television and contingency.

Based around Paul Ricoeur's (1980) "Paradox of Contingency" in narrative, which states that while the seeming presence of contingency and chance carry us through a narrative the totalising function of an ending reveals these contingencies to be ultimately illusory, Chapter Three has explored the issue of contingency in relation to the specificities of television production and reception. With Chapter Three I have argued that contingency can be considered a sixth characteristic of narrative television, however, my focus has not been on the way in which television attempts to mimic contingency, but rather on contingency as a force which is exerted *against* television. As the chapter has argued, due to the specific nature of television's messy temporality, in particular the close relationship between the time of television and the time of the viewer, contingency is something that happens *to* television, and is therefore a central part of its narrative structures. In order to demonstrate this the chapter identifies four main categories of contingency which have varying effects on television and its narratives. Chapter Three therefore argues that, like the five characteristics surveyed in Chapter Two, contingency represents a major problem in terms of thinking about endings in television, essentially reversing Ricoeur's paradox by arguing that, due to the presence of contingency as a force within television production, true endings, that is terminus based endings that fulfil the functions of cohesion, structure, and meaning, are highly unlikely.

Taken together these initial chapters foreground the need for a new approach to endings in relation to narrative television. Therefore, within both chapters I have proposed a model of intra-narrative endings as a potential way of resolving the problematic aspects of the relationship between narrative television and endings.

Drawing from ideas set out by Christine Geraghty (1981) and Laura Stempel-Mumford (1995) in their work on soap opera, I have developed their concepts of temporary closure and closure at the level of individual storylines into the wider concept of intra-narrative endings, which can be adapted and applied to a much wider range of television. In Chapter Two I have defined intra-narrative endings as islands of cohesion, structure, and meaning *within* ongoing television texts, as opposed to simply at the literal end of the text. As such they fulfil largely the same functionality as an ending, but are shifted to various points within a television text, thus removing the totalising influence of the terminus of the text, while at the same time freeing up interpretation to allow for the specific characteristics of the medium's production and reception. In Chapter Two I have argued that this concept allows for a more specific understanding of the five characteristics of television's production and reception, while in Chapter Three I have argued that a model of intra-narrative endings allows for the presence of contingency in TV narrative in a way that a focus on a terminus based ending does not.

Moving on from my initial chapters, my case studies have sought to demonstrate the applicability of this concept of intra-narrative endings to three very different forms of television: Soap Opera, the US Sitcom, and British sports coverage. These three case studies have been specifically chosen to highlight forms of television which have either been traditionally associated with a resistance to the core characteristics of narrative endings, such as Soap Opera and the US Sitcom, or else which have received relatively little analysis on the way of narrative study, as is the case with sports coverage. Across my three case studies I have demonstrated different ways in which a framework of intra-narrative endings can be used to analyse different narrative forms.

Considering that my concept of intra-narrative endings originates in the soap opera studies of Christine Geraghty and Laura Stempel-Mumford, Chapter Four applies the concept of intra-narrative endings to soap opera, expanding these initial ideas. Here I have taken a single moment from the narrative history of the British soap opera *EastEnders* (BBC, 1985-) and provided a reading of it as an intra-narrative ending. This moment is the death of Pat Butcher, and my analysis of it occurs on two interrelated levels. The first concerns the more immediate storyline, which I have dubbed the "Death of Pat Butcher", while the second concerns the much larger storyline which covers the entirety of the character's tenure on the show, what I have termed the "Life of Pat Butcher" storyline. By reading the death of Pat Butcher as an intra-narrative ending within the wider, ongoing narrative of *EastEnders*, Chapter Four has demonstrated the complex levels of cohesion, structure, and meaning within this moment, and analysed the myriad and multi-layered ways in which this was achieved. In the short term (the Death storyline) I have demonstrated the various ways in which the storyline introduced a sense of an ending, particularly via the use of extra-textual material and aesthetic cues such as music. In terms of the longer term storyline, encompassing Pat's entire 25-and-a-half year tenure on the soap, my analysis of Pat's death has demonstrated the highly complex network of connections employed by the soap, in particular focussing on familial connections and the use of objects (or mementos) to invoke a sense of an ending while at the same time crafting a 'definitive' history for the character. My analysis has focused on three characters in particular, Janine, David, and the deceased Frank, arguing that the narrative surrounding Pat's death focusses on these three individuals so as to craft an ending that positions them as the three most significant

figures in Pat's life. As I have argued, this is particularly significant in terms of Frank's presence in the narrative, Frank being only one of Pat's four husbands. As I have argued in this chapter, the crafting of a definitive and selective history for Pat operates to impose a sense of cohesion and meaning to the character's long history by foregrounding and privileging certain aspects over others. Finally, the chapter has also looked beyond Pat's death to consider the continuing narrative of *EastEnders*, focusing particularly on Pat's continued presence within the narrative even after death. In this way the chapter has positioned the death of Pat Butcher as an intra-narrative ending which both functions as an ending to that character, but which also allows for the further continuation of the narrative beyond that.

In Chapter Five I have taken a different approach in my application of intra-narrative endings in relation to the US Sitcom. Rather than select a specific moment within the US Sitcom *Friends* I have instead demonstrated the multi-layered function of endings within the US Sitcom form generally, and *Friends* specifically. This approach is informed by, and intended as an answer to, David Grote's assertion that "the only ending available to the sitcom is death." Grote's statement reflects the widespread idea that the US sitcom is a narratively conservative form which lacks any sense of narrative development in favour of a cyclical structure in which each episodes ends in such a way as to maintain the essential status quo, or situation. Here I have argued that such a view is entirely dependent on a traditional concept of terminus based endings, and that applying the framework of intra-narrative endings to the sitcom reveals a highly complex and multilayered network of intra-narrative endings within the US sitcom as a narrative form. To this end the chapter has analysed and identified a series of intra-

narrative endings across different levels of narrative structure, from macro-scale

endings such as those found at the end of episodes, seasons, and series, to micro-scale

endings such as those found in individual acts, scenes, and jokes. The chapter has

identified and analysed these various levels of endings across the US sitcom more

generally, as well as in the specific case of *Friends* (NBC, 1994-2004).

With Chapter Six, my final case study, I have sought to move beyond fictional forms

of television to apply my concept of intra-narrative endings to sports coverage. Within

the chapter I have argued that, while non-fiction, sports coverage is in fact highly

narrativised. Using the specific example of the BBC's coverage of the 2012 London

Olympics I have demonstrated the myriad ways made available to, and by, the BBC in

terms of narrativising the Games. Narrowing my focus to the specific final events of

Chris Hoy and Victoria Pendleton, I have demonstrated the various ways in which the

BBC's coverage sought to construct the sense of an ending around these events,

analysing the complex and multi-layered approach adopted by the BBC in constructing

two very different endings within the same narrative space. As I have demonstrated,

where Hoy's ending was framed in terms of personal and national success with an

underlying discourse of masculine achievement, Pendleton's ending was, in contrast,

framed in terms of competition and rivalry with her opponent Anna Meares. At the same

time Hoy's ending was framed as a triumphant climax to a successful career, while

Pendleton's was framed within the context of an often controversial personal life.

Across my three case studies I have demonstrated the flexibility and usefulness of

my concept of intra-narrative endings, showing the various ways in which it can be used

to re-assess the narrative structures of televisual forms which have typically been held

to either have a problematic relationship to endings, or which have received relatively little narrative analysis. Each case study deliberately looks at very different forms of television so as to demonstrate the flexibility of the concept and I have been careful to avoid the kinds of prestige drama series which have typically been the subject of endings studies, though, of course, the concept of intra-narrative endings can be equally applied to them as to the case studies featured here. In fact, the choice to focus on these three forms of television specifically is also informed by the limitations of the thesis format. As I have sought to demonstrate here, the concept of intra-narrative endings can be applied to a vast array of televisual forms, each time in a different way that allows us to re-assess our approach to the narrative study of television and its endings. In this way, the concept of intra-narrative endings is presented as an interpretive framework through which to study the narrative structures of television, one which encourages a move away from the totalising functionality of terminus based endings to a more televisually specific view which pays attention to the specificities of the medium's production and reception.

Thus this project makes an intervention into the burgeoning field of endings studies in television, offering an alternate perspective on narrative television to the existing one, which largely focusses on terminus based endings in prestige drama series (see, for example: Dana Polan's (2009) work on *The Sopranos* and Jason Mittell's (2015) work on *The Wire* and *Lost*). By encouraging such a perspective, this project has sought to re-position the study of narrative television in a way that pays attention to the specificities of the medium's production and reception, to consider television as a "story machine", and to encourage a view of narrative television as an ongoing process rather than as a

static text to be studied. To state it crudely, this project encourages a view of television as a journey, rather than a destination.[41] In this there is an implicit ontological statement that this project contributes to the continuing study of narrative television. While ontological questions have always plagued television studies, they have tended to focus on issues such as technology, institution, and the audience. In advocating for an approach that treats television as a "story machine" this project argues that the narratives structures of television are perhaps a key way of understanding the specificities of the medium. As such, a more medium specific understanding of the narrative structures of television could potentially make an intervention into continuing questions of 'what is TV?'

This is particularly relevant at the present moment in which technology and new viewing practices have introduced certain anxieties concerning the future of the medium. For example, in Chapter Two I have suggested that the narrative structures of Netflix's original programmes retain many of the key characteristics of broadcast television, even though the technology and reception of said programmes do not necessarily demand it. As such, in terms of narrative structure, in particular its use of intra-narrative endings, Netflix's original programming continues to be, I would argue, television. Thus while the technological platform might appear superficially different to that of broadcast television, in terms of narrative structure Netflix continues to make 'TV'. This is not, however, intended to be the final word on the future of television viewing. While the narrative structures might be the same, there are many other issues

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[41] Again, the idea of the journey is quite literally foregrounded in my use of the line "Don't stop…" in my title, itself a reference to the use of Journey's "Don't Stop Believing" in the final moment of *The Sopranos*.

at stake in terms of streaming platforms such as Netflix. However, in arguing for a model which thinks about television as a narrative form specific to the medium via a focus on its endings, this thesis makes a contribution to ontological questions about the medium and its future.

While rooted in the idea of the "story machine" this thesis is limited to a focus on the narrative texts themselves, the story more than the machine. As such I have deliberately focussed on the textual and theoretical aspects of narrative television though I believe that in terms of the future development of the ideas presented here, expanding the study of endings to include testimony from audiences and producers would, I believe, be incredibly fruitful and illuminating. Relatedly, this thesis deliberately elides issues of authorship in narrative television. These issues are complex, both in terms of production (writers rooms and showrunners creating uncertainty around identifying authorial figures), and in terms of methodology. A study of the production and writing of different forms of television would be complex and represent a significant study in its own right, as such I have deliberately attempted to avoid these issues in favour of maintaining a critical focus on the core concepts and characteristics of endings and television as much as possible. That said, a fuller consideration on the role of authorial figures in the construction of endings in television would be another fruitful development of the ideas presented here.

In many ways, then, this conclusion is, itself, an intra-narrative ending. As the highlighting of the possibilities for further research demonstrates there is potentially still much work to be done in continuing the study of narrative television and its endings. Throughout this project I have argued that endings are a key way of understanding

television, and this thesis represents one part of a potentially larger project that will use endings further. As the field of endings studies continues to expand, endings will become increasingly central to the way in which we understand and analyse narrative television. This thesis has sought to intervene on this burgeoning field early in its gestation in an attempt to shift the focus away from the terminus of the narrative to different points within the narrative, in so doing advocating for a model of narrative studies which views TV *as* TV, and which reconsiders its endings in this context.

Appendix A

Summary of *Friends*, Season One, Episode Twelve: "The One with the Dozen Lasagnes"

Scene Number	Scene Descripton
Pre-Credit Sequence	The gang are collected together in their local coffee shop "Central Perk". Ross begins humming the tune to the TV sitcom *The Odd Couple*. One by one the other characters join in until they are all humming along. Once the tune has finished Ross begins to hum the theme tune to *I Dream of Jeannie* only to be shut down by Chandler.
	Opening Credits
Scene One	Opens in Monica's apartment as Monica argues with her aunt on the phone. Monica has made a dozen meat lasagnes for her aunt, only to discover that her aunt is vegetarian. At the other end of the room Ross, Joey, Chandler and Phoebe leaf through a collection of baby books and discuss the impending birth of Ross's child. Rachel and her boyfriend Paulo enter, discussing their upcoming trip. As Paulo exits, the group split into two with the women in the kitchen area and the men in the sitting area. The scene cuts between the two groups as they each discuss Rachel and Paulo's relationship, given alternating views on it.

Scene Number	Scene Descripton
Scene Two	Chandler and Joey exit Monica's apartment some time later, discussing babies. On entering their apartment Joey throws his keys onto the dining table, only for it to collapse. They agree on the need to purchase a replacement table.
Scene Three	Ross enters Carol's (his ex-wife who is pregnant with their child) apartment with the pile of baby books and one of Monica's lasagnes from earlier. Carol hopes that the lasagne is vegetarian as Susan (her partner) does not eat meat. After some discussion revolving around the similarity in appearance of Carol and Susan's friend Tanya to Huey Lewis, the discussion turns to the topic of the baby's gender. Ross is reluctant to learn the sex of his baby, however, Susan then enters and discovers the sex of the baby based on an earlier (unseen) conversation between her and Carol concerning what they hoped it would be. Torn between a desire to know and not know, Ross exits the apartment. The scene continues with Susan and Carol as Ross buzzes up, ostensibly to enquire about the gender only to change his mind.
Scene Four	Joey and Chandler sit facing each other, balancing a lasagne they are eating on their knees *in lieu* of a table. They discuss the sharing of responsibility in terms of buying a replacement. The discussion turns to 'Kip' Chandler's previous room-mate of whom Joey is clearly jealous.

Scene Number	Scene Descripton
Scene Five	The following day at Phoebe's place of business, a massage parlour, Phoebe talks to one of her colleagues who tells her that her next appointment is particularly attractive. It turns out that this client is Paulo.
Scene Six	Later in the day the friends (all expect Phoebe) are in Central Perk. They discuss Ross's attitude towards not wanting to know the baby's sex. Monica reveals that she knows, and she in turn whispers it to Joey. Ross is indignant. Phoebe enters as Rachel is called away to serve customers. Phoebe is clearly shaken and when pushed she tells the gang "Paulo made a pass at me".
	Break
Scene Seven	The previous scene continues as Phoebe relays her story (illustrated via flashback). Rachel returns but the friends distract her and keep Phoebe's story from her. Ross convinces Phoebe that she has to tell Rachel.
Scene Eight	Chandler and Joey are shopping for a new table. They bicker due to their disagreement of styles. Chandler again refers to 'Kip', stating that Kip would agree with his choice.

Scene Number	Scene Descripton
Scene Nine	Monica's apartment later that night: Rachel is packing for her impending trip. Phoebe enters, and after some preliminary discussion regarding her trustfulness, reveals her story to Rachel. The scene then cuts to Joey and Chandler's apartment as they unveil their purchase to Ross and Monica, a foosball table as opposed to a normal dining room table. They begin playing and Monica reveals her competitive side. Back in Monica's apartment Rachel is recovering from Phoebe's story. They discuss the situation, with Rachel going back and forth on whether or not to end things with Paulo. The scene ends on a melancholy note with non-diegetic piano music playing in a minor key.
Scene Ten	Later that night Phoebe has joined the rest in Joey and Chandler's apartment. They discuss the situation and Monica and Phoebe exit to check on Rachel who is with Paulo next door. Left alone Joey and Chandler convince Ross that the time is right for him to 'swoop in' and woo Rachel once she breaks up with Paulo.

Scene Number	Scene Descripton
Scene Eleven	The scene opens on an establishing shot of the apartment as Rachel throws Paulo's belongings to the ground below. Phoebe, Monica and Ross look on from inside the apartment. Paulo leaves as his attempts at goodbyes are rebuffed by Phoebe, Monica and Ross. Before he leaves, however, Monica hands him one of the leftover lasagnes. Ross goes out to Rachel on the balcony to comfort her in the hope that he might kindle some attraction based on Chandler and Joey's advice. However, Ross's intentions are subverted as Rachel 'swears off' men for the foreseeable future. As they head back inside the apartment Phoebe and Monica are eating one of the lasagnes as Ross attempts (unsuccessfully) to convince Rachel to change her mind about swearing off 'all' men. Not all men will be Paulo's he tries to assure her, whereby Rachel replies "I'm sure your little boy wont grow up to be one", indadvertedly revealing the sex of Ross's baby. Visibly stunned Ross celebrates by excitedly repeating 'I'm having a boy!' Drawn by the commotion Joey and Chandler enter and the whole gang celebrate together. The scene draws to a close on Ross's stunned expression.
Epilogue	Over the end credits Chandler, Joey and Monica play foosball. Monica is singlehandedly beating both of them. As a result she is thrown out of the apartment as Joey and Chandler insist it is too late at night. However, having thrown Monica out they return to play the game.

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30 Rock (NBC, 2006-2013)

American Idol (Fox, 2002-)

America's Next Top Model (UPN, 2003-2006, The CW, 2006-)

The Andy Griffith Show (CBS, 1960-68)

The Appleyards (BBC, 1952-57)

Aquarius (NBC, 2015-)

Arrested Development (Fox, 2003-2006, Netflix, 2013-)

Australia's Naughtiest Home Videos (Nine Network, 1992)

Ashes to Ashes (BBC, 2008-2010)

Battlestar Galactica (Sci-Fi, 2004-2009)

The Big C (Showtime, 2010-2013)

La Bonne Aventure (Société Radio-Canada, 1982-1986)

Breaking Bad (AMC, 2008-2013)

Broadchurch (ITV, 2013-)

Brookside (Channel 4, 1982-2003)

Buffy the Vampire Slayer (The WB, 1997-2001, UPN, 2001-2003)

Cheers (NBC, 1982-1993)

Columbo (NBC, 1968-2003)

Community (NBC, 2009-)

Coronation Street (ITV, 1950-)

The Cosby Show (NBC, 1984-1992)

Crossroads (ITV, 1964-1988, 2001-2003)

CSI: Crime Scene Investigation (CBS, 2000-)

Daredevil (Netflix, 2015-)

The Daily Show (Comedy Central, 1996-)

Dallas (CBS, 1978-1991)

Diff'rent Strokes (NBC, 1978-1986)

The Dick Van Dyke Show (CBS, 1961-66)

Doctors (BBC, 2000-)

Doctor Who (BBC, 1963-89, 2005-)

Downton Abbey (ITV, 2010-)

EastEnders (BBC, 1985-)

EastEnders: Pat and Mo (BBC, 2004)

Emmerdale (formerly *Emmerdale Farm*) (ITV, 1972-)

ER (NBC, 1994-2009)

The Event (NBC, 2010-2011)

Everybody Loves Raymond (CBS, 1996-2005)

Extras (BBC, 2005-2007)

Family Guy (1999-)

Family Matters (ABC, 1989-1998)

Farewell Pat (BBC, 2012)

Firefly (Fox, 2002-2003)

Frasier (NBC, 1993-2004)

Friends (NBC, 1994-2004)

Fringe (Fox, 2008-2013)

Frozen Planet (BBC, 2011)

Full House (ABC, 1987-1995)

Game of Thrones (HBO, 2011-)

Grey's Anatomy (ABC, 2005-)

The Grove Family (BBC, 1954-57)

Happy Days (ABC, 1974-1984)

Happy Endings (ABC, 2011-13)

The Hills (MTV, 2006-2010)

Hollyoaks (Channel 4, 1995-)

House (Fox, 2004-2012)

House of Cards (Netflix, 2013-)

How I Met Your Mother (CBS, 2005-2014)

I Love Lucy (CBS, 1951-57)

Jericho (CBS, 2006-2008)

Laguna Beach (MTV, 2004-2006)

Late Show with David Letterman (CBS, 1993-2015)

Leave it to Beaver (CBS, 1957-1958, ABC, 1958-1963)

Life (BBC, 2009)

Life on Mars (BBC, 2006-2007)

Lost (ABC, 2004-2010)

Lucky Louie (HBO, 2006)

Mad Men (AMC, 2007-2015)

Magnum PI (CBS, 1980-1989)

María la del Barrio (Televisa, 1995-1996)

M.A.S.H (CBS, 1972-1983)

The Mindy Project (FOX, 2013-)

Modern Family (ABC, 2009-)

New Girl (Fox, 2011-)

The Office (NBC, 2005-2013)

Parks and Recreation (NBC, 2009-)

Person of Interest (CBS, 2011-)

The Phil Silvers Show (CBS, 1955-1959)

Planet Earth (BBC, 2006)

Planet Earth Live (BBC, 2012)

Play for Today (BBC, 1970-1984)

River City (BBC Scotland, 2002-)

Roseanne (ABC, 1988-1997)

Scrubs (NBC, 2001-2008, ABC, 2009-2010)

Seinfeld (NBC, 1989-1998)

Sherlock (BBC, 2010-)

The Simpsons (1989-)

The Sopranos (HBO, 1999-2007)

South Park (Comedy Central, 1997-)

Spartacus (Starz, 2010-2013)

Sports Relief (BBC, 2002-)

Star Trek: The Next Generation (Syndicated, 1987-1994)

Strictly Come Dancing (BBC, 2004-)

Three's Company (ABC, 1977-74)

Twin Peaks (ABC, 1990-1991)

The Walking Dead (AMC, 2010-)

Weeds (Showtime, 2005-2012)

The Wire (HBO, 2002-2008)

The X Factor (ITV, 2004-)

The X-Files (Fox, 1993-)

The Young and the Restless (CBS, 1973-)

Filmography

21 Grams (Aejandro González Iñárritu, 2003)

56Up (Michael Apted, 2012)

Ant Man (Peyton Reed, 2015)

The Avengers (Joss Whedon, 2012)

Captain America: Civil War (Joe and Anthony Russo, 2016)

The Incredible Hulk (Louis Leterrier, 2008)

Iron Man (John Favreau, 2008)

Irreversible (Gaspar Noé, 2006)

Pulp Fiction (Quentin Tarantino, 1994)

South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut (Trey Parker, 1999).

Videogames

Pong (Atari, 1972)

Nobi Nobi Boy (Bandai Namco Entertainment, 2009)

Hohokum (SCE, 2014)

Super Mario Bros (Nintendo, 1985)

Halo (Bungie, 2001)

Call of Duty (Infinity Ward, 2003)

Grand Theft Auto (Rockstar, 1997)

Bioshock Infinite (Irrational, 2013)

Wolfenstein (id Software, 1992)

Doom (id Software, 1993)

Grand Theft Auto V (Rockstar North, 2014)

Skyrim (Bethesda Game Studios, 2011)

Final Fantasy XIII (Square Enix, 2009)

Mass Effect 3 (Bioware, 2012)