STORY,
IN PROGRESS:

Considering New Methods for the Analysis of Ongoing Television Series

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Declaration

I, Kristina Graour, hereby declare that the work on which this thesis is based is my original work (except where acknowledgements indicate otherwise) and that neither the whole work nor any part of it has been, is being, or is to be submitted for another degree in this or any other university. I authorise the University to reproduce for the purpose of research either the whole or any portion of the contents in any manner whatsoever.

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ABSTRACT

The formal analysis of ongoing television series brings with it many challenges. And despite significant contributions to this area of inquiry, it still remains an aspect of television studies that receives less critical attention than the analysis of a programme's content. This thesis hopes to make a contribution to the field by developing flexible and comprehensive analytical tools that will allow scholars to analyse television series that are vast and, often, still in the process of 'construction'. Specifically, I want to define some of the core structural principles that allow a series to engage in what I term 'coherent expansion': that is, the process of multiplying narrative elements such as plotlines, characters and settings, while still attempting to retain a coherent formal identity. I will demonstrate that such coherence emerges not from any immovable arrangement of parts, but rather from a systematic ability to rearrange parts. Governing this process are the show's serial narrative dynamics – a term I develop to define the shifting relations between individual characters and the collective communities they form. Drawing on discussion of narrative form in relation to television as well as literature and film, I examine how theoretically boundless potential is shaped into a bounded spectrum of possibilities for narrative generation in any given series.

Although the foundational characteristics of television narrative have long been acknowledged – their reliance on recurring characters, their extended temporalities and, consequently, their exposure to contingency – less attention is paid to how these characteristics come to operate as they do. And it is precisely the question 'how' that is the recurring question of this thesis: how characters' placements within a community helps to define and delimit the identity of each, including delineating the possibilities of character change; how established dynamics between characters and communities allow for the generation of new plotlines; how hierarchies within the dynamics allow a series to adapt to (sometimes unplanned) change; and how the deconstruction of these dynamics can help achieve closure in a series' finale. Crucially, the concepts developed in this thesis are intended to be applicable across a wide range of television narratives, both episodic and serial, 'traditional' and 'complex'. In doing so, I hope to transcend the discourses around 'quality' and 'complex' television that sometimes isolate these modes from more 'simple' and 'traditional' narratives. Instead, I want to trace a kind of structural heritage that runs through television narratives. Using detailed case studies of *Cheers*, *Glee*, *Orange is the New Black* and *Mad Men*, as well a broad range of other examples, I wish to demonstrate how the same fundamental structural principles can be shaped into a wide array of possible forms.

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"You have to lay in enough DNA […] You're not figuring out what's going to happen in episode 309, but you're putting enough in the Petri dish so that the character can be there in 309."

- James Manos Jr. (quoted in Martin, 2013: 60-61)

This thesis began with the question of a writer more so than the question of a scholar. While pursuing my Masters in screenwriting, I had the opportunity to explore for the first time what it might be like to construct a narrative for a television series. And while I enjoyed exploring ideas for a series premise, what struck me was the challenge of identifying structural principles according to which that initial premise may develop over time. Having always been a writer who relied heavily on structure as part of my process (in both my academic and creative work), the question intrigued me. I wanted to explore how ongoing series are structured, and to understand how they are structured to *be* ongoing. Does a series as a whole in fact have a 'structure'? Researching the question, most of the prospective answers I encountered were only partially satisfying. There was certainly scholarship that addressed the notion of structure in relation to *segments* of a television series – individual episodes or seasons. While this was a helpful place to start, it did not answer my fundamental question. If I were to begin writing a television series, would there be any structural principles that guided the series in its entirety, something at the very 'core' of the show that determined its trajectory? Do television series share a kind of structural 'heritage', something akin to the three-act structure I had become so familiar with in film – a structure that is a common reference point for a large variety of films, even if only because some of them deliberately rebel against it. This thesis, then, is the product of a scholar trying to answer a writer's question.

In some respects, the opening quotation from James Manos Jr., a writer on *The Sopranos* (HBO; 1999-2007) and the creator of *Dexter* (Showtime; 2006-2013), encapsulates the key concerns of my research. Through the appealing metaphor of DNA, Manos Jr. alludes to something deeply ingrained within a series that will influence how it grows and adapts to

an indeterminate run time and unknown future. As Macdonald puts it in relation to series bibles, "A writer is selling the DNA of a screen idea here, with the claim that this can start a whole 'family'" (2018: 11). And as Manos Jr.'s comment about 'DNA' indicates, the creation of television narratives is a process beset by uncertainty. His words, however, also suggest that one narrative element can be called upon to offset this uncertainty – character. "You're not figuring out what's going to *happen* in episode 309, but you're putting enough in the Petri dish so that the *character* can be there in 309" (Manos Jr. quoted in Martin, 2013:60-61; emphasis added). In this thesis, I will argue that the structural principles of many television narratives are based on a particular treatment of recurring characters and that these structural principles allow a series to retain a coherent formal identity even as it remains 'open' and ongoing.

Due to particular production circumstances and historical developments, recurring characters have become a key aesthetic norm in television narratives. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule, a notable one being anthology series that change characters every episode, such as in *Room 104* (HBO; 2017–), or every season, as with *True Detective* (HBO; 2014–). Nonetheless, recurring characters are frequently acknowledged by players of the industry, viewers and scholars alike as a crucial component of a great many television series. Moreover, television characters lead a particularly collective existence – seldom written or engaged with in isolation, but rather as part of small or large communities of recurring characters. In this thesis, I argue that a comprehensive understanding of how television characters are configured into communities, and how these configurations in turn promote the proliferation of plot, can greatly contribute to our understanding of television series from a number of perspectives. I would like to further suggest that a detailed, formal analysis of characters and communities can facilitate a definition of serial structural principles that remain 'open' while at the same time fostering bounded alternatives for how a series may progress over time. Consequently, it is characters and communities that are at the centre of my analysis, both in and of themselves, and through a concept that I will introduce and develop in this thesis – the 'serial narrative dynamics' of a show. The term refers to the way in which characters and communities are configured both paradigmatically and syntigmatically in television narratives – a kind of narrative 'DNA' that allows the series to multiply, regenerate, while simultaneously maintaining a coherent formal identity.

That said, Manos Jr.'s comment about DNA also indicates the greatest obstacle for discussing anything like a 'structure' of television series: the contingent nature of television production, in which many (if not most) of the events of future episodes are unknown even to

its creators at the outset. Indeed, this obstacle may throw into question whether the scholarly enterprise I have set out upon is possible, or even necessary. Certainly, many current approaches to television narrative emphasise seriality as relational and unbounded – it transcends alleged borders between producers and viewers, and between viewers and the 'work'.[i] From some of these perspectives, a formal analysis of a television series may be considered 'old-fashioned' and of questionable worth. Consequently, before proceeding with a formal analysis of television narratives I would first like to make a case for why such a methodology is still valuable in a study of television. Furthermore, I want to propose that there are approaches to formal analysis and structure that are sensitive to the characteristics of television narrative and, similarly, can co-exist with other theoretical perspectives on the medium.

Writing in 1985, Roger Hagedorn argued that "Serials are distinguished as a narrative form by the discourse they trace between the producing industry and the readers/spectators/ listeners who consume them" (1985: 27). Over three decades later, Frank Kelleter makes a similar assertion: "serial aesthetics does not unfold in a clear-cut, chronological succession of finished composition and responsive actualization. Rather, both activities are intertwined in a feedback loop" (2017: 18). Like Hagedorn and Kelleter, many contemporary television scholars emphasize television narratives as complex cultural artefacts where production and reception are deeply intertwined (for some very recent examples, see Freeman, 2018:31; Boni, 2018: 70). Nor is such emphasis misplaced. But the question raised by these approaches is what place – if any – a formal analysis of television has.

Ted Nannicelli makes the convincing argument that although television studies has been admirably pluralistic, in order to have coherent debates about the "form, style and value of television artworks", we need to have a "rough consensus" about the "spatiotemporal boundaries" of television 'works' (2012: 165). In the current media environment, which is itself becoming increasingly pluralistic and fluid, this consensus may be even more "rough" than before. Simultaneously, however, I would argue that such a consensus is becoming all the more critical if we are to have the coherent debates called for by Nannicelli. In a context where the term 'television' no longer holds great certainty, a clearer understanding of the term 'series' may be more helpful than ever.[2] And it is in this regard that a formal analysis of serial narrative can be of assistance. For as Robin Nelson argues, at a time when the distinctions between film and television are becoming less definite, "the most obvious

[2] My use of the term 'series' to encompass both episodic and serialised narratives will be discussed in more detail below.

difference lies in scope and narrative form" with television narratives potentially running for many seasons, "and in some instances shifting significantly over time, to sustain themselves" (2007: 11). By assembling a comprehensive theory of television narrative, we can begin to interrogate those narrative characteristics that fall within the purview of a "rough consensus" of what television narrative is and is like. It is my hope that this thesis will contribute to that larger project.

Finding a rough consensus for what a series is, formally, also has implications for historical perspectives on television narrative. While I agree that it is necessary to ground the discussion of form in historical and social practices, we may also ask whether some definitions of seriality tether their object of enquiry *too* strictly to its temporal moment of production and (initial) reception. Let us take, for example, Kelleter's comment that serial aesthetics are defined by a feedback loop between production and reception (2017:18). This is certainly valid for the duration of the series' initial 'unfolding'. But how does this emphasis on the feedback loop affect our discussion of serialised forms after they cease creating new instalments? Writing in the same volume as Kelleter, Jason Mittell acknowledges that "Interpretive criticism of a moving target that both serially rearticulates itself and directly incorporates its own cultural reception is of a distinctly different order than the stable polysemy of a novel or film, *or even the postserialized finality of a television series that has completed its run*" (2017: 155; emphasis added). Again, this is true enough and is an important point to stress. However, this differentiation between completed and ongoing series begs the question of whether it is possible to find analytical concepts that are applicable to both stages in a series' existence, even if these tools are deployed in slightly different ways for each? In this thesis, I pursue this very goal.

I wish to analyse television series with a full acknowledgement that they are, or once were, *ongoing* narratives. But by placing the emphasis on (or making the point of origin) the form of the series as opposed to a comprehensive detailing of its production and reception contexts, I make the assumption that there are facets of seriality that define it *as* a form, recognizable as such even when consumed in retrospect. Put another way, the "feedback loop" of seriality produces aesthetic norms of television narrative that can be identified by analysing and comparing a range of series. So even when the initial feedback loop has come to an end, the norms it has produced are still evident – formal markers of a particular process and context. (And these norms in turn affect how new series are produced and consumed, entering their own feedback loop.) I can watch *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (CBS; 1970-1977) today without any knowledge of its original production and reception contexts and,

despite this, still see properties of its narrative form that I recognise in contemporary television series. Is such a form of viewing and analysis selective? Yes, it is. Is it fundamentally exclusionary of other theoretical perspectives? Not necessarily.

It is possible to conduct a formal analysis of a series' narrative without closing that analysis off to further, future research from different theoretical perspectives – an analysis that takes into account the production and reception of the series without being a study of those production and reception contexts. In other words, although this thesis is primarily a formal analysis, it is a formal analysis that does not exclude the possibilities of other types of scholarly inquiry. Indeed, I hope it encourages them – a point I return to in the conclusion. In this respect, it is a mode of formal analysis that draws on David Bordwell's influential approach to the study of film form.

In *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Bordwell lists three possible approaches to the study of narrative: narrative as representation, narrative as structure and narrative as a process or what he terms narration (1985: xi). Bordwell also admits that "the three approaches often crisscross" (ibid.). Although in this thesis my chief focus is the (broadly) structuralist concern of how the internal parts of a television narrative relate to one another, I hope to explore this issue in a way that is sensitive to narrative as process – "the activity of selecting, arranging, and rendering story material in order to achieve specific time-bound effects on the perceiver" (Bordwell, 1985: xi). Referencing Bordwell's theory of narration and the active viewer it implies, Tony Wilson suggests that it is a thesis even more likely to be applicable to television, where the "modes of viewing […] are much less fixed by the text than the cinematic spectator's gaze at the screen" (1993: 74). Bordwell's methodology is also cited by Mittell in *Complex TV*. In the book Mittell argues that a historical approach to poetics, partially inspired by Bordwell, can allow for the treatment of forms and structures as part of a "lived cultural practice" (2015: 7). As such, I draw on concepts and attitudes from what Bordwell describes as a "formal/functionalist" approach to narrative (2004: 203). While some branches of structuralism may be described as seeking 'objective' and 'scientific' methodologies (Huisman, 2005: 34), Bordwell places greater emphasis on spectatorial activity: "as a methodological point of departure, we ought to assume that the text is so made that it seeks certain intersubjective regularities of response" (2004: 212). Equally important is Bordwell's assertion that "the ways in which narrative principles mobilize material units is a contingent, norm-bound matter" (2004: 207). This allows for the possibility of closely analysing narratives without treating them as a-historical or a-social objects. Thus, while both industrial practices and the cognitive and material activities of viewers are peripheral to my

study, they have nonetheless been critical to the selection and formulation of the analytical concepts I use, as I hope will become apparent throughout the course of this introduction.

But if it can be conceded that a broadly formal approach to television series can have something to contribute to the field, what role does the specifically structuralist concern of examining relations among parts have to play? While it will take the full length of this introduction – and, indeed, this thesis – to answer that question fully, let me sketch the brief outlines of an answer here.

"The possibility of critical debate about a work of television depends upon our ability to identify and individuate the work – to establish its boundaries in such a way that our analysis is of *this* work and not any other(s)," argues Nannicelli (2012: 166). Similarly, the economic viability of a television series depends on the capacity of viewers to "identify and individuate the work". Aside from eliciting cognitive and emotional responses in their own right, recurring characters and their communal configurations play a crucial role in encouraging the ongoing perception of a series as a distinct 'work'. They help the series' identity remain coherent as *this* work and not any other. In my thesis, the focus will be on what formal possibilities the serial narrative dynamics of a show encourage, and which they delimit. I will explore how serial narrative dynamics can help proliferate plot, how they facilitate and delimit change (both on the level of individual characters and change within the diegesis more broadly), and how they help facilitate conclusions, if and when the series approaches its finale. But an analysis of these structural interactions also feeds into other questions – questions of representation, reception, and production contexts. How do creators of television series strive to maintain coherence in the series' narrative while working in the contingent industrial environment of Hollywood? And might a fuller understanding of this contingent coherence aid scholarly debates about the medium's aesthetics?

Consequently, the rest of this introduction is focused around the discussion of two interrelated concepts – structure, and a process I term the 'coherent expansion' of a series. The first portion of the introduction will look at the concept of structure in some detail, and see what definitions of structure are compatible with the ongoing and fragmented form of television narratives. For the question of structure is closely related to questions about open and closed forms. A common concern raised about formal analyses of television series is the inherently open nature of television narratives. Such concerns often contrast series with 'closed' narratives told in other media, such as the novel or film (Kelleter, 2017: 20; Innocenti & Pescatore, 2018: 147). But as Nannicelli reminds us, "These sorts of claims regarding expanding 'textuality' are not specific to television studies. Indeed, they have their

roots in literary theory" (2012: 168). He adds, however, that they have "acquired greater currency in television studies […] perhaps due to the complex temporal boundaries of television works" (ibid.). Similarly, I will argue that theoretical debates about the tension between closure and continuation which have taken place in relation to poetry and the novel can also be of use to television studies. I believe that it is useful to retrace and summarise some of these debates here, so that my own analysis of television form may be better situated in this broader theoretical context. In recent years, especially, many television scholars have been wary of comparisons between television and other media (Dolan, 1995: 32; Mittell, 2015: 18; Nannicelli, 2009: 190; Tischleder, 2017: 122). The hesitation is, I think, understandable, especially in contexts where the comparisons are intended to "legitimise" a 'low' medium through comparisons with 'high' culture (Jacobs and Peacock, 2013: 15). This is certainly not my aim here. Similarly to scholars such as Jason Mittell (2015) and Marc Dolan (1995), my goal is to find formal concepts that will allow an analysis of television "on its own medium terms" (Mittell, 2015: 18). However, too much defensive trepidation about cross-media comparisons can also rob us of exploring what narratological insights may be garnered from scholarship about narrative and form in other media. And, indeed, what television studies may itself contribute to these broader debates.[ii]

Moving from this general discussion of structure, in the second part of the introduction I look at how a better understanding of a series' structural principles can aid our comprehension of the way series navigate ongoing expansion while simultaneously attempting to retain a coherent identity. I will introduce the concepts of character and community a little more fully, examining how characters may be theorised as open concepts akin to the open forms they help structure. Here again I draw on a mixture of literary and television theories. Finally, I will conclude by proposing the concept of serial narrative dynamics as one that can help with the analysis of series that are both currently ongoing and also those that have completed their run. What follows in this introduction, therefore, combines a review of relevant literature and a definition of key terms with a preliminary development of my own theoretical approach. I begin with a relatively broad overview of the concepts that have underpinned my work, pulling in research from a variety of disciplines, gradually tapering the discussion in order to illustrate how these same concepts form a foundation for the terms I will be developing in relation to television more specifically.

Structure as Process

The term 'structure' is used by television scholars often enough. Frequently, it is used loosely, to denote the general shape or form of the series. But if we want to use the word more precisely, its very usage begins to provoke important questions. As I will explain, structure is traditionally associated with wholeness and, therefore, with closure and closed forms. Is it then possible to refer to television series as structures when their very economic mandate is to remain open? The production and reception of television series results in a narrative form deeply informed by contingencies rooted in an extended temporality. As such, a methodological approach typically associated with mapping static arrangements of parts in relation to a bounded form (Sturrock, 1993: xiii) seems unlikely to be applicable to a study of television series. Thus, if I am to analyse how the formal relationships between recurring characters structure television narratives, it is first imperative to address the difficulties of applying traditional definitions of the term 'structure' to ongoing series.

"In structuralist theory," states Wilson, "the audience uncritically adopted the text's apparently coherent view of the world and forgot its own limited and fragmented experience" (1993: 2). In the ongoing narratives of television, however, even the experience of the text itself is fragmented, and thus 'coherence' necessarily means something rather different in this context. What is needed, therefore, is a definition of structure that is not constrained by certain structuralist notions around closure. And as this next section of the introduction will demonstrate, there have indeed been discussions of structure that challenge a static definition of the term. Crucially, they do so by opening structure to temporal process and acknowledging the role of the reader – two elements that are central to television studies. Exploring such definitions will allow me to pursue the structuralist concern of examining the relationship between parts of a 'whole', while still acknowledging that the 'structures' in question are not impenetrable bastions.

What then, exactly, is a structure and can narratives be considered structures at all? One of the most comprehensive answers comes from Seymour Chatman. It is a definition worth quoting a length, since it touches on several analytical and evaluative implications that are associated with the term 'structure' – the notions of wholeness and unity being key among them. For an inter-disciplinary definition of structures, Chatman turns to Jean Piaget's introductory book on the subject. In order to justify why narratives may be treated as structures, Chatman applies Piaget's three defining characteristics of a structure to narrative:

wholeness, transformation and self-regulation (1978: 20-21). On the subject of wholeness, Chatman writes:

> Clearly a narrative is a whole because it is constituted of elements – events and existents – that differ from what they constitute. Events and existents are single and discrete, but the narrative is a sequential composite. […] Unlike a random agglomerate of events, they manifest a discernible organization. (Chatman, 1978: 21)

The second characteristic of structures, self-regulation, is defined thus:

> Self-regulation means that the structure maintains and closes itself, in Piaget's words, and that "transformations inherent in a structure never lead beyond the system but always engender elements that belong to it and preserve its laws". (ibid.)

Finally, transformation itself is defined as

> The process by which a narrative event is expressed […] However this transformation takes place […] only certain possibilities can occur. Further, the narrative will not admit events or other kinds of phenomena that do not "belong to it and preserve its laws." Of course certain events or existents that are not *immediately* relevant may be brought in. But at some point their relevance must emerge, otherwise we object that the narrative is "ill-formed." (Chatman, 1978: 21-22)

It seems that some aspects of Chatman's definition may resonate, if only partially, with television narratives. As with self-contained narratives, their individual elements also differ from the 'whole' that they constitute and they do display some organisation rather than being a "random agglomerate". This is perhaps most easily illustrated by instances where a series is critiqued for including events, characters or settings that do not appear to serve the series as a 'whole'. Both Henry Jenkins and Mittell cite the concerns of fans who worry that the shows they are watching (*Twin Peaks* (ABC; 1990-1991) and *Lost* (ABC; 2004-2010), respectively) are being improvised rather than constructed according to a 'master plan' (Jenkins, 1995: 64; Mittell, 2015: 39). For a more recent example, we might turn to the response of viewers to a season two episode of *Stranger Things* (Netflix; 2016–),'The Lost Sister' (2.7). The episode temporarily abandons the show's central plotline and leaves behind

its recurring setting in order to follow one character to a new city and a new community of characters. Popular reactions to the episode were largely negative, with the chief complaint being that the episode contributed nothing to the series. One online reviewer summarises the sentiment, complaining that the episode "isn't even *Stranger Things*, really" (Kelly, 2017: n.p.). The comment is thus suggestive of the fact that some "laws" of *Stranger Things* had been broken – a 'lapse' that allowed an episode into the structure of the series that had little to do with that structure.

It is noteworthy, of course, that both this complaint and the ones referenced by Jenkins and Mittell are in relation to 'quality' and 'complex' programming. It provides evidence that for *some* viewers of *some* series, at least, there is a tendency to treat ongoing television narratives as more or less traditional types of narrative structures. But how should this impact upon any formal analysis of television narrative? For attaching the characteristic of wholeness to narratives that, for most of their duration, are 'incomplete' in the strict sense of the word is nevertheless problematic. And the concept of a closed system seems equally at odds with a narrative designed to remain 'open'. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that wholeness and self-regulation come with significant cultural values attached.[iii] This is partially due to the fact that wholeness is intimately intertwined with modes of criticism that prize unity as a hallmark of art, such as the Romantic notion of organicism (Kriger, 1989: 3-5).

Chatman's definition of narrative structure, therefore, foregrounds yet again the methodological dilemma I discussed earlier: analysing television narratives as structures seems to imply treating them as closed art 'objects' as opposed to unbounded products of (popular) culture. Dolan, writing about *Twin Peaks*, speaks directly to the potentially problematic nature of this tension. For Dolan, the complaint that the original *Twin Peaks* ran for too long and should have been of a definite length instead stems from Anglo-American Romanticism and the Coleridgean notion of aesthetic organicism (1995: 31). Implicit in this mode of criticism, Dolan states, is "the self-fulfilling idea that 'just' creating a television series can never be artistic" (1995: 32). The comment begs the question of whether there is a way to reconcile any potential desire for wholeness and self-regulation with the medium's characteristic tempering of these qualities? Jason Jacobs and Steven Peacock articulate the problem, asking: "How do we judge a television work's unity if it is open-ended, changing and building across episodes, still in flux?" (Jacobs & Peacock, 2013: 7). For the line of inquiry proposed in this thesis to be valid, it is therefore necessary to augment more traditional definitions of structure, such as the one articulated by Chatman, in such a way that

they accommodate ongoing narratives that have a *tendency* toward structure and wholeness while still being 'incomplete'.

One of the fundamental ways in which the idea of structure as a static union of parts is challenged is through an acknowledgement of the reading experience – an experience that is "not instantaneous but extensive" (Smith, 1968: 220). In *Structuralist Poetics,* Jonathan Culler credits Victor Shklovsky for being one of the few formalists who realised that any such study should "attempt to explicate the structural intuitions of readers by studying their formal explications" (1975: 223). For Culler, as for Shklovsky, "the analysis of plot structure ought to be a study of the structuring process by which plot takes shape" (ibid.). It is this notion of the structuring process that is vital for our purposes here. "Structures and relations are not objective properties of external objects; they emerge only in a structuring process. And though the individual may not originate or even control this process – he assimilates its rules as part of his culture – it takes place through him" (Culler, 1975: 30). This particular version of structuralism has important similarities with Bordwell's brand of 'functional' formalism and the concept of aesthetic norms, norms which inform the mental processes of the viewer. Granting more agency to the subject than does Culler, Bordwell states that "a narrative film both triggers and constrains the formation of hypotheses and inferences [in the viewer]; it does not uniquely specify or determine them" (1985: 39).

Thus emerges a potentially productive definition of structure as *process,* a process intimately connected with the activities of the reader or viewer. Writing about structure in relation to poetry, Barbara Smith formulates a description of these activities:

> As we read, structural principles, both formal and thematic, are gradually deployed and perceived; and as these principles make themselves known, we are engaged in a steady process of readjustment and retrospective patterning. (Smith, 1968: 10)

Like Bordwell, Smith traces a mutually constitutive relationship between form and subject in the creation of structure and meaning, with formal principles in the work triggering the mental activities of the subject. The notion of retrospective patterning is very pertinent to the analysis of television series. Indeed, concepts very much like it have been used by various television scholars. Kelleter, for example, writes of the "recursive character of serial progression", with recursivity meaning "the continual readjustment of possible continuations to already established information" (2017: 21). Elliot Logan states that:

> One of the implications of unfolding serial composition is that the meaning of the artistic choices that are made in the presentation of the fiction, and our sense of the significance of our involvement in particular moments, is not stable. They are both historical and provisional, subject to cumulative and retrospective interpretation. (Logan, 2016: 161)

And writing about soap operas, Christine Geraghty argues that because soap operas are not "aiming at a single fixed point of resolution" (1991: 130), they are free to test out different solutions to the characters' problems:

> The audience is offered the opportunity to make a judgment on a situation and then to watch the elements shift until it is necessary to revise that judgment. Soap operas allow us to change our minds, reflect on our attitudes and redefine our values in the light of new evidence. (ibid.)

Although these comments were written in different contexts and with different critical ends in mind, cumulatively they suggest the applicability of Smith's ideas about structure to television narrative precisely because they all share an emphasis on temporal processes. Of course one difference between Smith's field of study and television narratives is that in the case of the latter the ongoing process of retrospective patterning usually lasts a great deal longer. The particular production and consumption contexts of television series often result in an increased *awareness* of their open-ended nature by all parties involved: the contingency of the structuring process for the viewer is amplified because of the contingent circumstances under which the creators of the series must labour. If a formal analysis of television series is to align with these contexts, it becomes all the more crucial to conceive of structure as a process.

Consequently, I draw significantly on the definition of structure in Smith's work on poetry. Her simple yet highly constructive definition of structure resonates greatly with the aesthetic norms of television narratives:

> It will be useful to regard the structure of a poem as consisting of the principles by which it is generated or according to which one element follows another. The description of a poem's structure, then, becomes the answer to the question, "What keeps it going?" To think of poetic structure this way, rather than as an organization

> of, or relationship among, elements, is to emphasize the temporal and dynamic qualities that poetry shares with music. (Smith, 1968: 4)

Smith's definition of structure, as the answer to what keeps a poem going, correlates with my own desire to find out how ongoing television narratives sustain their runs. Furthermore, the "temporal and dynamic" qualities that Smith identifies in poetry are equally present in television series. While I will later amend the opposition implied here between temporal and spatial organisations of elements, for the moment Smith's conception of structure provides a useful starting point because it demonstrates that the very notion of structure need not be oppositional to television form.

Indeed, television scholars have already used poetry as a point of comparison for how television narratives operate. Sean O'Sullivan discusses the way in which both poetry and television series are predicated on the arrangement of parts – an "art of fracture" as well as an "art of the energy required to stitch together" its pieces (2010: 59). Like Barbara Smith, he also draws a link between these arts and that of music (O'Sullivan, 2010: 63). Amy Holdsworth writes about the "patterns and rhymes" of television series, using poetic terminology to describe a narrative form that likewise uses repetition as the basis of its construction (2011: 53). And writing about silent film serials, Ruth Mayer describes the way in which seriality "fashions and organizes time into units, modules, or segments, foregrounding the structuring patterns of resonance and rhythm, cadences and clusters, and the narrative productivity of repetition and variation" (2017: 23). These comments showcase how productive comparisons between poetry and television can be. They also, however, gesture to another – albeit interrelated – question.

The discussion of "fracture" and "segmentation", of "pieces" and "units", brings us back to the problematic question of wholeness in relation to ongoing television narratives. Granted, Smith's definition of structure does allow for the analysis of works that are 'incomplete'. But it is still easier to think of some compositions as 'wholes' – if only potential ones – that are in the process of being structured. This is especially true of shorter forms such as some poems and stand-alone films. But with vast compositions such as a television series, the complexities of the relationship between part and whole are foregrounded even more prominently. For one thing, some 'parts' of a series, such as episodes and seasons, are quite large in their own right. They are composite entities that have an internal structural logic of their own. Indeed, multiple theorists have discussed the various levels on which ongoing series are structured (see Thompson, 2003: 63; Newman, 2006: 17);

Garin, 2017: 36). Additionally, in some series these 'parts' are indeed designed to stand alone much more so than in other programmes. Thus, even if we conceive of structure as a process that happens over time, we still need to have a fuller understanding of the role 'wholeness' and 'unity' play in this process. Is the proliferation of various parts in a series determined and curtailed in any way at the service of the series as a 'whole'? And if so, how do we reconcile any notions of wholeness with the seeming openness of structure as process, and with the capacity of individual parts to possess their own form?

"[W]e seem to lack widespread agreement about two related questions: when is a television work finished, and when is a television work a distinct whole rather than a constitutive part of some other work?" states Nannicelli (2012: 166). Indeed, examining the relationship between parts and 'wholes' has an important place in the study of television narrative. Television form, after all, "calls attention to itself as an array of parts" (O'Sullivan, 2010: 59). Jeffrey Sconce notes that "television must produce 'parts' that each week embody the whole while also finding, within such repetition, possibilities for novel and diverting variations" (2004: 101). O'Sullivan describes the "putative unity" of serialised television as a "collection of pixels" (2011: 117). And writing about the cable shows of the early twenty-first century, Martin describes their "storytelling architecture" as a colonnade: "each episode a brick with its own solid, satisfying shape, but also part of a season-long arc that, in turn, would stand linked to other seasons to form a coherent, freestanding work of art" (2013: 6). What emerges in all of these comments is the desire to conceptualise parts that have their own shape or form, but that likewise have a role to play in a larger entity. Following Nannicelli's observation, this raises two related questions – *can* we, at any point, discuss the series as a 'whole', and what is the structural relationship between this 'whole' and its constitutive parts?

For Robert Scholes, one of the great challenges for literary structuralism is to "discriminate accurately between the tendency toward system – especially at the level of the individual work – and the failure to achieve it"; it should not regard a work as closed *so as* to treat it systematically (1974: 10). Extending this perspective, we can further suggest that the characteristics of structure as identified by Chatman – wholeness and self-regulation – exist only partially in any given composition. And it is precisely through their partiality that they are made productive. The *tendency* toward wholeness and unity may exist within many television narratives, and this impacts the way in which we perceive them, both as viewers and as scholars.[iv] A similar ideas is made evident in the work of D.A. Miller and Peter Brooks, who analyse the role of wholeness, or totality, in another long-form narrative – the

novel. For Brooks, narrative can be conceived of as both metaphoric and metonymic: for although plot is the "structure of action in closed and legible wholes", suggests Brooks, narrative also requires syntagmatic relations (1984: 91). Hence Brooks describes narrative as "the movement from one detail to another, the movement toward totalization under the mandate of desire" (ibid). In this analysis, totalization is in no way an instantaneously attainable quality of the novel. Rather, it is the *desire* for totality that helps govern the movement of the narrative toward potential wholeness. As Miller puts it: "Carefully cultivating our desire for a next installment or a future volume, the novel continually *promises* the totality it cannot, at any single moment, deliver" (1981: 279). Indeed, for Miller, *not* delivering this totality is precisely what allows the novel to generate narrative:

> In the last analysis, what discontents the traditional novel is its own condition of possibility. For the production of narrative – what we called the narratable – is possible only within a logic of insufficiency, disequilibrium, and deferral, and traditional novelists typically desire worlds of greater stability and wholeness than such a logic can intrinsically provide. (Miller, 1981: 265)

Miller's comment has particular relevance for television narratives, the very economic mandate of which is to continually cultivate that "condition of possibility" he speaks of. While some television narratives avoid equilibrium altogether, others, such as episodic narratives, disrupt it on a regular basis in order to postpone ultimate closure. Thus we have the constant cliff-hangers of soap opera, and the succession of problematic 'situations' in sitcoms. In both instances, the promise of realising a larger 'whole' is repeatedly deferred as new instalments are added to it (I will return to the notion of the 'narratable' again in the fourth chapter on finales). But the spectre of this unrealised whole nonetheless plays a crucial role in the structuring process, as both Brooks and Miller intimate.

Culler summarises the point well, stating that "even if we deny the need for a poem to be a harmonious totality we make use of the notion in reading" (1975: 171). He thus argues that "it is only in the light of hypotheses about the meaning of the whole that the meaning of parts can be defined"; following Merleau-Ponty, Culler conceives of understanding as "the postulation and repostulation of wholes" (1975: 92). The phrase clearly resonates with Barbara Smith's description of structure as achieved through the process of retrospective patterning. What emerges, then, is a broadly hermeneutic approach to the notion of structure. As Wilson describes it: "Projections of possible programme content and the viewer's concern

with their truth produce the to and fro movement, the play of meaning across the process of a text. This is the 'hermeneutic circle' of understanding a programme by relating part to whole in a fundamentally rational speculation about meaning." (1993: 51). Following this line, it is not any *inherent* wholeness in a structure that is seen to define it. Rather the *potential* for wholeness to exist helps regulate the structuring process, while the narrative's propensity to continue repeatedly destabilises this potential. Writing about fictional worlds in television, Babette B. Tischleder comes to a similar conclusion: "A fictional world can never be grasped as a whole or at rest but needs to be actualized—mentally 'synced'—on the basis of recurring, varying, and novel elements" (2017: 123). Like Brooks, Miller and Culler, she views wholeness not as an objective quality but rather as a conceptual tool: "Serial worlds are perceived as variable yet always within coherent spatiotemporal coordinates—coordinates that organize the relationship of single episodes or beats to an imagined whole" (ibid.).

In all of these accounts, what is implied is a structuring process that is informed – but not defined – by the notion of wholeness. As Wilson puts it, viewers operate with "a principle of interpretative charity" in assuming that they are confronting a coherent whole (1993: 72). This process allows us to court the possibility of wholeness – and the related notion of closure – while never fully realising it. With each new part added, the promise of the whole is postponed and its prospective image remade anew. This is a theoretical perspective on wholeness that fits in line with the notion of structure as process, as both ideas are predicated on the importance of the temporal 'unfolding' of a narrative. The point is very elegantly expressed by Murray Krieger, whose discussion of unity in Romantic organicism acts as a productive supplement to Smith's definition of structure. Also writing about poetry, Krieger argues that once temporality is admitted into spatial notions of unity, "unity is never the same; indeed, it can be affirmed only while at the same instant being undone in the search for its continual reformulation by means of the struggle to encompass the ever-changing variety of the temporal" (1989: 42). For Krieger, the tension between part and whole is not a theoretical impasse to be solved, but rather a productive force within literary works themselves. Krieger argues that a valuable notion in the aesthetics of organicism as advocated by Coleridge is the "opposition between the would-be autonomous part and the would-be totalizing whole" (1989: 40). Krieger goes on:

> As I am describing it, built into the mystical dialectic of organicism, with its magical imposition of unity, is a negative thrust that would explode it. But it is a negative that

> the positive thrust – toward a miraculously closed union – depends upon cultivating as its antagonist in its ever-enlarging effort to encompass it. (ibid.)

I will return to Krieger's definition of unity and his concept of the "would-be autonomous part" later in this introduction and at multiple points in this thesis, for these ideas provide a constructive way of thinking about a narrative form that "calls attention to itself as an array of parts" (O'Sullivan, 2010: 59). For now, Krieger's remarks serve to emphasize that in the structuring process, *both* the tendency toward wholeness and the resistance of total unity are productive forces. The 'failure' of an ongoing series to be 'whole' should not disqualify it from being analysed as a structure; it merely requires definitions that are compatible with the form's ability to continually generate narrative. Smith's definition of structure, along with Krieger's definition of unity, provide just such definitions on which I can build my own analysis and develop my own analytical tools.

In light of the above discussion of parts and wholes, the metaphor of 'DNA' for the structural principles of a series becomes all the more appealing. It gestures towards something shared between the parts of a series, something that makes them more than forms in their own right but also part of a larger process. To return to Macdonald's comparison of some series bibles with DNA – these documents outline both "the ground rules for the whole series" as well as "specific proposal(s) for an individual episodes(s)" (2018: 19). To seek out the structural principles of a series, then, is not necessarily to search for "unambiguously complete forms" (Smith, 1968: 28) where these do not exist. Rather, it is to ask how a series sustains itself by simultaneously generating parts and binding them together into a greater whole, even as the conception of that whole remains a conditional one. To use Krieger's terminology, structural principles prevent any part from being completely autonomous (1989: 40). At the same time, however, the generation of these parts does not allow the series as a whole to be entirely totalizing either. Viewed from this perspective, a television series as a distinct entity becomes representative not only of structure as process, but it also becomes a structure in process – in the process of being made and remade through the dialectical relationship between part and whole.

Having established a definition of structure as process, it is now necessary to ask exactly what structural principles guide this process in ongoing series. To do so, it is important to examine the relationship between character and plot – for it is plot that is typically associated with the unifying qualities of structure. However, in television narratives,

characters frequently escape or outlive this totalizing force of plot and themselves become the recurring source of a series' coherence.

Character and Plot

Perhaps the most fundamental distinction that exists in relation to television narrative is the one between episodic and serialised programmes. Even when analysing hybrid forms, such as Mittell's concept of complex TV, this terminology is still employed: "narrative complexity is a redefinition of episodic forms under the influence of serial narration" (Mittell, 2006: 32). This distinction – whether explicitly or implicitly – is more often than not founded on the basis of plot. Breaking down serial narratives into the four elements of storyworld, characters, events, and temporality, Mittell notes that "even highly episodic programs are serialized in certain ways. Nearly every fictional television series has a serialized storyworld and characters" (2015: 22). This is a seemingly obvious but nonetheless essential observation.

The importance of character to television narratives has frequently been acknowledged by scholars of the medium. Sarah Ruth Kozloff summarises the sentiment, stating that "it is characters and their interrelationships that dominate television stories" (1987: 53). This is true for serial/episodic hybrids as well as soap operas and episodic shows. Writing chiefly about the former category, Newman notes that "It is not merely plots that carry over week after week but characters whose lives these plots define" (2006: 23). And writing about soap opera, Geraghty comments that "very often the repetition of plots, so tedious to the casual viewer, is part of a pattern based on the well-established character traits of particular individuals" (1991: 15). Or the contention of Sconce that "It may well be that the true art of television writing (as many have argued) is to revisit certain 'stock' plots and give them a unique inflection through the specificities of that program's characters and series architecture" (2004: 103). Yet despite the recognised importance of this 'common ground', character is seldom mined for its full potential in television scholarship. Rather, the categories of 'serial' and 'episodic' almost inevitably redirect the attention of formal analysis to matters of plot, and thus to the structural differences between these two forms of television.

The question of 'priority' of either plot or character in narrative is by no means a new one. Recapping the problem, Chatman argues that we should dispense with any such arbitrary prioritisation of either character or plot over one another:

> [T]o me the question of "priority" or "dominance" is not meaningful. Stories only exist where both events and existents occur. There cannot be events without existents. And though it is true that a text can have existents without events (a portrait, a descriptive essay), no one would think of calling it a narrative. (Chatman, 1978: 113)

Or, as Henry James famously put it, "What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character?" (1948: 13). While I do not disagree with the general points being made by James or Chatman, in the case of television narratives the question of 'priority' requires some more teasing out.

When a narrative is complete, it is easier to see the relationship between character and plot as balanced in their relative importance. Each element of the narrative works symbiotically with the other, all existing within and delimiting the boundaries of the completed work. The plot exists to illustrate character. The characters exist to motivate the plot. But in the context of an 'incomplete' narrative that is still 'unfolding', such as an ongoing series, the question of priority from an abstract, theoretical perspective becomes tempered by the related question of sequential primacy. If we analyse a given scene, episode, or even a season of an ongoing series in relative abstraction, incident and character may indeed possess equal importance. But when we take into consideration the gradual construction of that narrative over an extended period of time, we see that character determines incident in a very prominent and utilitarian way. This is directly related to the norms of television production, as future plotlines are often constructed around pre-existing characters. This practice of using a recurring groups of characters to sustain a television narrative over the course of an indeterminate and contingent run is a long-standing characteristic of the medium. Todd Gitlin recounts how in numerous interviews a variety of network executives all pointed to character as the reason why a show succeeded or failed (1985: 64). And although the economics of television production have changed since Gitlin conducted his interviews, and are still undergoing tremendous flux, the importance of recurring characters has remained a significant characteristic of television narratives.

If a formal approach to television narrative is to be sensitive to these norms, it needs to account both for the theoretical inseparability of plot and character, as well as for the sequential primacy of recurring characters in television narrative. Following the above discussion of parts and wholes, characters become prime examples of 'would-be autonomous parts' that strain the potentially totalising force of plot.[v] This relates directly to their capacity to 'outlive' any plot that they are involved in and, consequently, potentially exceed any single

plot function. On the other hand, however, characters act as a totalising force in their own right. Returning to Barbara Smith's definition of structure "as consisting of the principles by which it is generated or according to which one element follows another" (1968: 4), recurring characters can be seen as a crucial principle of generation in ongoing series. When a season-long plotline is resolved in *Desperate Housewives* (ABC; 2004-2012), for example, a new plotline will be constructed the following season that involves the same core group of characters. As a result, the discussion of character from a formal perspective becomes intimately intertwined with debates about open and closed forms, and the related question of whether characters themselves are open or closed constructs.

"The key point of agreement in terms of existing scholarship on character in literature and film seems to be that more scholarship is required," writes Radha O'Meara, adding that this is especially true in relation to television characters (2015: 189-190). Furthermore, O'Meara posits that analyses of episodic series that take characters as "functional structures rather than rounded characters" are "informed by structuralist narratology that aims to shed light on the repetition built into the industrial frameworks of creating popular television series" (2015: 191). Indeed, the neglect of character by formalist and structuralist approaches to narrative has been noted outside of television studies also (Culler, 1975: 230; Chatman, 1978: 113). For both Culler and Chatman, the functional model of character overlooks (and even negates) a key pleasure of consuming a fictional text (Culler, 1975: 230). "The role that a character plays is only part of what interests the audience. We appreciate character traits for their own sake, including some that have little or nothing to do with 'what happens'," states Chatman (1978: 112). Given Chatman's definition of narrative structures as whole and self-regulating, it is perhaps ironic that here the phrase "for their own sake" points to the way in which characters can strain the limits of that self-regulation. Instead, characters can ascertain their autonomy even as they play their 'part' in the narrative as a 'whole'. This potential (if partial) autonomy of character is all the more pronounced in television narratives.[vi]

Not all television narratives, even serialised ones, have a single plotline that defines them from start to finish. And even in cases where such plotlines do exist, an individual plot seldom accounts for all levels of narrative. Rather, it is the recurring characters that bind these levels together and give the show its distinct identity. Discussing the way coherence informs the selection practices of authors and the inference practices of audiences, Chatman notes that "Narrative existents must remain the same from one event to the next. If they do not, some explanation (covert or overt) must occur […] Whether or not the events must also be causally linked is not so clear" (1978: 30-31). The statement has even greater significance

in the context of television narrative. As Nelson notes in relation to *Lost*: "the 120 hours of fiction cannot be sustained by a central linear narrative" (2016: 35). If we are to examine a series as a narrative with a coherent identity rather than only isolating individual parts such as episodes or seasons for formal analysis, then the ability of characters to bind the series *into* that one coherent narrative is paramount. Although serialised plotlines can perform this binding function, connecting multiple episodes to one another as we watch to see what happens, their capacity to do so has, historically, been more limited.

For example, while a statement that describes Ross and Rachel's on-and-off relationship in *Friends* (NBC; 1994-2004) as "the key narrative issue to resolve before the series comes to an end" (Sconce, 2004: 103) is not technically incorrect, *only* focusing on the resolution of a particular plotline can become problematic in many instances. For one thing, such approaches will not help to explain the coherence of entirely episodic series. And even highly serialised plotlines that define a show for most of its run may be concluded before the show itself goes off air. (Whether or not these shows remain popular with audiences or successful financially after these developments is a separate question; my focus here is how the changes are accommodated on a structural level.) An example is *The Mentalist* (CBS; 2008-2015) which wrapped up its long-standing 'Red John' serial killer mystery during the first half of season six, before the show itself ended after seven seasons. By comparison, the departure of major characters is a much less frequent occurrence than the conclusion of individual plotlines. Even when a show like *Game of Thrones* (HBO; 2011–) breaks this convention, killing off a central character in the penultimate episode of the first season, the shock value of this development exists only because it is a deviation from an established norm.[vii] But even in cases where major characters do depart, the effect is partially off-set by a reliance on the rest of the ensemble cast, as will be discussed in more detail in chapters one and two.

Recurring characters, therefore, provide a form of coherence in a series that is not entirely dependent on the causality of plot. While Chatman and Culler attribute these 'totalizing' properties of character primarily to the tendencies of readers, in television such readerly tendencies in turn inform the production process. Because viewers can become attached to characters "for their own sake", they become the basis for crafting a potentially successful television series (Gitlin, 1985: 64). "The horizons of personality always recede before us," suggests Chatman (1978: 118). As a result, characters prove a perfect foundation for narratives meant to last an indefinite amount of time. From a formal perspective, then, a

definition of character is required that respects the expansive potential of character and that does not simply tether it to plot.

This is not to say that some television series, or parts thereof, could not be analysed using models that treat character as plot functions. However, just as Chatman flags up the difficulty of applying this approach to complex, modern literary characters (1978: 112), so too would it be difficult to analyse many characters in complex television narratives in this fashion. And even more traditional television series can prove difficult to subject to such functional classifications – because characters frequently 'outlive' any single plotline that they are involved in, their potential to exceed any one functional role is also great. For example, sitcoms with an ensemble cast, such as *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* or *Friends* can regularly shift functional roles between its characters. Thus while we could analyse isolated episodes using functional approaches, they prove insufficient for examining how television narratives develop over time.

Following the argument outlined above, in my approach to ongoing television narratives I consider recurring characters as a source of both coherence and narrative potential in a series. In order to achieve this, it is essential to conceptualise characters as open constructs rather than being strictly delimited by the functions of plot. It is for this reason that this study draws on the work of Chatman in his theoretical approach to character. Although writing predominantly about the novel, Chatman's theories around character resonate with the study of television narrative precisely because of his insistence on the openness of character. Chatman contends that a "viable theory of character should […] argue that character is reconstructed by the audience from evidence announced or implicit in an original construction and communicated by the discourse, through whatever medium" (1978: 119). From a methodological perspective, this approach averts one of the biggest drawbacks of structuralism, namely the tendency to insist that the discourse strictly dictates a single interpretation of its narrative. Instead, this process of 'reconstructing' characters from the discourse is more closely aligned with Smith's notion of retrospective patterning or with Wilson's brand of phenomenological hermeneutics (1993: 65).

Thus, for a formal definition of what a character's 'make-up' is, I will use Chatman's definition of a character as a collection of abiding qualities, or what he terms the character's "paradigm of traits" (1978: 126) – a concept I define and discuss in chapter one. It is a definition that allows character to be a product of the discourse while simultaneously remaining an open and fluid entity; it is thus a definition that is sensitive to viewer capacity for (re)interpretation as well as to adjustments in the ongoing production process. But

although Chatman's conception of character is a useful starting point, it still requires some development if it is to account for the role *recurring* characters have in television series. For if the coherent identity of a television narrative is partially founded on character, and if character is theorised as a fundamentally open construct, then does anything exist within a television series to delimit that openness? Put another way, if the coherence of a series relies on the presence of recurring characters, does anything help to define the coherence of the characters themselves? Plot is certainly one answer. But as I have argued, plot is not versatile enough to account for the coherence between a number of narrative levels. Instead, in this thesis I will propose that what defines and delimits characters in television narrative is other characters. To do this, I will combine Chatman's definition of character with Alex Woloch's (2003) work on the 'distribution' of characters in the novel and Geraghty's (1991) research on the community in soap operas. For in most ongoing series, it is precisely the correlations between the individual and the community that define the possibilities and limitations of the narrative's trajectory. Television series, I will argue, are structured around communities of recurring characters, while the communities, in turn, are structured around dominant characters, settings or traits that exert a centripetal force on the community and hold it together. This is one reason why the episode of *Stranger Things* cited earlier (2.7, 'The Lost Sister') elicited discomfort among viewers – not only did the episode lack any contribution of the central plotline of the season, but it very abruptly severed one character (and by proxy the viewers) from the established community all other episodes have revolved around.

In structuralism, characters' formal relationships with one another have often been formulated through the use of binary oppositions (Stadler 2009: 164). As Stadler argues, binarism "implicitly privileges a combative and hierarchical way of thinking and makes these structures seem natural, instead of privileging a process of negotiation, or seeing similarities and a continuum of possibilities and positions" (ibid). In this thesis, I want examine character interrelationships without resorting to such strict oppositions. For relationships between characters in the communities of ongoing series are founded precisely on the process of negotiation Stadler finds lacking in a binary outlook. As I will explain in chapter one, the relations between characters and communities are based on both the differences *and* similarities that characters have with one another. Furthermore, as multiple case-studies will make clear, it is not only differences between characters that are capable of generating plot – shared traits can also be a source of conflict. And while in chapter two I will argue that characters are hierarchically arranged in television narratives, these hierarchies, too, are subject to a process of negotiation. By shifting the focus away from how a single, delimited

plotline defines the formal function of a character to instead examining how systematic character interrelationships are capable of generating a series of plotlines, we can indeed analyse a television narrative as a "continuum of possibilities and positions". Indeed, much of the analysis that will follow in this thesis will be focused on mapping a spectrum of formal possibilities for television narratives, possibilities that different series engage with in different ways.

To fully account for these paradigmatic relationships between individuals and communities, as well as their capacity to generate plot developments, I would like to introduce two concepts into the study of television narrative – *coherent expansion* and the *serial narrative dynamics* of a show.

Coherent Expansion

Throughout the introduction I have been building an argument for why it is productive to think of television narratives as structures in process, their various narrative levels bound together by shared structural principles based on the treatment of recurring characters. I have referred to the way this common 'DNA' can give a series a distinct identity, or coherence. In making this argument, I have been using the word coherence broadly, to imply a certain amount of consistency between the various parts of a series, enough so as to justify why these parts belong to some larger 'whole'. Writing about closure in poetry, Barbara Smith states that "Although integrity, in the sense of internal coherence and distinct identity, is obviously a factor in the experience of poetic closure, closure usually implies another more common sense of integrity also, namely completeness" (1968: 25). Crucially, Smith's remark differentiates between coherence and completeness, thereby allowing for a definition of wholeness that is conditional, as has been my argument above. "Even a poetic fragment has coherence and a distinct identity," notes Smith (ibid.). This is obviously a beneficial distinction to make with regards to ongoing television narratives – for series try to create a "distinct identity" whilst simultaneously being incomplete.

But aside from this broader usage, the term coherence also comes with the more specific implications of unity. Yet as the above argument regarding parts and wholes has made evident, any notions of unity in narrative – and television narratives especially – have the potential to be offset by opposing forces. Any given part may 'pull away' from the

totalising whole, even as that whole remains a contingent one. Krieger summarises the argument thus:

> Organicism's call for unity, it should now be clear, occurs only in the company of its opposite, the call for a variety that gives to any attempted unity a dynamics that threatens its stability. The absorptive power of any would-be unity must at every moment be challenged by that which would break it apart. To retain its dynamic character, it must cultivate its antagonist so that it may uncover always new and greater powers of accommodation. If this means it is always unsettled and in motion, then it is always in process, always working. (Krieger, 1989: 41)

What I term a show's coherent expansion is a specific expression of this general process outlined by Krieger. On the one hand, there is the series' economic mandate to expand – to proliferate plots, characters, settings. This expansion threatens the overall coherence of the series. On the other hand, the need to cohere may limit the expansion possible in a series. For expansion is typically predicated precisely on any given part straining the possibilities of its 'would-be autonomy'.

Writing about transfictions or the "the migration of fictional entities across different texts", Roberta Pearson explains why she has elected to use the terms additionality and cohesion rather than expansion and cohesion:

> First, the term "addition" doesn't necessarily imply a narratively meaningful expansion, that is, one that enlarges or reworks a transfiction's previously established settings, events, and characters. […] Second, expansion seems implicitly to imply cohesion, whereas additionality does not; an addition can have fairly minimal points of contact with the previously established transfiction. (Pearson, 2017: 113-114)

The argument certainly makes sense with regards to 'migrations' across different texts. But in the context of individual series, as is my focus here, the term expansion is appealing precisely *because* it implies coherence and meaningful expansion. The interrelated forces of coherence and expansion are like two sides of the same coin – the process of coherent expansion is defined by and made productive through the tension between them. As Krieger puts it, any "would-be unity" must "cultivate its antagonist" in order to retain its dynamic quality (1989: 41). In television narratives, this is directly related to a show's economic need to encourage

expansion while never divorcing it entirely from coherence – to have a good chance at longevity a programme must be both distinct and dynamic.

The presence of this tension between coherence and expansion raises an interesting question of whether the balance between the two can be 'bad' or problematic. Too much coherence, and the series may be perceived as uninteresting and repetitive. Too much expansion, and the series ceases to be the thing it was in the beginning. Macdonald articulates the problem when discussing two potential approaches to the series bible – bibles as DNA, and bibles as 'tablets of stone': "The DNA view runs the risk of developing too far away from the origins. The stone tablet view runs the risk of becoming too constrained, formulaic" (2018: 20). In chapter three I touch on this question further, noting how formal properties in the narrative of a particular series, *Glee* (Fox; 2009-2015), seem to indicate that its process of coherent expansion was taking strain. However, I think that this question can be addressed from slightly different theoretical perspectives more fully, such as a specifically evaluative approach to television aesthetics or cognitive studies of audience response.

Aside from the tension between coherence and expansion, it is also crucial to note that expansion itself can happen in two 'directions' – forward and outward. The forward movement occurs as the discourse progresses in time, one episode after another. The outward movement encapsulates the proliferation of existents, such as characters and settings, as well as the elaboration of existing existents (for example, by revealing new character traits or changing established ones). As such, coherent expansion relates both to the syntagmatic and paradigmatic dimensions of television narrative.

In recent television scholarship, a much greater emphasis has been placed on the paradigmatic aspect of television narratives, one which often coincides with the greater attention afforded to the concept of storyworlds (Tischleder, 2017: 123; Boni, 2018: 51; Innocenti & Pescatore, 2018: 148). Tischleder, for example, argues in favour of "conceptualizing complexity in terms of vertical narrative options rather than linear progression" (2017: 123). For her, series are defined by paradigmatic complexity rather than syntagmatic determinism (ibid.). The argument is partially a response to previous accounts of television series (such as those of Mittell) that, according to Tischleder, prioritise the temporal dimension of television narrative over the spatial (Tischleder, 2017: 122). In many ways, my own approach aligns with this emphasis on the paradigmatic. As my discussion of character and plot suggests, I do think that a large emphasis on plot has led to other elements of television narrative being less thoroughly theorised. However, in redressing the balance I want to be careful not to tip the scales in the other direction. After all, both the paradigmatic

and syntagmatic aspects of a television series are integral to its narrative. Indeed, in some ways, debates about paradigmatic and syntagmatic conceptions of television narrative are an echo of the argument about plot and character dominance cited earlier. And if we do not want to get trapped in a similar stand-off in discussing storyworld and plot, then we need to foreground the fact that, as with character and plot, the two are mutually constitutive.[viii]

Consequently, we can yet again temper the question of theoretical dominance by stressing the interrelated notion of sequential primacy. Narrative elements such as recurring characters and settings can be teased apart from the temporal flow of narrative events precisely to find out how the two come to constitute one another. In other words, how does outward expansion facilitate forward expansion, and vice versa. As the discourse moves forward, the generation of new plotlines allows us to learn more information about the series' existing characters and settings and, in some cases, introduces us to new ones. And new characters, character traits or settings in turn promote novel plotlines. These two directions of a series' expansive force both impact upon its coherence. For example, any alterations to a character's traits will in turn affect hypotheses about what kind of future events may be possible in this particular narrative.

This interrelationship is perhaps most clearly illustrated by series that attempt to balance strong forward movement and significant outward expansion. Take, for example, these two sets of comments about *Twin Peaks* and *Desperate* Housewives, written over a decade apart:

> *Twin Peaks* combined the syntagmatic complexity of a mystery with the paradigmatic plenitude of the soap. (Jenkins, 1995: 60)

> *Desperate Housewives* is characterised by the way it mixes genres, most notably merging the thriller, with its opening enigma and strong linear narrative working towards a resolution, with the classic soap opera format, focused on families, friendship groups or neighbourhood, where just a sense of life going on moves the series forward. (Coward, 2006: 36)

> This is pretty much the pattern that [Lynch] follows throughout the pilot [of *Twin Peaks*] – carving out little pockets in the mechanical plot and creating shapely formalist designs inside them. (Rosenbaum, 1995: 26)

> *Desperate Housewives* takes time to reflect on some of the everyday negotiations and experiences lived out by these women […] the pleasures of *Desperate Housewives* lie as much in these detours as they do in our edging ever closer to the 'solving' of Mary Alice's suicide, to the extent that the 'diversions' become equally the subject of the narrative. (Jermyn, 2006: 177)

Although emerging from different 'authorship' and reception contexts, both series share significant formal similarities: both *Twin Peaks* and *Desperate Housewives* begin with a mystery centred around the death of a character, while at the same time focusing on the lives of the community that character was from. As such, they serve as ideal examples of the tension between the forward momentum of plot and the layering of characters' lives. In the scholarly comments cited above, the language confirms that there is a teleological structure to these narratives as well as a counter-current that seeks to disrupt it: the "little pockets" carved out of the "mechanical plot", "detours" and "diversions" that take us away from the linear enigma. Similar remarks have also been made about other shows, such as *The Sopranos* (Nochimson, 2003: n.p.) and *Mad Men* (AMC; 2007-2015) (O'Sullivan, 2011: 120). And in this instance the dual directionality [ix] is clearly connected to generic influences – "the syntagmatic complexity of a mystery" and the "paradigmatic plenitude of the soap".

Yet these 'disruptions' are no less productive than the forward momentum they intercept. And although *Twin Peaks* and *Desperate Housewives* are particularly marked examples of the relationship between forward and outward expansion, the general principle is applicable to a wide range of series. The mandate for a television series to continue ensures that individual narrative elements, layered with past history, have a much greater chance of escaping a strictly linear progression of plot – be it in patterns of episodic iterations or serial fluctuations. Indeed, for this reason temporality on television has frequently been described in non-linear terms – as an "ebb and flow" (Holdsworth, 2011: 64) or a "headlong rush toward dawdling" (O'Sullivan, 2011: 126). Perhaps surprisingly, the potential of this dual motion is lyrically expressed by that major representative of Organicism, Coleridge:

> The reader should be carried forward, not merely or chiefly by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the attractions of the journey itself. Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air; – at

> every step he pauses and half recedes, and from the retrogressive movement collects the force which again carries him onward. (quoted in Krieger, 1989: 31)

The motion of television narratives strikes me as following a similar pattern of movement. For as the series moves forward, be it in episodic instalments or in a stream of continuous seriality, the fiction takes time to do more than progress the plot. It allows for pauses in which the world of the narrative can be appreciated and, simultaneously, 'built up'. Interestingly, this pause is characterised by Coleridge as simultaneously being a partial recession. And so too with television – we often appreciate narrative elements such as characters or settings 'for their own sake' by reflecting back on what we know about them. This is the complex temporality and geometry of television at work: moving both backward and forward, onward and outward, each direction enabling another. And as the narrative expands, our vision of the imagined whole changes; any new narrative elements are incorporated through a process of retrospective patterning into an understanding of the series' structural principles.

Serial Narrative Dynamics

The desire to find something at the very core of television series that both sustains them and makes them distinct has been present in television scholarship for some time. Kozloff uses David Marc's term to refer to the "cosmology" of a series (1987: 54); Sconce writes about "series architecture" (2004: 95); Geraghty discusses the "internal conventions" of soaps (1991: 19); while Mittell describes the "intrinsic norms" of complex TV (2015: 44). My own desire to define some of the structural principles of television narrative feeds very much into this ongoing scholarly enquiry. Consequently, the concept of serial narrative dynamics developed as a way to analyse a series coherent expansion across a number of narrative levels. It is intended to help explain how new parts of a series' narrative are generated from existing principles, whilst simultaneously conceding that any new parts may in turn affect the dynamics themselves by altering our image of the series as a 'whole'. In this way, the 'dynamics' of a show may be thought of as its core structural principles, its DNA.

The general ideas on which I have based this concept are by no means new observations. The important role that contingency, temporality and character play in television narrative have certainly been noted before (as the various citations in this

introduction indicate). The concept of serial narrative dynamics is thus both a synthesis and elaboration of such observations and research. It is also a concept rooted in a question with strong formalist ties – 'how' (cf. Mittell, 2017: 146). Writing about the role of communities in soap opera, Geraghty remarks that "The notion that the life of soap 'is defined as community' seems a commonsense evaluation of the British soaps' appeal, something of which the viewers themselves are as conscious as the critic. Less attention has been paid to how that togetherness, that sense of belonging, is established" (1991: 85). The sentiment strikes me as being quite relevant to several aspects of television narrative more generally. Perhaps because the importance of certain characteristics of television series is "common-sense", less attention is paid to *how* these characteristics come to operate as they do. The concept of serial narrative dynamics is intended to ask and help answer some of these questions. How are characters delimited by the communities they form? How do communities remain fluid yet distinct entities? How do the interactions between individuals and communities delimit the possibilities for change in the narrative? The approach of this thesis to these questions is one of formal analysis. But as I stated at the outset, I do hope that the questions raised and concepts developed will resonate with other theoretical perspectives, too.

At the start of the introduction I noted that serial narrative dynamics relate to both the paradigmatic and syntagmatic aspects of television narrative. This is because the concept refers both to the way in which characters and communities are configured in relation to one another, as well as how these configurations are employed in the events of the narrative to produce a forward momentum of plot. As such, serial narrative dynamics are a synthesis of two approaches to structure and structural principles detailed above. On the one hand, the concept borrows from more traditional approaches of theorists such as Chatman who conceptualise structure chiefly as the relationship among elements. On the other hand, it also draws on the more 'revisionist' definition of structure provided by Barbara Smith, who defines structure as the principles according to which one element follows another. Serial narrative dynamics, therefore, are both spatial and temporal.

The word 'dynamic' has been chosen precisely for its ability to denote movement (as an adjective) as well as a force that generates movement (as a noun). It emphasises that the core structural principles of a show are both relational, and that these relations are formed and may shift over time. 'Dynamic' is a word that scholars writing about narrative reach for relatively frequently to describe their ideas. In this introduction alone I have already cited several such scholars: Barbara Smith writing about the "dynamic qualities that poetry shares

with music" (1968: 4); Krieger observing the "dynamic character" of organic unity, as he defines the term (1989: 41); Woloch discussing the "dynamics of distribution" in narratives (2003: 30). The word has also been used in the context of television narrative specifically: Mayer cites the "self-propelling dynamics of serial narration" (2017: 22); Tischleder wishes to investigate the "dynamics of serial storytelling" (2017: 120); and Garin discusses the episodic and the serialised as the "two major dynamics" of a series' form (2017: 35). In all of these instances it is a word used to evoke the image of a form in motion, in process. As such, it strikes me as an ideal term to describe the ever active and reactive 'core' of a television narrative – a forge in which new narrative material is created and to which it, in turn, adds fuel. Building on the remarks of all these scholars, I wish to draw on the potential implied in their use of the word while also formalising its meaning to suit the 'nuts and bolts' approach of my own analysis.

It is important at this point to stress that the concept of serial narrative dynamics is not intended to encapsulate all of the structural principles in a given television series. Any show will, of course, employ a range of structural principles that make it, and its parts, unique. We might, for example, speak of the way in which flashbacks help structure each episode of *Lost* (Mittell, 2015: 130); the way a season of *Mad Men* is structured by the number thirteen (O'Sullivan, 2011); or the way in which *Breaking Bad* (AMC; 2008-2013) is structured by the theme of dignity (Logan, 2016). And certainly, the different structural principles within a show will also be interconnected. For example, while in this thesis I take as my starting point the structural arrangement of characters and communities, from these configurations also emerge thematic patterns particular to each show. Thus, while many formal and thematic elements may indeed structure a given television narrative, I have chosen to focus on those elements that a wide range of series have in common. In this regard, serial narrative dynamics may be conceptualised as the foundational structural principles that, due to the norms of television production, many television narratives share. Of course, how series then embellish upon this elementary foundation may vary greatly. But an improved understanding of the foundation, I argue, can only add to an appreciation of any individual flourishes and digressions. Consequently, the concept of serial narrative dynamics is meant to be inclusive and specific at the same time – inclusive so as to encapsulate a wide array of television narratives for analysis and comparison, and specific enough so that elements of each narrative can be dissected in relative detail. And since the relationship between individual characters and collective communities is a *serial* dynamic that a majority of television narratives share (even episodic ones) – it is these interactions that form the basis of my definition of the term.

My interest in the commonalities rather than the differences between a range of television narratives has an impact on my engagement with some of the terminology from the field of television studies. Like Anthony Smith, I define serial narratives broadly, as ones that evoke "an ongoing storyworld across a sequence of textual instalments, with the distribution of each new instalment usually separated by an interval from the last" (2018: 4). I use the term 'series' to refer to any such narratives. Crucially, this definition has the potential to encapsulate programmes with episodic or serialised plotlines. Because of my particular goals in this thesis, my focus is not on carving out sub-categories of programming from within this broad definition, such as the often problematised but still not retired notion of 'quality' TV; the (historically fluctuating) distinctions between series and serials (see Creeber, 2004: 7-12); or specific iterations of the serial form such as complex narratives (Mittell, 2015) and "modified soap structure drama series" (Smith, 2018). By founding my analytical process on narrative elements that many shows have in common – groups of recurring characters – I hope to develop concepts applicable across these pre-established categories. In doing so, I do not wish to imply that some of these distinctions are not productive. For example, the work of Mittell in analysing complex TV "on its own terms" has been an important contribution to the field (2015: 4); and Anthony Smith's (2018) very recent study of how particular industrial contexts, such as network broadcasting and basic cable, shape different approaches to seriality demonstrates a promising area for further differentiation among television series. Seeking out the commonalities between various television narratives does not mean disregarding their differences. Rather, more meaningful comparisons can emerge if we have a more comprehensive understanding of exactly how these types of television narratives diverge from one another. Furthermore, seeking out such commonalties may help avoid classifying traditional television narratives as the 'other' against which concepts such as complex and quality TV are defined.

That having been said, this thesis, as an initial exploration of my ideas, needed to be delimited in some ways. Its chief case studies, therefore, are US 'prime-time' or 'premium' series that contain a blend of serial and episodic plotlines: *Cheers* (NBC; 1982-1993), *Glee*, *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix; 2013–), and *Mad Men*. As Anthony Smith argues, the US industry has a "powerful cultural relevance in this period", being as it is the "primary provider of popular entertainment the world over" (2018: 5). Indeed, Jeanette Steemers cites evidence that, as an exporter of completed programmes, the US had a global share of 76% in 2007 (2016: 739). (As a scholar from the Global South, I have personal experience of this pervasive influence.) And the 'premium' programming emerging from this industry tends to

foreground the tensions that I have raised throughout this introduction – that between part and whole, between unity and fragmentation.[x] Consequently, such shows prove a fruitful ground on which to initially test the concepts I will develop. But I hope that the analyses of these case studies will also demonstrate the applicability of the analytical concepts themselves to other types of shows – such as strictly episodic ones, or daytime soaps operas. Indeed, although each of the four series I focus on include some serial plotting, they do vary in the balance they strike between the episodic and the serial. While *Cheers* is mainly recalled by scholars because of its serialised romance plot (Sconce, 2004: 102; Mittell, 2006: 32), the majority of its plotlines are episodic. *Glee* and *Orange is the New Black* are much more serialised by comparison, but they give their episodes a distinct structure through the use of techniques particular to each show – *Glee* employs a diegetic 'theme of the week' whilst *Orange* has each episode focus on the flashbacks of an individual character.

The series are also diverse in their temporal and industrial origins, ranging from the more traditional network broadcasting of the 1980s to contemporary streaming platforms. This, along with their varying genres, result in episodes of different length and a different accommodation of ad breaks. While this collection of series may be a little too diverse to be described as possessing the "group style" Newman notes in scripted prime-time serials (2006: 17), they nonetheless share enough "production norms" (ibid.) to have significant formal similarities. Because they all emerge from "Hollywood's economic model of industrial art" (O'Sullivan, 2010: 64)[xi], they are still beset, to a smaller or greater extent, by contingencies. As such, the dialectic between unity and process that is so central to my discussion of structure is visible, in distinct ways, in each of these shows. Put another way, all four shows have to negotiate the heritage of the seeming endlessness of the soap opera and the more clearly structured unity of the stand-alone film – two ancestors of 'prime-time' or 'premium' television programming. Indeed, many (if not most) ongoing television shows can be interpreted as striking their own unique balance between the lineage of the classical film and the soap, narrative forms that themselves are indebted to prior influences. But it is the impact of the soap opera that binds these programmes together most strongly, through the inherited production norm of ensuring continuation through a reliance on recurring characters. Arguing for why historicizing a genre like the soap opera is important, Elena Levine writes: "That we no longer notice the influence of daytime drama on prime-time serialization in fact may signify just how deeply the soaps' influence has pervaded our senses of what TV storytelling is; soap opera is so deeply embedded in TV narrative that its roots have become invisible" (2017: 108). While some theorists have indeed noted the influence of the soap on television

narrative (Hagedorn, 1985: 39; Thompson, 1996: 35; Sconce, 2004: 99; Holdsworth, 2011: 34), I agree with Levine's sentiment that this influence should be examined more closely.

The detailed focus on four series is partially a response to the acknowledged difficulties of studying long-form narratives. Like Mittell, I think that there is much appeal to focusing on a select few series whilst also "referencing a broad corpus" (2015: 9). Drawing on Gibbs and Pye's metaphor of artworks as houses, Jacobs and Peacock suggest that the "television 'houses' we return to again and again want us as long-term tenants" (2013: 12). Reflecting on the significance of this for television scholarship, they write:

> And while we may look at the history of architectural design, the provenance and distribution of building materials, in order to place the house within a system and history of construction, it is only by inhabiting the space as a dwelling, a home, that we get to know it intimately and thereby earn the experience from where the first springs of criticism may arise. (ibid.)

My own engagement with television began precisely with this kind of "intimate" immersion into select television series, and although I now step back to a slightly more 'formal' distance to observe the "system and history of construction" of television narratives, I hope that the former approach will still be perceptible in my writing. Thus while the first half of each chapter concentrates on defining formal concepts that may be applied to a wide range of television series, the second half is dedicated to in-depth case studies of the four series listed above.

Chapter one provides an overview of the concepts I will be dealing with in this thesis. In this chapter, I especially focus on defining three key terms crucial to my analysis – character, community and serial narrative dynamics. Drawing on Chatman's definition of character as a paradigm of traits, I discuss why this approach is so suitable to television studies. Then, for a characterisation of community I turn to Geraghty's work on the soap. I propose that her ideas can meld productively with Chatman's, together helping to explain how characters are bound into collective entities whilst simultaneously retaining their individuality. Finally, I combine these two narrative components – characters and communities – into what I term the serial narrative dynamics of a show. Borrowing from Woloch's ideas about character and structure, I analyse how the vast potential of characters' individual and communal traits are shaped into particular configurations in the discourse through the dynamics between them. The chief case study for this chapter is the sitcom

Cheers. Using this series as an example, I discuss how the serial narrative dynamics of the show are established in the pilot. I then explore the flexibility of these dynamics, discussing how they are able to generate multiple plotlines (both episodic and serial) and how they adapt to the inclusion of new characters and the loss of existing ones.

Building on these foundational definitions, in chapter two I explore the various hierarchies present within the serial narrative dynamics of a show. I discuss how particular traits, characters and settings can rise to dominance within a shows' community, and how this dominance relates closely to centripetal force. Comparing my use of the term 'centripetal' with Mittell's notion of centripetal complexity, I outline the advantages of differentiating between multiple centripetal forces operating within a community, each vying for dominance. A key aim of this chapter is to analyse how the presence of these hierarchies is linked to a series' distinct identity. This involves noting how narrative hierarchies affect the process of coherent expansion by regulating, and often off-setting, the impact of any changes in the narrative. Using *Glee* as my main case study, I examine how existing hierarchies in the show adapt to changes in the narrative, as well as detailing how the hierarchies themselves guide the possible scope and direction of such change, especially in the face of unforeseen production circumstances.

Chapter three is devoted to the question of character change. The development of characters, in the traditional literary sense, has typically been perceived as a rarity in ongoing television narratives. Instead, relatively stable characters are considered the bedrock of a series' premise. Taking such observations into account, and building upon existing scholarship on character change by theorists Roberta Pearson, Jason Mittell and Radha O'Meara, I seek to determine the extent to which characters may change in a television series whilst still performing their function in the show's dynamics. I argue that in television narratives, a character's identity is both socially and temporally provisional. The possibility of change is bounded by the character's position in relation to the community, as well as the indefinite duration of the programme. Taking *Orange is the New Black* as my primary case study, I look at how a contemporary series can actively engage with the possibilities of character change afforded by television's aesthetic norms. Instead of transgressing these norms, *Orange is the New Black* works with them and within them to create a fluid conception of identity that questions to what extent people change, and how this change is informed by social context.

The last chapter, somewhat appropriately, focuses on series finales. Reflecting back on questions of structure and wholeness raised in this introduction, I work to theorise closure

in a manner appropriate to the open-ended form of many television narratives. Returning to Barbara Smith's work on closure, and also drawing on the writings of Miller and Marianna Torgovnick on the subject, I define closure not as the completion of an otherwise incomplete structure, but rather as a disruption of the structural principles that have been used to generate a coherent narrative over time. Following this, I will examine the various ways in which the serial narrative dynamics of a show can be deconstructed in a finale, thereby providing it with its chief closural force. The main case study for this chapter is *Mad Men*, a particularly complex example of the way in which the deconstruction of a show's dynamics can intersect with its thematic concerns. Referencing back to the discussion of hierarchies in chapter two, I examine how *Mad Men*'s final episode dissolves its community by targeting the functional redundancies of the community's shared traits – eliminating several dominant traits that bound the community together. I then discuss how this dissolution works together with the show's thematic treatment of time, and specifically the impact time can have on identity.

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Chatman describes the objective of narrative theory as "a grid of possibilities" – "It plots individual texts on the grid and asks whether their accommodation requires adjustments of the grid" (1978: 18-19). A similar sentiment informs this thesis. I wish to examine the "grid of possibilities" afforded by the television medium, and to analyse a spectrum of series that take different advantage of these possibilities. In doing so, I hope to trace the structural DNA of television narratives – DNA that not only allows individual series to proliferate indefinitely, but that has also allowed the form itself to flourish over the decades, becoming more and more prominent in both our cultural and scholarly activities.

Notes

[i] For some recent examples, see Kelleter's introduction to a volume he edited – *Media of Serial Narrative* (2017). Such an approach informs the essays in another edited collection, *Reading Contemporary Serial Television Universes* (2018).

[ii] Discussing potential 'blind spots' in media studies, Liv Hausken notes the pitfalls of medium blindness (2004:392-397). Hausken argues for the need for both general and medium-specific theories of narrative, adding that we need to be aware of the difference between the two (Hausken, 2004: 397). For a further discussion of this subject, see David Herman's chapter in the same volume (2004: 47-75).

[iii] As Barbara Smith states, "wholeness is a difficult concept to discuss, especially in connection with art, where the term has acquired strong honorific value" (1968: 26).

[iv] The notion that a television narrative possesses a tendency toward structure and wholeness intersects with reception studies and our critical evaluation of cultural output. Mittell, for example, makes the point that many serialised narratives, such as novels, comics and television series, have garnered increased cultural status as artworks after their publication in bounded volumes (2015: 37). And Umberto Eco, in his essay on the cult object, makes the argument that books can be both cult and art objects because they can be re-read at will, and in segments (1985: 4). Thus, it may be easier or more tempting to foreground (or even exaggerate) the tendency toward system in a television series depending on what format and mode it is consumed in.

[v] There have, of course, also been theorists that challenge the unifying properties of plot from other theoretical perspectives. Sudeep Dasgupta, for example, seeks to explore the temporal experiences of watching a serialised work "beyond a plot-driven identification of meaning" (2017: 163). Timotheus Vermeulen and James Whitfield analyse the 'pull back and reveal' gags of *Arrested Development* (Fox, 2003-206; Netflix, 2013–), arguing that these jokes draw viewers' attention to peripheral spaces beyond "the privileged space of the plot", signifying "a democratisation between the representative categories of plot, action and agent and pure presence" (2013: 110).

[vi] Writing about affect and television, Nelson notes: "Where most work in Film Studies has concentrated on unpacking new engagements with character and linear narrative […], the protracted and meandering postnarratives of complex TV suggest additional modes of encounter with less emphasis on teleological trajectory" (2016: 28).

[vii] Mittell also makes the important observation that *Game of Thrones* is based on a series of novels, and thus Ned Stark's death was made possible partially because of the books' "established precedent" (2015: 124-125).

[viii] The difficulty here is partly exacerbated by the nebulous definitions of 'storyworld' that exist. The issue warrants more discussion than I unfortunately have room for here, but at its core the problem arises due to the fact that while the term is often used as another word for setting or a collective noun to encapsulate both settings and characters, at other times more specific meanings of it are invoked. Both Mittell (2015) and Tischleder (2017), for example, cite David Herman's definition of storyworlds. For Herman, storyworlds are construed as "mental models of a special sort" (2002: 17). They therefore relate directly to the cognitive processes of readers who construct these mental models based on cues from the discourse (Herman, 2002: 20). In Herman's definition, storyworlds are particular *reconstructions* of plot. In the more general understanding of storyworlds, they are *constituents* of plot.

[ix] For more on the 'dual directionality' of *Twin Peaks*, see the remarks of Sconce on the subject (2004: 107-108) and Dolan's argument on why the second season of the show was more successful as televisual storytelling (1995: 42-43).

[x] For a discussion of "episodic closure and serial deferment", see Newman (2006).

[xi] Newman likewise stresses the "interplay of commerce and art" in US prime-time television (2006: 17).

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CHARACTER AND COMMUNITY: DEFINING SERIAL NARRATIVE DYNAMICS

Writing in 1974, Horace Newcomb noted that "With the exception of soap operas, television has not realized that regular and repeated appearance of a continuing group of characters is one of its strongest techniques for the development of rich and textured dramatic presentations" (quoted in Sconce, 2004: 97). Writing in 2015, however, Jason Mittell states in contrast to Newcomb that "On *most series*, we watch fairly stable characters interacting to form dynamic relationships" (2015: 137; emphasis added). While these two statements are perhaps an oversimplification of television's characteristics in their respective time periods, they do provide evidence of what the medium's general aesthetic norms are perceived to be. In the four decades between these two writings, not only has television developed to embrace the narratological strategy of recurring characters much more fully, but scholarship on television is more readily acknowledging the potential of this technique. Despite this, however, television characters can still benefit from closer study. Specifically, we can address more fully not just the role that characters play in plotlines, but the crucial part they play in *generating* plotlines. Do characters delimit the events possible in a narrative, and are they themselves delimited in any way? To return to James Manos Jr.'s metaphor – exactly how do characters and their collective configurations come to form part of a series' DNA?

To answer these questions we need to understand what dynamics in a series help to generate plot without expressing the longevity of the series *only* in terms of plot. Kozloff, for example, writes that

> Television series nearly always create in their initial premise a tension or enigma that centers on character development or relationships. Will Mary Richards be able to make it on her own? Will Alex Keaton renounce greed and ambition and embrace more human values? Will Edith Bunker ever revolt against Archie? (Kozloff, 1987: 54)

While I agree with Kozloff that characters and their relationships are central to television narrative, the wording obscures some important distinctions as far as the structural principles of a show are concerned. The terms "tension" and "enigma" have very different implications, and need to be teased apart for a more detailed analysis of television form. To use *The Mary*

Tyler Moore Show as an example: I would argue that the question "Will Mary Richards be able to make it on her own?" is answered relatively early in the show's seven season run. It is not an "enigma" that the show is structured around solving. A more apt wording of the sentiment would be that we watch *as* Mary Richards makes it on her own. Mittell highlights this vocabulary problem when he describes the need to differentiate between "narrative enigmas", which are based on questions from the narrative past, and "narrative statements", which are triggers for future events (2015: 25). Mittell argues that "the most common model of event serialization found on television is the forward-moving accumulation of narrative statements that create triggers for future events to come in subsequent episodes" (ibid.). While the distinction is helpful, even this is a step further than I wish to go here. Or rather, it skips a crucial step I want to foreground – namely, to analyse what dynamics exist that bring these narrative statements about in the first place. Are there any structural principles governing the scope of possibility for what chain of events can transpire in a given television narrative? And do these forces apply only to one plotline, or to many? To return to the *Mary Tyler Moore* example: Mary 'making it on her own' implies various events in the narrative chain. And while these events certainly do take place – Mary's promotion, her raise in salary and awards, her increasing comfort with being an unmarried woman – they by no means account for all the plotlines in the show, even those involving Mary (not to mention the rest of the major characters). To understand how all these plotlines relate to one another on a structural level, we need to look beyond any one enigma or series of statements and examine the broader serial narrative dynamics at work. This change in emphasis marks the difference between understanding the structure of a central plotline, and understanding the structural principles of the show.

Kozloff's use of the term "tension" comes closer to articulating the generative principles of a series that I am seeking to analyse here. But what exactly is the nature of this tension? Is it narrative, thematic, ideological? The answer is that it can be all three. My aim in this thesis is to articulate, in formal terms, dynamic tensions and dynamic shifts between characters and communities that in turn produce plotlines, reflect themes, and invoke ideology. I agree with Mittell when he writes that "having a more robust account of how television storytelling works should give us a deeper understanding of its meanings and cultural power" (2017: 147). For purposes of scope, this study focuses on the former question, the how, but without denying the importance of the latter, the 'what'.

In this chapter I outline in detail the three elements at the crux of this thesis – characters, communities, and serial narrative dynamics. I begin with a discussion of how

character can be defined in formal terms, and specifically terms that align with the ongoing and contingent nature of television series. Turning to Chatman's conception of character as a paradigm of traits, I examine the appropriateness of his approach to television form, not only because the definition maintains the openness of characters as constructs but also because of the way Chatman theorises the relationship between character and plot. Moving from narratology to writing on the soap opera, I then consider how the concept of community so crucial to soaps can also be productive in analysing a wider range of television narratives. Drawing on Geraghty's writing on the role of unity in soap opera communities, I look at how the potentially expansive trait-paradigms of individual characters are shaped by their relationship to the community through patterns of alignment and difference. Bringing this research together, I introduce the concept of serial narrative dynamics – a term designed to articulate the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships between characters and communities. For it is these relationships, I argue, that help guide the coherent expansion of the series – shaping its possibilities into probabilities and necessities. To demonstrate how the serial narrative dynamics of a single show operate, the chapter concludes with a case study of the sitcom *Cheers.* Here I analyse not only how the dynamics help establish patterns of interaction and plot that become quite familiar, but also how these same dynamics adapt to change over time.

Character

The general concept of character traits has been utilised by many television scholars, writing about a variety of television series. Analysing an episode of *The Bob Newhart Show* (CBS; 1972-1978), Kristin Thompson observes that "As in the typical classical Hollywood film, the causal action here all arises from the characters' goals and traits" (2003: 30); Pearson writes about the "routine augmenting of traits and biographies" in long-running series (2007: 55); O'Meara describes the manner in which viewers "interpret character traits and behaviours" (2015: 190); Geraghty argues that "well-established character traits of particular individuals" are a key pleasure of soap operas (1991: 14); and Macdonald states that all of the series bibles he has analysed at the very least detail "key character traits" (2018: 16). The term, therefore, demonstrates itself to be rather ubiquitous and useful. But for a comprehensive analysis of the structural role characters play in television narratives, more detailed definitions of both traits and characters are advantageous. Exactly what is a trait and how are they assembled to form an individual character? In this regard Chatman's definition

of character is constructive, while also aligning with the way television scholars already write about character.

In his attempts to promote an open theory of character – one that doesn't simply treat characters as functions of plot – Chatman draws on both philosophical and psychological writings. Looking up the term "character" in the *Dictionary of Philosophy*, Chatman cites the following definition: "The totality of mental traits characterizing an individual personality or self", where "self" is further defined as "The quality of uniqueness and persistence through changes … by virtue of which any person calls himself I and leading to the distinction among selves" (1978: 120). Turning from philosophy to psychology, Chatman then broadens the term "trait" to mean any distinguishable and enduring quality of an individual, not just mental ones (1978: 121). Out of this discussion emerges Chatman's conception of character as a paradigm of traits:

> "trait" in the sense of "relatively stable or abiding personal quality" recognizing that it may either unfold, that is, emerge earlier or later in the course of the story, or that it may disappear and be replaced by another. In other words, its domain may end. […] At the same time, traits must be distinguished from more ephemeral psychological phenomena, like feelings, moods, thoughts, temporary motives, attitudes, and the like. These may or may not coincide with traits. (Chatman, 1978: 126)

The nuances of this particular definition of character and character traits make it applicable to a range of television narratives.

Firstly, the definition allows for the possibility of character change as traits disappear or are replaced, without necessitating this change as part of a limited, 'literary' definition of character. In *The Office* (NBC; 2005-2013), Ryan enters the show as a reserved and down-to-earth temp, but in later seasons his promotions within the company see these traits replaced by brashness and pretension. Chatman also argues that his proposed defintion accommodates 'rounded' characters, for while traits "generally overlap", conflicting traits may also inhere within a character (Chatman, 1978: 122-123). To draw on another example from a sitcom: in *Scrubs* (NBC, 2001-2008; ABC, 2009-2010), Dr Cox can be an incredibly abrasive and abusive character toward the interns working below him, but he also has the capacity to be caring and supportive. Finally, there are also allowances made for more isolated instances of 'aberrant' behaviour as some of a character's acts or habits "may be inconsistent with a trait" (ibid.). For Chatman, this point is vital in accounting for modern characters such as Valmont

in *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, who is able to perform a virtuous act despite being an "essentially evil" character (ibid.). Certainly, similar examples may be drawn from television, as when the usually stoic Don Draper has an emotional breakdown in the series finale of *Mad Men*. But in television narrative the need to account for temporary, uncharacteristic behaviour has other applications also. For in long-running series, the need for novelty may result in episodes where individuals act 'out of character' without a permanent impact on their personality. Such changes need not indicate character 'complexity' in the same manner as the Velmont example, and may manifest themselves in both episodic and serial narratives. Sconce accounts for the commonplace use of amnesia and evil twin plots in television by explaining that they allow "characters the temporary freedom to escape their textual prison and engage in activities that violate their character profile" (2004: 101). And while most contemporary series no longer use these plots, he notes that "other slightly more plausible strategies have replaced them to perform the same textual work", such as "a passing 'extraordinary circumstance' to motivate temporary and often quite dramatic character deviation" (Sconce, 2004: 102).

The reason Chatman's definition of character accommodates occurrences such as the ones cited by Sconce is because the distinction between traits and "more ephemeral psychological phenomena" (Chatman, 1978: 126) echoes the very distinction between the episodic and the serial. Television characters, viewed from this theoretical perspective, are intrinsically serial entities – comprised of only those traits that recur over time. To return to the Mittell quote cited in the introduction: "Nearly every fictional television series has a serialized storyworld and characters" (2015: 22). Of course, shows with serialised plotlines will more readily call attention to the serialised trait-paradigm of a character, but this does not negate the fact that the cumulative compilation of traits is a fundamental building block for a majority of television narratives. Indeed, it is precisely in the cumulative nature of the trait-paradigm that Chatman's theory aligns most significantly with television scholarship.

> In narratives […] the whole set of a character's traits established up to that moment is available to the audience. We sort through the paradigm to find out which trait would account for a certain action, and, if we cannot find it, we add another trait to the list (or at least put ourselves on guard for further evidence of the one we impute). (Chatman, 1978: 127)

The process being described by Chatman is very much akin to Barbara Smith's notion of retrospective patterning, rooted in the reader's capacity to structure a text *over time* (1968: 10). "When […] expectation [is] foiled, we would readjust not only our expectations concerning the future items, but also our perception of the preceding ones," states Smith (1968: 13). As I discussed in the introduction, this notion of structure as process resonates greatly with the unfolding narratives of television. And the same is true of individual characters: we can watch as a personality is revealed over time, making sense of traits in light of the 'total' identity they contribute to, even as this 'totality' remains out of reach (a point I return to again in chapter three). This process can be especially foregrounded when dealing with characters that are hard to 'read', like the intelligence agent Eve in in *Killing Eve* (BBC America; 2018–). When Eve doggedly pursues a mysterious assassin, viewers are frequently left questioning what traits motivate her character – her profession, her boredom, her personal obsession with the assassin.

Thus while a characters personality is necessarily 'cumulative', this may mean different things for different viewers – depending on whether they have seen one episode, or one hundred episodes. Nevertheless, character traits are necessarily made sense of in the context of a serial acquisition of knowledge. The aberrant behaviour described by Sconce will be more meaningful for regular viewers familiar with a character's trait-paradigm, even if the plotline of the given episode is self-contained. In a 'what if' episode of *Friends,* for example, the series explores alternate lives for its characters in a two-part episode titled 'The One That Could Have Been' (6.15 & 6.16). Although the plotlines of this episode are self-contained, it is our serial knowledge of the characters that makes the uncharacteristic behaviour of the six friends humorous and enjoyable. And it is precisely *lengthy* interactions with complex narratives that facilitate attempts "to read the minds of nuanced, multifaceted characters" (Mittell, 2015: 132). Or as Geraghty writes about soaps, one of their "most striking qualities is the way in which the audience becomes familiar with the history of certain characters and has access to knowledge which is well beyond that given in a particular episode" (1991: 14). The role of memory in our engagement with television has long been noted as one of the medium's key characteristics. As Holdsworth states, "pattern and the anticipation of repetition" are an important pleasure of seriality (2011: 55). Chatman's definition of character allows us to conceptualise the trait-paradigm as one such pattern, and a crucial one at that, present not only in narratives with serialised plots but in serialised characters across a range of television shows.

All of these correlations between Chatman's conceptualisation of character and television scholarship are important, making his definitions highly applicable to long-running series. But perhaps the most significant aspect of Chatman's approach, especially with regards to the aims of my thesis, is the way he theorises the relationship between character traits and narrative events. Chatman notes that the fundamental difference between events and traits is that events

> have strictly determined positions in story (at least in classical narratives): X happens, then Y happens because of X, then Z as a final consequence. The order in story is fixed; even if the discourse presents a different order, the natural order can always be reconstructed.[i] Further, events are discrete; they may overlap, but each has a clear-cut beginning and end; their domain is circumscribed. (Chatman, 1978: 128)

Traits, argues Chatman, are not subject to these temporal limitations: "traits are not in the temporal chain, but coexist with the whole or a large portion of it" (1978: 128-129). This is a significant observation with regards to the ongoing and fragmented narratives of television. It acknowledges that while a trait is expressed in a particular moment in time *through* a given event, it is not necessarily limited to this singular moment of expression. In *The X-Files* (Fox; 1993-2002, 2016-2018), occasional plotlines foreground Scully's religious beliefs as a Catholic. Even though this trait is not expressed in every episode, we may still consider it as part of Scully's personality throughout the course of the series. This distinction is crucial if we are to account for the way in which recurring characters aid a show's coherent expansion. Even if a character's participation in a particular plotline is concluded, their traits continue to exist beyond the circumscribed domain of that chain of events. Indeed, the persistence of these traits may be called upon to generate new plotlines – plotlines that still cohere with the established givens of the narrative. It is in this way that characters can act as a totalizing force in a narrative, something I noted in the introduction. Their structuring presence, and the presence of their traits, can transcend any one temporally discreet event, as in the *X-Files* example. In the context of television narrative, what is constructive about this formal approach is that it allows character traits to be expressed through a potentially infinite number of events as the series goes on. And just because a character's traits have not been manifested in a given event or episode, does not preclude the possibility that these same traits may be called upon in future to generate plot (a notion that ties into questions of character change, which will be discussed in detail in chapter three).

Furthermore, because a character's traits are not strictly tethered to a functional role they may play in any single plotline, some traits may be expressed in ways that do not move the plot forward at all. For example, when analysing the biography of *CSI*'s (CBS; 2000-2015) Gilbert Grissom, Pearson notes that the series includes details that "deepen the character but have little narrative consequence" (2007: 47). Sometimes, an expression of a trait may play no other function except to reinforce a connection between the viewer and a character they feel they know (cf.: Blanchet & Vaage, 2012). As was mentioned in the introduction, even series with prominent central enigmas, like *Twin Peaks* and *Desperate Housewives*, can exhibit such 'detours' from the plot. For the analyst, the notion of traits creates the ability to account for the way we can "appreciate character traits for their own sake" (Chatman, 1978: 112). And although traits can be displayed with "little narrative consequence", to return to Pearson's phrase, such traits can also represent latent narrative potential. For initially 'inconsequential' traits (like all traits) can be employed to move the series forward in due course, thus aiding coherent expansion. Originally 'minor' traits may be exploited in later seasons because of their capacity to generate plotlines that appear novel in comparison to ones derived from a character's more dominant traits. In *The Mary Tyler Moore Show,* Mary's best friend Rhoda is self-deprecating and on a perpetual diet, with both traits defining her character continually but seldom becoming the subject of a dedicated plot. An exception occurs in 'Rhoda, the Beautiful' (3.6). In this episode Rhoda finally reaches her goal weight and is entered into a beauty contest at the department store where she works. The main plot of the episode revolves around Rhoda's inability to relinquish her self-deprecating attitude and view herself as an attractive woman. This ability of character traits to act as narrative potential is vital in a medium where content needs to be generated on an ongoing and contingent basis. Thus, while a character's 'total' trait-paradigm may carry over from episode to episode, individual traits may be exploited to a greater or lesser degree in the various plotlines.

Another advantage of such an approach to character is that trait-paradigms do not require consensus in the same way that taxonomic classifications of character function do. Instead, I would suggest that the concept provides a formal language for comparing disparate readings of a character. One way that the productive potential of analytical 'discrepancy' can become evident is through the naming of traits. Discussing the naming process, Chatman posits that "One is able to call up increasingly accurate descriptive adjectives the deeper one gets into the narrative" (1978: 130). Once again the notion of retrospective patterning is evoked, here suggesting that even the same reader or viewer may augment their precise

interpretation over time. (In the case study, I will touch again on the subject of naming traits, discussing how the structural role of some traits encourages more or less specific descriptions of them.)

Having established this definition of character, it is now necessary to put character in context. For individual characters on their own cannot facilitate the coherent expansion of a series. Spin-offs perfectly illustrate this point – the same character placed in a different diegetic context will yield a distinctive narrative from the original series. The broad umbrella term typically employed to describe this context is 'storyworld'. Although the critical use of the term fluctuates greatly, at its most general it is often used by scholars and viewers alike as a collective noun that describes all of the characters and setting in a series. But precisely because of its breadth, this term is not specific enough to explain how a given character plays a role in the coherent expansion of a series. For the storyworlds of series can be vast, and some of their components can play relatively minor roles in the proliferation of the discourse. Instead, I propose that for the purposes of narrative analysis, the notion of community is more helpful in describing those *recurring* elements of a storyworld that play a significant role in delimiting individual characters and determining their role in the coherent expansion of the show.

Community

Vast narratives, such as ongoing series, are often characterised by the multitude and multiplicity of characters that they can accommodate. Discussing the formulation of the classical style in Hollywood cinema, Kristin Thompson traces the influence of the short story on the then emergent medium of film: "The short story dealt with fewer characters than the novel or drama. To gain the maximum effect, one or two central characters were held to be ideal" (1988: 170). This is due to the fact that films, like short stories, have much less time to tell a story than the novel:

> Over the course of hundreds of pages, the author could slowly acquaint the reader with a whole set of central figures and could change their traits in a leisurely fashion. Character became the wellspring of the action, rather than an agent reacting to a series of incidents. (ibid.)

Here, Thompson connects the vast temporality of a novel's discourse with a multiplicity of characters. The potentially long runs of television series result in a similar tendency to embrace a larger number of major characters than most stand-alone films. As Blanchet and Bruun Vaage observe, "series can compensate for alignment with so many different characters through their longer running time" (2012: 36). Consequently, accounting for such multiplicity and how it relates to the individuality of characters, as per the discussion above, is critical to an analysis of television narrative.

In series, the inclusion of "a whole set of central figures" is not only more feasible than in shorter works, but also more appealing. On the one hand, a large cast of characters helps to offset contingencies of the production process as it allows a show to accommodate the temporary or permanent unavailability of individual actors (Geraghty, 1991:21; Thompson, 2003: 4). It also allows viewers to have more 'subjects' with which they may be able to identify (Wilson, 1993: 92). Additionally, more characters means that the ongoing narrative will have more "wellsprings of action", more potential sources of coherent expansion. When comparing the film and television incarnations of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (The WB, 1997-2001; UPN, 2001-03), Kristin Thompson notes that in the latter, Buffy "gains a set of friends among the unpopular crowd at the high school – an element largely missing from the film" (2003: 90). Thompson links this addition directly to the proliferation of the narrative: "Given this larger number of characters and far broader premise concerning supernatural foes, there are considerably wider possibilities for plot generation than in the film" (2003: 91). Indeed, the connection between a proliferation of characters and a proliferation of plot has been noted by other theorists as crucial to television narratives (Kozloff, 1987: 51-52; Allen, 1995: 18).

This does not mean that some shows do not have "main" characters that resemble the protagonists of classical cinema. Such examples are most apparent in episodic narratives that revolve around the weekly exploits of the same protagonist, such as Michael Knight in *Knight Rider* (NBC; 1982-1986). In other cases, one main character could be said to 'anchor' an ensemble cast. This is evident in both episodic shows as with Jerry Seinfeld in *Seinfeld* (NBC; 1989-1998) and serialised ones, as with Meredith Grey in *Grey's Anatomy* (ABC; 2005–) and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In all these examples the inclusion of the character's name as part of the series' title only serves to reinforce their importance. However, the structural role of such characters is not identical to that of their filmic counterparts. As Tischleder notes, "even when television shows have explicit protagonists […] they don't just follow these characters' trajectories but present them acting and reacting within greater social

ensembles and locales" (2017: 121). While most television protagonists do move the plot forward, they also serve the added function, key to television narrative, of bringing a group of characters together as a community. The details of this binding function will be discussed in chapter two; here it is first necessary to establish the importance of communities to television narrative in general and determine a way of analysing the formal relationship between any individual character and this collective entity. It is useful to begin with a dictionary definition of community, to gauge the appropriateness of the word for my purposes here, before proceeding to expand on this definition by drawing on the theoretical insights of scholars such as Geraghty.

The Oxford Dictionary defines community as "a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common" (Oxford University Press, 2017). This basic definition has great resonance for television narratives, in which characters frequently share (if not always live in) the same space. Like the reliance on a large cast of characters, this aesthetic norm is also directly linked to the economics of television production in which reusing the same location or set repeatedly yields financial savings. As such, narrative justifications need to be constructed for communal spaces. The two most frequent alternatives are narratives where characters work together or live together (or at least in very close proximity to each other). "In most series, a particular setting or institution forms a show's center of gravity, structuring the world it engenders," states Tischleder (2017: 121). The structuring function of place is also noted by Geraghty (1991: 100). For her, shared spaces perform the key function of defining the borders of a soap's community:

> One further strategy in creating a sense of community is to exclude those who do not belong and to clarify the difference between those inside the community and those outside it. On the one hand, the opposition seems clear and differentiates between those who live in the Street or the Square and those who do not, thus employing geographic setting as a key factor. (ibid.)

Although not all television series emphasise this distinction between 'us' and 'them' quite so strongly within the diegesis itself, on a formal level the delineation remains critical throughout. It helps the narrative remain coherent by maintaining that we follow *this* group of people and not *that* one. And in many television narratives, as in soap operas, geography is a critical factor in the selection process. However, it need not be the only one. Some communities, in life as in television, are spatially scattered. Shows such as *Heroes* (NBC;

2006-2010) and *Sense 8* (Netflix; 2015-2018), for example, unite characters from across the globe into one discourse.

Amending the dictionary definition of community slightly for our purposes here, we might then describe a television community as a group of recurring characters that have one or more characteristics in common, of which a shared geographic association is only one possible trait. Such a definition intersects with Chatman's approach to character as a paradigm of traits, and can help explain in detail how the dynamics between individual characters and communities assist in the coherent expansion of a series. To develop this examination of community further, it is helpful to turn to writing on the soap opera – a form in which character multiplicity and its relationship to temporal expansion are particularly foregrounded.

The influence of soap operas on other forms of television narrative, especially "quality" television emerging in the early 1980s, has been noted by scholars such as Sconce (2004) and Robert J. Thompson (1996). Indeed, key characteristics of the soap have helped shape a range of narrative strategies on television. While the influence is perhaps most apparent in serialised plotlines and the consequent emphasis placed on viewer memory, soaps' characteristic use of large ensemble casts has also had a vital impact. The "multiple identification" that occurs in soap operas (Modleski, 1979: 14) is relevant to an understanding of how many ongoing series create ensembles "with wide-ranging attachments across scenes and episodes" (Mittell, 2015: 129). For while not all series contain casts quite as large as soaps, and do not necessarily engage with the notion of community in the same way, the concept of community itself remains useful in relation to a variety of series. This is firstly because the community is directly linked to soaps' paradigmatic complexity, a property which television scholars have been increasingly foregrounding in relation to other series as well. And relatedly, the community is a critical concept for explaining how the individual traits of a character are woven into the larger diegesis to give a show its distinct formal identity.

"Put in semiotic terminology, US daytime soap operas trade an investment in syntagmatic determinacy (the eventual direction of the overall plot line) for one in paradigmatic complexity (how any particular event affects the complex network of character relationships)," writes Robert Allen (1995: 7-8). The applicability of Allen's observation to contemporary television series has been noted by multiple scholars (Mittell, 2017: 149; Tischleder, 2017: 123) while others have made similar comments (Newman, 2006: 19). One could argue that many contemporary series attempt to balance these two forms of investment,

as well as getting them to work with one another. Mittell indicates such a possibility in reference to *Buffy*: "*Buffy*, at its most accomplished, uses forward plot momentum to generate emotional responses to characters and allows relationships to help advance plots" (2015: 20). In the introduction, I made a similar argument in discussing how forward and outward expansion are interrelated and often collaborative. Thus, while some series may place more or less emphasis on the paradigmatic dimension of the narrative and develop it to a greater or lesser degree, in general addressing this aspect of television narrative remains crucial for a comprehensive approach to an analysis of storytelling in the medium.

In contrast to the tendency of non-serial popular narratives to be teleological, Allen writes that "the serial spreads its narrative energy among a number of plots and a community of characters, and, what is even more important, sets these plots and characters in complex, dynamic, and unpredictable relationships with each other" (1995: 18). An important question, then, is how characters are bound together into a community and, furthermore, how are dynamic relationships between individuals and the community facilitated. A comprehensive answer in relation to British soap operas emerges from Geraghty's writing on the subject. Her observations hold great relevance for a range of television narratives because they help explain how the interrelationships of television characters become structured by patterns of similarity and difference between them.

In her initial definition of community, Geraghty states that "although community is an important unifying factor, it often proves elusive. British soaps offer the notion of a harmonious community but the chimera is rarely pinned down. […] It becomes an ideal which has to be worked for" (1991: 85). For Geraghty, the aspirational ideals of the community are based on "an ethos of sharing, an acceptance of each other's individual characteristics and a recognition that everyone has a role to play if the community is to continue" (ibid.). A very significant aspect of this definition is that it allows for the coexistence of characters' "individual characteristics" and the community. Geraghty goes on to stress that the "emphasis on unity is not at the expense of individual characters" (1991: 89). Indeed, the community as an ideal can exist only *through* the accommodation of individual idiosyncrasies:

> It is in the nature of the soaps' ideal community that it can draw into itself all sorts of characters – the grumpy, the cantankerous, the complaining, the eccentric – and that they do not need to be transformed into ideal types for the community itself to be celebrated. (1991: 86)

A notion of community that accommodates the individual is critical if we are to retain the definition of character as established in the previous section. After all, Chatman's exploration of character begins with the definition of "self" as a "*distinction* among selves" (1978: 120; emphasis added). Therefore, any analysis of how these distinct 'selves' come together into a collective group needs to explain both how a sense of togetherness is formed and how a character's "quality of uniqueness" is maintained (ibid.). Geraghty's description of community is useful for these purposes precisely because it maintains that belonging to a community and being a unique individual are not mutually exclusive. This does not mean, however, that there is no tension between a character's individuality and their inclusion in the community. In fact, on a formal level this tension often becomes generative of narrative.

Writing about *Middlemarch*, D.A. Miller links the role of the community in the novel with what he terms the "narratable" – that which is capable of generating narrative:

> "Sane people did what their neighbours did, so that if any lunatics were at large, one might know and avoid them." Here is the mechanism of social control that allows the community in *Middlemarch* to maintain itself. Here as well is the mechanism of narrative control that allows this community to function, in precise ways, like a traditional novel. The collective scenarios of society constitute the nonnarratable equilibrium, and the violations of them (lunacy being only the most extreme form of exorbitancy) represent the narratable difference. (Miller, 1981: 110)

For Miller, therefore, "difference" from the community is linked directly to the very presence of narrative. While this comment may be simplified into the adage that conflict generates story, this would elide some important nuances of Miller's analysis. Specifically, Miller foregrounds how difference itself is constructed: "To disallow one set of differences, however, works typically in this community to insist on the force of another set. Weak differences get erased so that strong ones may be underscored, and vice versa" (1981: 112). Writing about the working-class community of *EastEnders* (BBC 1; 1985–), Geraghty traces a similar argument (1991: 150). She notes that the middle-class characters in the soap help to mark out the extent of the community's "tolerance": while some middle-class characters are rejected by the community, others are cautiously accepted because they are willing to endorse the community's values (ibid.). What emerges, then, is that the common traits binding a community together are both different from one narrative to another, and also hierarchical in nature – some commonalities are more crucial to unity than others. While the latter idea of

hierarchy will be addressed in more detail in the following chapter, here it is important to note that communities in various series will be founded on different commonalties and will "underscore" and "erase" diverse sets of differences. As Herman states, "what counts as normal or canonical will vary from world to world, narrative to narrative – as will, therefore, what counts as disruptive, disequilibrium-causing, noncanonical" (2009: 133).

Understanding what binds characters together into the distinct communities of their respective television shows thus becomes crucial to identifying the forces of that show's coherent expansion. For it is not a character's identity alone that helps govern these forces, but their identity in relation to a pattern of *alignment and difference* with other characters. The precise nature of the plotlines a series may generate will depend not only on characters' individual traits, but on the particular chemistry of their combination. While a divergent character trait may be played up in one show to generate plot, in another it could be "nullified" into a "storyless backdrop" (Miller, 1981: 128). In *Friends*, the fact that the six main characters are New Yorkers is seldom used in a direct fashion to generate plot. Instead, this communal trait functions to bind the characters together and thus contributes to the show's identity coherence. In *Norther Exposure* (CBS; 1990-1995), on the other hand, New Yorker Joel Fleischman finds himself at odds with the residents of the small Alaskan town where he is working and the opposition becomes a frequent source of narrative.

However, two caveats need to be noted with respect to this argument. Firstly, it must be mentioned that common traits can also become a source of narrative and even conflict, a point I return to later in this chapter and again in chapter two. The second qualification is that the ongoing nature of television series means that the distinction between what is 'narratable' and 'nonnarratable' may fluctuate over time. In *Hill Street Blues* (NBC; 1981-1987) Bobby Hill's racial difference from most of the main characters is seldom used to generate plot. In an episode of season two (2.12), however, Hill is elected as the Vice President of the Black Officers' Coalition in a plotline that stems from differences between the white and black police officers' experiences. It results in a temporary rift between Hill and his white partner, who becomes jealous of the Coalition's demands on Hill's time. After Hill quits the coalition, the racial difference once again becomes dormant. This example is also a good illustration of how structural observations can work in tandem with other theoretical perspectives, such as ideological analysis. For while I am focusing on how patterns of alignment and difference can help generate narrative, these observations could also be taken further to examine the ideological implications of what a series chooses to deem as 'narratable' difference.

Geraghty's discussion of community as defined both by unifying commonalties and tolerable differences can be productively combined with Chatman's theory of character as a paradigm of traits. Specifically, we can conceptualise a television community as another paradigm of traits within a series – one that exists alongside individual trait-paradigms and is an aggregate of them. That is, a communal trait-paradigm is composed of those traits that a majority of recurring characters have in common. Like television characters, television communities and their trait-paradigms are inherently serial entities. To be considered part of the community, a character needs to both be recurrently present in the narrative and repeatedly exhibit traits that align him or her with other recurring characters. The community's trait-paradigm may be extensive when characters possess a great deal of shared characteristics, or it may be more limited when such commonalities are few. Not all television communities will be as large as their soap opera counterparts (indeed, few are), nor do they need to be founded on values such as sharing and acceptance, as the soaps analysed by Geraghty are (1991: 85). Despite these difference, however, the broader notion of community still presents itself as a highly productive analytical concept precisely because of its connotations of (partial) unity in the face of (partial) dissent, thereby mimicking the qualities of television narrative as discussed in the introduction.

In line with Geraghty's study, the communal paradigm of traits in its entirety remains an 'ideal'. The degree of alignment between a character's individual traits and those of the community may vary. It is possible for characters to be tied to the community only through basic factors such as geography, while other characters may be highly representative of communal traits. And no individual character need be representative of all traits in this communal paradigm, either at a given moment or over time. For every general impression one might make about the community there may very well be an exception to the rule. The WJM newsroom in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* may strike us as being a congenial and friendly community even though its producer, Lou Grant, often lacks any permanent expression of this trait, being a lot more irritable and curt than his employees. In *Glee*, the teenagers in the glee club can be described as talented singers for the most part until Sugar Motta, a decidedly poor singer, joins the club in season three.

Conversely, there may be instances where aberrant traits become communal ones. This is because a communal trait-paradigm, like an individual one, is subject to change. However, this process is even more complex in communities than in individuals because it requires a majority of recurring characters to all exhibit a particular and consistent change. Sometimes this process can happen gradually, as when the cast of *Friends* move from being

six single characters in season one to being five coupled characters and one bachelor in the finale. In *Friends*, this process is inherently linked with the gradual movement of the show towards its conclusion. The conflation of these two factors is by no means coincidental; alterations to a community's shared traits can have significant implications for the coherent expansion of that series. As such, changes to communal traits occur more frequently when a series is progressing toward a finale, as will be discussed in chapter four. Less 'terminal' changes to a community's trait-paradigm are not impossible, however, and chapter three will remark on just such a shift in *Orange is the New Black*.

As with individual characters, the formal definition of community as a paradigm of traits allows the community to remain an open construct. As a series progresses, the parameters of a community can expand, contract, or shift as characters enter or leave its borders. As Geraghty observes, the "division between the inside and the outside" of communities is not always clear: "Many characters hover on the boundaries, moving between acceptance and rejection as the situation demands" (1991: 101). Such shifting boundaries are linked to the longevity of the community as well as the series itself. "The families and communities on which soaps are based have continually to accommodate new problems and tensions if they are to continue," writes Geraghty (1991: 129). And while different series may "accommodate new problems and tensions" at varied rates, a theoretical conception of community that allows for this possibility is key – it links the accommodative qualities of the community with the productive forces of narrative, as discussed in the introduction. To return to a passage from Krieger cited there: "The absorptive power of any would-be unity must at every moment be challenged by that which would break it apart. To retain its dynamic character, it must cultivate its antagonist so that it may uncover always new and greater powers of accommodation" (1989: 41).

Through the theoretical conception of community outlined above, the community becomes a kind of microcosm of the generative forces of the narrative itself. It is both a product of multiplicity and a force that shapes multiplicity by structuring identity. A character's uniqueness as an individual necessarily comes about through a comparison with others. Comparison need not entail opposition, however. In the *Cheers* case study I will explore examples of how characters become individuated from the community, ranging from characters representing a communal trait to an extraordinary degree, to characters whose traits oppose most of the community's paradigm. But if both individual and communal trait-paradigms are defined as open constructs, theoretically if not practically infinite and thus able to act as narrative potential, then we need to look more closely at how something boundless

becomes formed into something concrete. To do so, it is necessary to examine how characters and communities come to mutually constitute and delimit one another, and to ask how these paradigmatic relationships come to be manifested syntagmatically – a multidimensional relationship that I term the serial narrative dynamics of a show.

Serial Narrative Dynamics

"Narrative", posits O'Sullivan, "comprises three elements: the possible, the necessary, and the possible disguised as the necessary" (2009: 323). He goes on to outline the possible and the necessary thus:

> The possible offers the originating conditions for watching or reading a story, the promise of infinite directions in which a particular character or situation might develop. […] But if the possible, or certain aspects of the possible in the particular world of the narrative, do not assume the character of the necessary – a direction or resolution toward which the narrative must be tending – then the narrative remains caught in the sphere of potential. (ibid.)

Initially, characters and communities may seem like ideal embodiments of the possible in a television narrative. Indeed, as I have described them above, they represent the very "sphere of potential" from which the necessary directions of a narrative may emerge. But upon closer analysis, it becomes evident that both characters and communities are also suffused with necessary limitations. To contribute toward the coherence of the series, characters and communities need to themselves remain coherent. And if they are to help generate expansion, characters and communities must remain in a productive relationship with one another. The concept of serial narrative dynamics is meant to express how the possibilities of character are shaped into probable and necessary forms through the arrangement of characters into communities and their positioning in relation to these same communities. In addition, however, the probable direction a series will take is informed not only by these paradigmatic relationships, but also by the way in which they manifest over time. As such, serial narrative dynamics correspond to a definition of structural principles that I laid out in the introduction. That is, a show's dynamics exemplify structure as both spatial – an arrangement of elements in relation to one another – and temporal – the principles according to which one element follows another. In this final section of the chapter, I would like to expand on how the

'spatial' arrangements of characters, as well as the temporal shifts in these arrangements, serve to define the probable direction of a series' narrative.

Fictional characters in any narrative form are partially delimited by the discourse that represents them. In his book, *The One VS The Many*, Alex Woloch argues that this is indeed one of the defining qualities of literary characters – that they emerge at the "juncture between structure and reference" (Woloch, 2003: 17). In this way, Woloch's observations may be viewed as a complement to Chatman's theorisation of the relationship between character and plot, in that the individual 'personality' of a character pervades the discourse and exceeds any limited manifestation of it in the plot's sequence of events. Pilots are a good example of this, since they are frequently constructed so that we, as viewers, want to get to know a character better than the limited run-time of the episode allows. However, as I intimated earlier, this delimitation of character is partially offset in television narratives because of their extensive and indefinite durations. While no discourse is infinite, in ongoing series there is much more opportunity for the suppressed or unelaborated personalities, or traits, of characters to be brought into the narrative over time. Thus, it may be argued that in television narratives, characters are delimited less through the restricted space of the discourse than their counterparts in stand-alone works. Conversely, however, television characters are more prominently delimited through the dynamics between them and the other characters in the discourse. In this regard, Woloch's work on the novel provides a useful counterpart.

Woloch contends that characters, along with being delimited through the space afforded them in the discourse, are also delimited through their formal relationship between any one character and 'the many'. "[T]he space of a particular character emerges only vis-a-vis the other characters who crowd him out or potentially revolve around him," states Woloch (2003: 18). And while Woloch argues that these "dynamics of distribution" are "inherent to narrativity as formal process", his specific focus on the nineteenth-century European novel is justified because of the way the realist novel actualises this process (2003: 30).

> The inclusive aesthetics of the nineteenth-century realist tradition – with its dual impulses to bring in a multitude of characters and to bring out the interiority of a singular protagonist – illuminates particularly well the tension between the structural and referential axes of characterization. (ibid.)

It is in this regard that there is an interesting parallel between Woloch's theory and my own concept of serial narrative dynamics. For as the above discussion of community made clear, a

show's dynamics rely on a similar tension between representing multiplicity whilst simultaneously accommodating individuality. The "inclusive aesthetics" Woloch mentions are certainly ones which the nineteenth-century novel shares with television narratives, not necessarily because of a realist tendency in any given television series but because of the production norms of the medium that privilege groups of recurring characters. Because of this, characters in both the realist novel and in many television series have to compete for space in the discourse.

There is, however, a key difference between the realist novel and the ongoing series. For the important structural and economic role communities play in television narratives means that to secure a *recurring* space in the discourse, characters simultaneously have to secure a place in the show's community. A guest character on a series may be granted a prominent position in a single episode, but in order to acquire a *serial* position in the discourse their traits will have to be configured in relation to those of the other recurring characters. In chapter three, I will look at some examples of how character change can be managed precisely to integrate an occasional guest star into the permanent community of the show. This structural need to align characters with the community means that not only do television characters have to compete with each other for space – or screen-time – in the discourse, but also that their personalities are delimited through the way they need to be arranged in relation to the community. In other words, the development of a character's trait-paradigm is delimited not only through how much time is devoted to its elaboration, but also by the patterns of alignment and difference that have been established between that character and the community.

On the one hand, a character's alignment with the communal trait-paradigm cannot be severed entirely – they must retain at least one trait that keeps them tied to the community if they are to have a significant *and* serial role in the narrative. As chapter two will demonstrate, this is why key shared traits – such as shared jobs or shared locations – often play a key structural role in the dynamics of a series. On the other hand, characters need to retain traits that individuate them from the community as unique personalities. I return to this in point in chapters two and three, where I touch on the role of extras who 'fill out' the community without being individuated characters in their own right. Thus, while "all fictional characters are partially defined by the other characters with whom they interact" (Pearson, 2007: 45), in ongoing television narratives these serial interactions are structured in a very specific way. And it is precisely the nuances of these paradigmatic relations that I hope the concept of serial narrative dynamics will aid in analysing. In chapters two and three I will take up in

detail the implications of these relations in terms of how they determine the shaping of the community as well as how they delimit the possibilities of individual character change. For now, it is sufficient to stress that these dynamic relationships between characters and communities are the primary way in which the potential of a given character is bounded for structural purposes.

Because of the ongoing and contingent nature of series' temporalities, television narratives are not only in a state of dynamic tension but are also subject to dynamic *shifts*. The coherent expansion of a series is influenced not only by the paradigmatic relationships of character and community traits, as outlined above, but also by how these trait-paradigms are organised in any given moment and how these configurations can change over time. This syntagmatic dimension of a show's serial narrative dynamics is equally significant in analysing how the potential of a series is shaped into more concrete possibilities.

Although Chatman defines a character trait as separated from the temporal chain of events, he clarifies that this "does not mean that its moment of expression in the discourse is of no significance" (1978: 129). And in television narratives, the expression of a trait has both local and serial significance. Analysing an isolated unit of narrative, such as an episode, we can ask what character and community traits are being manifested in that moment and in what configuration. In the pilot of *Suits* (USA; 2011–), all the plotlines work together to introduce viewers to a group of lawyers that are all highly capable, intelligent and very ambitious. In this episode, the two main characters – Harvey and Mike – are contrasted with this community and aligned with each other by demonstrating their capacity for unethical and deceitful behaviour in the name of such ambition. However, we can also ask another question pertinent to ongoing television narrative: how does any configuration of traits change over time? Are the same traits consistently expressed from episode to episode, and are they organised predictably in relation to one another? It has already been noted that trait-paradigms are not closed entities but rather open to change, and the dynamics between paradigms can be just as fluid as the paradigms themselves. As such, the way that traits are utilised by any given plot and brought into the chain of events can fluctuate.

Firstly, although a trait-paradigm is built up serially, this does not mean that each trait will be expressed in every instalment of the series. Some traits may lie dormant for the duration of a particular plotline or episode, but such dormancy is different from a trait's domain ending entirely, in Chatman's terms. There are episodes of *Mary Tyler Moore* where Ted is not being miserly with money, yet this does not lead regular viewers to assume that he has stopped being stingy altogether. Patrick Jane's bereavement and his desire to avenge his

murdered wife and daughter are not expressed in every episode of *The Mentalist,* but we assume that this remains the motivating factor for Jane's involvement with the California Bureau of Investigation. "[E]ven regular spectators will need to be reminded of the relevant backstory for an episode," note Blanchet and Vaage (2012: 34). Some series draw on the potential inherent in viewers' cumulative knowledge to create tension around whether a character's trait is simply dormant or whether its domain has ended entirely. In chapter three I will analyse *Orange is the New Black* as an example of a series that does just this.

Secondly, as we watch a series develop we make note of the 'patterns' that emerge from its temporal unfolding, making note of what traits, actions and interactions have narrative consequence and which don't. Plot, we might say, is just the most noticeable pattern of a show but there are others, such as the configurations of trait-paradigms (although the two are always interlinked). The long-running duration of many television series allows for their various trait-paradigms to align or conflict in a range of ways, sometimes in predictable patterns, sometimes in unexpected shifts. In *Northern Exposure* Dr Joel Fleischman's cynicism and scientific logic are frequently brought into conflict with the 'alternative' beliefs of the residents of Cicely, the small Alaskan town where Joel is obliged to practice. Plotlines are often generated through the same juxtaposition of Joel attempting to cure ailments with Western medicine while his patients embrace 'unconventional' explanations and solutions for their problems. Examples include Joel attempting to cope with an outbreak of the flu virus while his Native Alaskan receptionist, Marilyn, uses an ancient tribal remedy to cure the townsfolk (1.5) or Joel's inability to help the local radio DJ, Chris, whose voice was 'taken' by a beautiful woman (2.2). In most of these cases, Joel's traits contrast not just with those of the individual residents of Cicely, but also with the community as a whole.

Other series create patterns that are less easy to discern and therefore predict. *You're the Worst* (FX; 2014–) revolves around Jimmy and Gretchen, two self-centred individuals reluctant to get involved in long-term romantic relationships. These traits that they have in common are somewhat ironic, since the show is a take on the romantic comedy genre, albeit a revisionist one. Consequently, much of the series' tension lies in whether these traits will change and whether change in one individual will align with a similar change in the other, thus making a long-term relationship possible. At the end of the first season, for example, Gretchen mistakenly thinks that Jimmy will propose. Her first reaction is to flee the relationship, but she subsequently works through her anxiety and tells Jimmy she will marry him, only to find out that he never intended to propose. At the end of the second season, it is Jimmy who takes an important step towards commitment when he puts aside his typically

self-serving ways in order to support Gretchen through a worsening bout of depression. Thus, the shifting trait-paradigms and their configurations create suspense around whether each character will temper their selfish tendencies and reconcile to the idea of long-term commitment, and whether such a change will simultaneously be matched in the other partner.

As these different patterns of paradigm configuration play out over time, they inform the possibilities of a show's coherent expansion. According to Chatman, "the working out of plot (or at least some plots) 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" (1978: 46). Chatman quotes Paul Goodman, who states that in the analysis of a poem, "in the beginning anything is possible; in the middle things become probable; in the ending everything is necessary" (quoted in Chatman, 1978: 46). These comments parallel O'Sullivan's discussion of the possible and the necessary in television narratives (2009: 323). In ongoing series cycling through multiple plotlines, the question of possibility and probability rests not only with each individual plot but with the broader dynamics that produce them. Put another way, serial narrative dynamics can help us understand how the choices of possible plotlines in a series are delimited. Part of this, as has been discussed, lies with the trait-paradigms themselves, which help determine what kind of plots a series is likely to tackle. But equally important is the temporal patterns – or 'rhythms' – with which the dynamics function. The stability of the way in which trait-paradigms are configured and the regularity with which dormant narrative potential is actualised can all inform our sense of likelihood of forthcoming events. In some series, as with the *Cheers* case study below, the dynamics operate in a constant rhythm, with character and community trait-paradigms remaining stable and their configurations in relation to each other mostly predictable. In other cases, such as the *Orange is the New Black* case study in chapter three, the configurations of character and community paradigms are much more likely to shift sporadically.

Of course, the indefinite duration of ongoing series also increases the possibility that a show developing in a relatively regular pattern may make more abrupt changes to its dynamics, precisely to stave off the "narrowing of possibility" and the "inevitability" of the end. Examples include *Mad Men*'s season three finale which puts an end to both Don's marriage and the company he works for, as well as the five-year flash forward at the end of *Desperate Housewives'* fourth season. Mittell's discussion of the *Alias* "reboot" in season two also touches on an instance of 're-configuration' (2015: 47), as does O'Sullivan's discussion of "narrative remission" in *Breaking Bad*, where the "supposed inevitability, or at least omnipresence, of the diagnosis is severely compromised" (2017: 179-180). Through

such dramatic reworkings of their narrative givens, series can re-open previously delimited narrative possibilities, causing us to readjust our conception of the shows' structural principles and the plotlines they make probable.

In light of all of this discussion, it may be helpful to conclude by thinking of serial narrative dynamics as both the history and potential of a television series, with both aspects working together to model the probable shape or structure of the show. On the one hand, dynamics are history because trait-paradigms are by their nature cumulative, an organization of narrative material that has been accrued up to a certain point. Through retrospective patterning, we structure not only the paradigms themselves, but the relationships between them and their formations over time. From this history then emerges potential – bounded alternatives of how the series may expand. Information that may have been stored paradigmatically is employed, in future episodes, syntigmatically. And as this potential is actualised, it in turn augments history – confirming existing traits or adding new ones, expanding communities or contracting them.

Narratives, states Chatman, "evoke a world of potential plot details, many of which go unmentioned but can be supplied. The same is true of character. We may project any number of additional details about characters on the basis of what is expressly said" (1978: 29). Ongoing television narratives are ideally positioned to take advantage of this property of narrative, for as series develop they can continue to elaborate upon unmentioned details, be they minor nuances or major revelations. To clarify, then, the history being evoked here is the history of the discourse, not necessarily the history of the characters (although the two are of course connected). Sometimes, unknown character histories hover strictly in the realm of potential until they become the subject of future plotlines and thus enter the history of the discourse. Dale's ill-fated love affair in *Twin Peaks*, Gabrielle's sexual abuse as a teenager in *Desperate Housewives*, Monica's weight problems in *Friends*, Ted's absent father in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* are all examples of character history being exploited to generate narrative, from isolated episodic plots to long-running arcs. In some shows this relationship between past and future is made the very thematic centre of the series, as in *Transparent* (Amazon; 2014–) and *Mad Men*, the latter of which will be explored in chapter four. Thus, the concept of serial narrative dynamics can contribute to scholarly discussions, cited in the introduction, of the backward and forward motion so critical to many television narratives (Holdsworth, 2011: 64; O'Sullivan, 2011: 126). To paraphrase Coleridge, serial narrative dynamics can help explain in formal terms how a series collects force from its retrogressive movements, force that will in turn carry it onward (quoted in Krieger, 1989: 31).

By way of summary, let me return to the metaphor of DNA that I called upon in the introduction. Hopefully without stretching the metaphor too thin, I would like to propose that the concept of serial narrative dynamics is analogous to a series' narrative DNA. In it is encoded both the history of a show as well as the information needed for it to replicate itself. While the show's dynamics cannot predict the final course a show will take, predetermining all future narrative events, they do play a key role in delimiting some possibilities. And while a multitude of other circumstances will help chart out a series' path, many of them unforeseen at its outset, the dynamics can help us understand why a series adapts the way it does to these forces. Having laid this basic groundwork, I would now like to put an individual show 'under the microscope' to demonstrate how the concepts I have outlined thus far can aid in the formal analysis of a long-running series.

CASE STUDY: *CHEERS*

In 1993 when *Cheers* was about to go off air, a *Time* magazine article remarked that "by the end of its run, the *Cheers* laughpoints had become so familiar – Woody's naiveté, Carla's surly put-downs, mailman Cliff's out-to-lunch monologues – that the show seemed almost to write itself" (Zoglin and Bland, 1993: 59). Indeed, this familiarity is representative of what is typically identified as the narrative strategies of the sitcom. One commentator, for example, cites "the genre's fundamental reliance upon and exploitation of repetition, evident in the regular return to an established set of characters and environments. Likewise, plot structures that hinge upon those characters interacting with scenarios allows familiar attitudes, beliefs and motivations to be visited and revisited" (Walters, 2013: 113). As such, the sitcom proves a convenient initial case study to demonstrate how serial narrative dynamics with relatively stable trait-paradigms and regular patterns of configuration can produce a multitude of plots. For sitcoms often exemplify the dynamics of 'traditional' episodic television with its need to "strike a narrative balance between repetition of premise and differentiation of plot" (Sconce, 2004: 100). And not only do sitcom characters possess relatively consistent traits, the dialogue of programs such as *Cheers* often articulates and reinforce these traits, constructing running jokes based on their dependability. The sitcom is thus a genre that is explicitly aware of its reliance on individual character traits for its sustainability, as well as granting great importance to the make-up of its collective communities. For in comedies, as Mittell points out, "ensemble dynamics are usually what distinguishes a given program" (2015: 126). Analysing a traditional sitcom therefore grants an opportunity to explore serial narrative dynamics in a relatively stable context before using this same concept to examine shows that are more readily considered as 'complex', thus demonstrating its applicability across a range of television narratives.

That said, close analyses of traditional series also have the capacity to reveal their own complexities. I agree with Kristin Thompson, who writes:

> Since the 1980s, dramas with multiple storylines have been praised as introducing complexity into narrative television. I shall argue, however, that good situation comedies and "simple" dramas often in fact also have an underlying complexity. Indeed, many of the interesting aspects of storytelling are hidden in television in a way that they are not in most other arts. We watch television via single episodes, and

> those episodes may be unremarkable. Yet television is structured in ways that become apparent only if we take the long view. (Thompson, 2003: x)

Thus, my second aim in choosing a sitcom as the first case study is to take this "long-view" in order to demonstrate how a program that, on an episodic level, may appear "unremarkable" does indeed possess intricate structural principles worthy of detailed analysis. And while such shows may opt for general stability, their narrative dynamics can also demonstrate a keen adaptability when faced with the contingencies of production. Indeed, such adaptability is a key reason why *Cheers*, specifically, makes for an instructive case study.

Originally airing on NBC from 1982 until 1993 and lasting for a total of eleven seasons, *Cheers* is certainly a prime example of narrative longevity. Although in contemporary scholarship *Cheers* is most often cited as an example of a show that introduced serial plotlines into its narrative (Sconce, 2004: 102; Mittell, 2006: 32), the majority of its plots are still episodic. Consequently, *Cheers* is a good illustration of how the same serial narrative dynamics can produce both serial and episodic plots. In addition, *Cheers* provides an opportunity to explore how those dynamics adjust over time. *Cheers* had to survive the loss of two major characters as well as incorporating new recurring characters into its community. Its ability to do so in a way that preserved its structural principles makes it an example of narrative dynamics adapting to changes brought on, not by planned transformations to the diegesis, but by unforeseen circumstances within the production. I would like to begin with a detailed analysis of the *Cheers* pilot, examining how it established the dynamics of the show, before moving on to an overview of how the show's trait-paradigms were configured in the early seasons. Finally, I explore how these dynamics adapted to several cast changes, including the departure of Shelly Long.

***Cheers*: Meeting the Regulars, Establishing the Dynamics**

Pilots are often referred to by scholars as both exceptional and expositional episodes, ones in which the 'world' of the show is established (Martin, 2013: 60; McCabe, 2013: 188; Mittell, 2015: 56). In the case of the terminology I have been employing, this means introducing us to the recurring characters, the community they form, and establishing some of the traits that will come to define them, both as individuals and collectively. One particular challenge of a pilot is to simultaneously build a diegetic world from scratch while also giving the impression that it already exists, with characters that have pre-existing traits and possibly

relationships. As Sconce puts it, a show should "orchestrate a sense of community for their viewers, a world they feel they inhabit" (2004: 95); but a pilot must also *initiate* the viewer into that community, setting up its traits and paradigmatic relationships.

Television series employ a variety of approaches in order to achieve this. Some begin by forming a new community in the pilot, allowing viewers to integrate into the community from its first day of inception, as do *Glee* and *Lost*. Other shows launch their narratives with an established community already in place, but use stylistic techniques to introduce viewers to this community. *Modern Family* (ABC; 2009–) and *Arrested Development* are good examples here, both of which use their 'mockumentary' styles to provide viewers with all the information they need. Sometimes integration into an existing community can be aided by disturbing the dynamics of that community in the pilot, such as the opening of *Six Feet Under* (HBO; 2001-2005), which begins with the death of a father and the return home of the oldest son, or *Desperate Housewives*, which opens with the suicide of a friend and neighbour in a seemingly idyllic suburban neighbourhood. One very prevalent strategy is to introduce an 'outsider' into a pre-existing community. This character, unfamiliar with the rest of the group, becomes a proxy for the audience and allows information about the community to be relayed to them and thereby also to us. Examples of such pilots include *The Bing Bang Theory* (CBS; 2007–), *Friends*, *Twin Peaks*, *Mad Men* and *Orange is the New Black*. And it is into this latter category that *Cheers* falls.

In his "slow-motion replay" of the *Veronica Mars* (UPN, 2004–2006; The CW, 2006–2007) pilot, Mittell demonstrates just how much narrative information can be conveyed in a few minutes of screen-time (2015: 68-85). Using the concepts I have been developing thus far, I wish to employ a similarly comprehensive strategy in relation to *Cheers*. But like Mittell, I am forced to limit how much detail I can include due to the space such analysis requires. That said, although the analysis below cannot literally go through the pilot shot by shot, it can still indicate that 'even' a 25-minute pilot for a traditional sitcom has a significant number of narrative strategies at work that do repay detailed analysis. The chief narrative techniques that I will be focusing on are those that simultaneously unite most of the major characters (the employees and regulars of the Cheers bar) into a community while relegating one character, Diane Chambers, to the role of outsider. Indeed, it is through a contrast with Diane that the unity of the community is established. Additionally, her outsider status helps the viewer apprehend the community in terms of both their traits and relationships.

The pilot's plot centres on how Diane, a young TA at Boston University, comes to take a job as a waitress at Cheers. She first enters the bar with her fiancé and employer, Dr

Sumner Sloan, who is insisting on retrieving his grandmother's wedding ring from his ex-wife before he and Diane fly to Barbados to get married. As the episode progresses it becomes increasingly clear that Sumner still has feelings for his ex-wife and in the end abandons Diane at the bar. Now single and unable to go back to working for Sumner, Diane reluctantly accepts a job offer to stay on as a waitress at Cheers.

One of the first significant aspects of the episode is that it opens with the bar virtually empty save for its owner and bartender, Sam Malone, and a teenage boy trying to con his way into getting a drink. As the boy exits, Diane and Sumner enter, and a lengthy scene begins that will introduce us to most of the regular characters. It is as if the community is being 'assembled' for us, as each character enters the bar one by one, allowing the audience to absorb new information in stages. The length of a standard sitcom episode means that this ten-minute scene forms nearly half of the episode's runtime. As such, each line of dialogue needs to serve multiple purposes: it needs to introduce the individual traits of the characters; it needs to establish how the characters relate to one another and give us a sense of the traits of this community; and more fundamentally, it needs to give us a reason to consider this group of characters *as* a community; finally, befitting the genre, the dialogue should also aim to be funny.

The fact that the bar is largely unpopulated at the start of the episode serves another important function – it allows the audience to take in the Cheers bar itself, another important 'character' in the show. The space being uncrowded allows for easy orientation, both spatial, as we take in the layout of the bar, and aesthetic, as its design gives us an indication of the kind of establishment this might be and thus the kind of patrons we may expect to frequent it. Indeed, setting can often be a prime indicator of key communal traits. For example, Pearson, writing about workplace dramas, states that the workplace "constructs character" (2007: 46). Geraghty makes a similar remark about British soap operas, noting that they "use their settings […] to invoke a particular kind of community" (1991: 92). In the case of *Cheers*, the bar is dominated by dark earth tones and natural materials such as wood and brick, conveying an initial sense of history and unpretentious comfort, prefiguring the down-to-earth character of most of its regular customers.

When Diane and Sumner enter the bar, Sam is in his office and thus not in the scene. As Sumner steps away to use the payphone, Diane is left alone in the main, central space of the bar. A telephone begins to ring behind the bar; seeing no-one around to answer it, Diane picks up the phone. At this point, Sam comes out of his office, still drinking coffee and chewing a mouthful of food. "Are you Sam?" Diane asks him. He nods. "Someone named

Vicky," Diane explains, handing him the phone. At this Sam backs away from the phone, mumbling "no, no, no". Reluctantly, Diane lies and tells the caller that Sam had to step out, taking a message for him:

Sam: Well?
Diane: You're a magnificent pagan beast.
Sam: Thanks, what's the message?
Diane: Now listen, I didn't like doing that.
Sam: I'm sorry, if I didn't own this place I'd fire me on the spot.

The humour here revolves around two key traits that will come to define these characters: for Sam, it is his sexual prowess; for Diane, it is her quickness to get involved in the affairs of others. The exchange also sets up several contrasts between the two characters: Sam doesn't take his relationships too seriously while Diane is about to get married, and Diane is more concerned with moral and ethical matters than is Sam. Moments later, Sam is also contrasted with Sumner as he fails to be impressed by Sumner's academic and poetic accomplishments. Later in the episode Diane will make this point more explicitly, and with a greater value judgement, when she tells Sam that Sumner's "everything you're not: he's well bred, he's highly educated, he's distinguished, he's urbane". The contrasting traits established here will serve as key forces in the show's dynamics, and will be returned to a multitude of times as a source of plot.

As the scene progresses, the pattern established here will be repeated: as each new character enters the bar, a brief comic exchange between them and Sam will serve to introduce key character traits. In addition, with each new entrance the communal traits will begin to emerge as an intimated aggregate of the individual conversations. The first to enter is Cheers' second bartender, an older man named Ernie Pantusso, or 'Coach'. He enters complaining about the American football team, 'The Patriots'. As Sam engages with Coach on the topic it becomes apparent that this is a subject that both men are passionate and knowledgeable about:

Coach: The patriots did it again. This is going to be the worst draft yet. They got a first-round pick, right Sam. Do they get a jack-rabbit for the back field? No. A gunslinger quarterback? No. A linebacker they get, Sam, a linebacker.

Sam: I don't know, Coach. I've seen a good linebacker turn a whole team around.

Coach: Yeah, me too.

The punchline hints at the trait that will come to define Coach's character – he is quite a simpleminded man, who gets easily confused and tends to misunderstand the statements of others. Sam attempts to introduce Diane to Coach and explain her circumstances, but she requests that Sam not discuss "her private life with everyone that comes in". This juxtaposes the comradery between Sam and Coach with Diane, who clearly has no desire to integrate herself into their world. She has already taken out a book and started reading, thus disengaging herself from her surroundings and re-affirming her intellectualism (this reading habit is one Diane will maintain over the seasons).

Next to arrive is Carla Tortelli, a middle-aged, Italian waitress. Carla's entrance is preceded by Coach remarking to Sam that "Carla's late again". Although the line is small and mundane, it is an indication of the kind of narrative work pilots must do – creating an illusion that this world already exists and that these characters have prevailing traits. Carla then bursts into the bar:

Carla: Okay, I'm late! My kid was throwing up all over the place. You don't buy that excuse I'm quitting, cause I don't work for a man who has no compassion for my children. And it doesn't look like you're exactly swamped here. I'm usually very punctual, you don't like it, that's fine, cause this isn't such a great job to begin with. I'm gonna change.

As Carla enters the toilet, Sam turns to Coach: "Think I was too hard on her?" Carla's lengthy and loud speech introduces her as a working mother with a fiery temperament and a no-nonsense attitude, relying partially on stereotypes of Italian Americans. Sam's response, meanwhile, reveals him to have laid-back attitude as a boss. As Carla re-enters the bar, she joins in on the discussion of the Patriot's draft selection with Coach, thereby aligning herself with him and Sam, and confirming a hypothesis that this community is passionate about sport. Meanwhile the divide between the Cheers community and Diane is also re-established. Although Carla initially attempts to joke with Diane, Sam tells Carla that Diane doesn't want to be disturbed. "Oh, well tells her nibs I'm sorry," Carla quips, the first of many gibes Carla will make about Diane's self-important attitude throughout the series.

The next person to enter the bar is its most devoted regular – Norm Peterson, an overweight accountant who spends all of his free time at Cheers. As Norm walks through the door and greets the bar's occupants, the three staff members yell out in unison: "Norm!" This once again helps to establish patterns of behaviour that predate the pilot. It also reinforces a message that has already been communicated by the show's title sequence, in which the theme song famously proclaims that "sometimes you wanna go where everybody knows your name". These lyrics, together with the bar's comfortable aesthetics and the staff's greeting of Norm reinforce each other in establishing Cheers as a welcoming space where people can escape the troubles of daily life by retreating into a familiar community. As Norm takes a seat at the bar, Sam asks him "How you doing Norm? What d'ya know?" to which Norm replies, "Not enough". The reply typifies Norm's pessimistic attitude towards life as well as his passive and nonchalant character. The greeting of Norm as he enters will become a trademark of the series, as will the pithy question and answer exchange between Norm and someone behind the bar. Brett Mills notes that one obstacle for sitcoms is that "broadcasting is inherently about communicating with large, diverse, unconnected audiences, whereas comedy has traditionally relied on close relationships between joke tellers and audiences" (2009: 15). But recurring patterns such as Norm's greeting create precisely this kind of close relationship between the programme and regular viewers. Placing the foundations for such patterns in a pilot is therefore important for orchestrating that sense of community for the viewer, to return to Sconce's phrase (2004: 95).

As Norm also brings up the topic of the Patriots draft, he too is aligned with Sam, Coach and Carla in their love of sport. With these five characters assembled around the bar, all of the actors whose names appear in the first season's opening credits have been introduced (Cliff Clavin, who will become a major character from season two, is introduced a little later in the episode). The next portion of the scene becomes devoted to providing the viewer with key background information about the characters, using Diane as a proxy. Because Diane is an outsider and clearly doesn't share the community's love or knowledge of sport, this allows for the exposition to take place more 'naturally'. Norm moves the conversation from football to baseball and the Red Sox, remarking that the Sox could have used Sam today. Like Coach and Carla before him, Norm attempts to draw Diane into the conversation:

> Norm: Yo, miss, wouldn't you love to see Sammy there, flinging the old horse-hide again?

Diane: Flinging what?

Norm: Don't you know who this is?

This exchange yet again reinforces the dynamic between Diane and the Cheers community. Firstly, the fact that Norm addresses the question to Diane at all demonstrates that in this bar the patrons are probably accustomed to involving each other in their conversations. Secondly, Norm assumes that Diane will have an interest in sport and knowledge of Sam's baseball career, suggesting that these are traits that most Cheers' regulars share. Finally, the difference in diction between Norm and Diane's speech, with his use of slang and her inability to understand it, further enforces the opposition between Diane's level and type of education, and that of the others. Norm's question is followed by several points of exposition: that Sam was a baseball player and was very good, that Coach was in fact his coach for a time, that Sam left baseball because he developed a drinking problem, that he bought the bar while an alcoholic and hung on to it after he sobered up. Crucially, these facts are conveyed to Diane 'in relay', with each person taking an opportunity to add something to the story, once again uniting the community into a collective unit while Diane remains the outsider.

The communal nature of the bar, and Diane's resistance to it, continues to be reinforced as the episode continues. As the bar fills up, a conversation strikes up at one table about "the sweatiest movie ever made" and quickly spreads to include the entire bar, with some participants having to raise their voice in order to unite parties scattered across the room in one communal conversation. Only Diane laments her presence: "This is the night before my wedding and I'm in the middle of a sweat contest". When Sumner returns to the bar and tells Diane that he is confused about his feeling for his ex-wife, most of their private conversation is covered in two-shots which focus on them apart from the rest of the community. As Sumner leaves yet again, the camera lingers on a worried Diane framed in a medium shot by herself. A cut then reveals the rest of the room, with every person around and behind the bar staring intently at her in dead silence. As a parallel to the previous scene, it informs the viewer that at Cheers not only trivial conversations like the "sweat contest" but very personal ones are shared by the community as a whole. Geraghty states that in soaps, public spaces need to be "widely accessible, free-for-all areas where no one can be prevented from joining in a conversation even when their views are not wanted", further stating that private and public locations are not "watertight" with dramatic private moments often playing out in public (1991: 53-54). The description also applies to *Cheers,* in which the binary is collapsed even further – for in its depiction of the "workplace family", the closest personal

ties of the characters are to others at Cheers, something common to many series set in the workplace. Sérgio Dias Branco, in an insightful article on the spatial and temporal features of sitcoms, writes of *Cheers*:

> How do the characters live in this unified space? How do they dwell in it? There are noticeable differences between Diane Chambers's (Shelley Long) pensive and elegant gestures and Carla Tortelli's (Rhea Perlman) careless, graceless actions. But what is more striking is their dynamic as a community, the communion of different people. (Dias Branco, 2013: 97)

What is emphasized here by Dias Branco is that very same property of communities that is so critical for Geraghty in soap operas and that I believe is central to most ongoing series: their ability to bind characters through shared commonalities while simultaneously preserving their sense of individuality.

Indeed, the *Cheers* pilot demonstrates a range of techniques to individuate characters from the community, creating various degrees of alignment between individual and communal trait-paradigms. Diane is of course an extreme example, with most of her traits being incompatible with or even in direct opposition to the traits of the community. As such, her character is a typical example of how binary oppositions can generate conflict in narrative. While she is highly educated the other characters in the community often lack even more basic levels of education; while she is extremely articulate and verbose the diction of the other characters is more informal, often filled with slang; both of these oppositions also point to a distinction of class, with Diane coming from a wealthy, upper-class family (even though she has refused to take their money), while the rest of the group fall under working-class and middle-class categories. From these fundamental differences emerge a variety of others, such as differences in hobbies, dating habits, and aspirations.

But while such oppositional traits are an effective and common strategy to individuate characters and generate plot, there are also others. In the case of the rest of the major characters, their trait-paradigms align quite closely with the communal one, with one or two key traits used to distinguish them as individuals. A character may be individuated through traits that are unique to them but not in conflict with those of the community. For example, while the bar's community all endorse and value both heteronormative sexual prowess and sporting ability, only Sam actually possesses these 'skills' as part of his trait-paradigm. And it is precisely these skills that define him as a character and result in the rest of the community

revering him. Another way characters become individuated is by becoming exaggerated or remarkable examples of communal traits, either because of the degree to which the trait is manifested in the individual or the precise manner in which it pronounces itself. For example, while most members of the community enjoy drinking beer, Norm's exaggerated devotion to the beverage singles him out. And while the Cheers community can generally be described as unintellectual (sometimes even anti-intellectual), different characters represent this trait in a variety ways. On one extreme, the character of Coach is a man who just is not very smart – he gets confused by the simplest of conversations. On the other hand, Sam, while lacking Diane's high-brow knowledge and cultural references, still has "street smarts", as Diane puts it (3.16).

Similarly, oppositional traits are not the only ones that are able to generate conflict. A clash between common traits is also capable of producing conflict, especially when those traits are confrontational is some respect, such as pride, stubbornness, selfishness or competitiveness. An example of the latter occurs in 'King of the Hill' (3.15), in which Diane confronts Sam about his over-competitive nature. Sam confesses to being very competitive but has the realisation that Diane is also. Diane is appalled at the accusation. "I'm not competitive. I'm intense, and strong-willed, but I think that mindless games and contests are very destructive and diminish the human spirit," she tells Sam. Here we see Diane trying to use her extensive vocabulary to dissociate herself from a trait that Sam possesses and reinforce traits that she sees as valuable. The word 'mindless' is key, as it illustrates Diane's attempt to distance herself from the non-intellectual pursuits of the bar. This is a minor example of how disputes about the naming of traits can be productive – the distinction that Diane draws forces an examination of whether differentiating between competitiveness and intensity can have a functional value in the narrative. In this instance, the action of the episode invalidates Diane's distinction, as she and Sam end up playing Ping-Pong for hours to prove his point. The incident also demonstrates that characters cannot always be taken at their word as far as their traits are concerned, since what they believe to be true of themselves may be proven otherwise by their actions. Towards the end of the *Cheers* pilot, one such hint is provided about Diane's self-imposed opposition to the bar's community.

The last eight minutes of the pilot circle back to its opening. The day is over and Sam, Coach, Carla, Diane, Norm and one other customer are the last people left at the bar. As each character exits, the final joke dedicated to them reminds us of the traits they were introduced with: Coach's 'slowness', Norm's dedication to frequenting Cheers and drinking beer. As the

bar's last regular leaves, thanking Sam for listening to his problems, Diane is left alone in the room with Sam and engages with him willingly for the first time:

> Diane: I wonder why people tell bartenders their problems. It's kind of sad isn't it? […] These poor wretches with no one in the world to turn to but some stranger who mixes drinks. I met Sumner two years ago…

Both the humour and narrative significance of this statement lie in the quick turn that Diane's comments take, from being critical of the bar's regulars to partaking in one of the activities that define them – sharing their problems with the bartender. Indeed, it hints that despite her assertions to the contrary, Diane may be more like the Cheers community than she would like to admit, a notion that the series explores more fully as it progresses. This is also the first action that Diane takes that will allow her to (partially) integrate into this community. The second occurs when Diane finds out that Sumner has left for Barbados with his ex-wife and Sam offers her a job at Cheers. While Diane is first indignant, Sam points out that she has few other prospects and predicts that the phrase "magnificent pagan beast" has not left Diane's mind. Thus, by the end of the episode, two crucial links are established between Diane and the *Cheers* community: her new job and a potential attraction to Sam, with a range of contrasting traits remaining as a source of potential tension.

Serial Dynamics, Episodic Plots

In *Cheers,* the trait-paradigms established in the pilot generally remain quite stable and are continually reinforced. In season one, for example, the traits introduced are all returned to again as a source of plot: Sam's sexual prowess in 'Sam's Women' (1.2) and 'Any Friend of Diane's' (1.6), Carla's temper in 'The Tortelli Tort' (1.3), Norm's devotion to frequenting Cheers in 'Any Friend of Diane's' (1.6), Diane's intellectual pretensions in 'The Spy Who Came in for a Cold One' (1.12), the community's love of sport in 'The Tortelli Tort' (1.3) and 'Let Me Count the Ways' (1.14). Likewise, the configuration of the paradigms remains constant, with the same traits brought into relationship with one another: Diane's sense of morality is contrasted with Sam and Carla's disregard for morality in 'Now Pitching, Sam Malone' (1.13) and 'Father Knows Last' (1.15); the community's admiration for Sam's sexual 'achievements' in 'Sam's Women' (1.2). What is significant, however, is that these recurring dynamics are able to generate both episodic and serialised plotlines as the show

goes on. The most prominent of the latter is the on-again, off-again relationship that develops between Sam and Diane – a serial element that is sustained through the show's first five seasons, until actress Shelly Long's departure from the series.

Speaking about Sam and Diane's relationship in 2016, the show's co-creator James Burrows called it the "propeller that drove the boat" (Hibberd, 2016: 58), while in 1987, when *Cheers* was about to enter its sixth season, Ted Danson remarked that "Sam and Diane were the center of *Cheers* as a partnership" (Harmetz, 1987: n.p). One way to interpret such statements is to view the serialised relationship plotline as a 'spine' which gives the programme its structure and ensures its longevity, with the resolution of the plotline becoming an 'end-goal' of the series. While such a teleological analysis is feasible, an alternative perspective is also possible. Indeed, as I have already argued, placing too much emphasis on a particular plotline as the source of a show's longevity may result in overlooking the dynamics that fuel not only that plotline, but many others.

In the case of *Cheers*, the narrative dynamics that inform Diane's tumultuous relationship with Sam also inform many other plotlines, all founded on the distinctions between Diane and the bar's community established in the pilot. Although Sam and Diane are attracted to each other they have almost nothing else in common, a dynamic that applies to the relationship between Diane and the other major characters too. The conflict between the Cheers community and Diane's intellectualism and cultural pretentions sometimes inform episodic plotlines outside of her relationship with Sam, such as Diane's attempt to expose the ruse of a 'spy' with her intellectual superiority (2.12), her reluctant participation in the Miss Barmaid contest (1.18), or her marvelling at Sam's new interest in reading novels (4.6). Indeed, sometimes the dynamics are not presented through plotlines at all. As I noted earlier in this chapter, an event or action that may not contribute to the linear progression of plot can be just as effective in demonstrating a trait or the dynamics between them. A prime example in *Cheers* is Carla's perpetual dislike for Diane's pretentiousness. While the animosity between them is rarely developed into a fully-fledged plotline, it becomes a running gag throughout the show, with Carla continually finding new and creative ways to insult Diane. Such moments may not move the narrative forward themselves, but they are critical in reinforcing the show's serial narrative dynamics which in turn generate plot.

Nor was Diane the only character used to provide these opposing traits. 'Outsider' characters were brought in on an episodic basis to enact this same tension with the community. Here, *Cheers'* setting plays to its advantage since the bar is a space easily penetrated by a vast array of clientele, something that it has in common with the popular

procedural formats. Although initially Diane was the only source of the clash between the Cheers community and the world of 'high culture, other (episodic) characters began to fulfil the function more and more frequently. This often included providing other 'well-bred' romantic partners for Sam, such as Diane's friend Rebecca (1.6); the journalist Paula (3.19) and the councilwoman Janet (4.24 -4.26). A similar dynamic is also created between Carla and an episodic love-interest, the "distinguished and accomplished" Dr Bennett Ludlow (3.13). These examples also illustrate another notable aspect in the process of naming traits. In *Cheers*, 'intellectual' or 'cultured' characters are broadly defined in the narrative. This is because in Cheers (both the bar and the show) there is little functional need to differentiate between various kinds of 'intellectuals'. Academics, psychiatrists, writers and artists are all placed within this category by most members of the Cheers community and end up serving the same function within the series' narrative dynamics, providing a contrast to the generally low-brow traits of the regulars. With other traits, however, there is a functional need to find more accurate description and adjectives. For example, the bar's community are not just sport's fans, they are supporters of Boston teams specifically. The distinction is structurally significant in its capacity to generate conflict and thus plot, as when Carla attacks a Yankee fan who then threatens to sue the bar (1.3), or when Sam and Coach bet against the Boston Celtics after an MIT professor uses a computer to predict that they will lose a game (1.14). The very general grouping of the intellectual sphere means that a wide array of characters can be called upon to fulfil a similar structural function in the series as does Diane.

In addition to being a source of conflict, Sam and Diane's relationship also generated narrative tension because it threatened to 'disprove' their individuating traits. Sam often finds himself apprehensive about committing to one woman, thus eliminating the chief way in which he proves his masculinity to himself and others. Diane, meanwhile, is frequently offended when she is grouped with the unintelligent women Sam typically dates. Yet this tension, too, was also explored through episodic plotlines. The tendency is especially prevalent with regards to Diane's character, since her reluctant presence in the *Cheers* community leads her to question whether her 'true' identity is at odds with her idea of herself. For example, while Diane prides herself on her intellectual and artistic capabilities, some episodes revolve around these being called into question. Two episodes significant in this regard occur in season five. The first, 'Everyone Imitates Art' (5.10), centres on the rejection of Diane's work from a poetry publication, while the second, 'Dance, Diane, Dance' (5.12), deals with Diane's unaccomplished dream of becoming a ballerina. The former ends on a positive note when Sam reveals that he published a poem plagiarised from one of

Diane's love-letters under his name, thus finally making Diane a published author. 'Dance, Diane, Dance', however, ends on an uncharacteristically melancholy note for *Cheers*, as Diane slinks out of a ballet audition, having to abandon her dream. A speech Diane gives in 'Everyone Imitates Art' highlights the discrepancy between Diane's perception of herself and how she is portrayed in the diegesis through her actions and the opinions of others:

> Diane: I've struggled so hard for so long to keep my dreams alive. And I haven't fooled anyone but myself. I know all along you all considered me a pretentious, self-deluded windbag and apparently you've all been right. I'm never going to be Diane Chambers the great poet, world-famous novelist and revered artist. I've gone as high as I'm going to go. I'm a waitress in a beer-hall. And not a very good one. A waitress. A waitress. A waitress.

The term 'self-deluded' points to a significant trajectory in Diane's defining traits, illustrated by the jokes made at her expense. While they began as jokes about the traits themselves (her over-intellectualism, her verboseness) they began to include jokes about her unfounded pretensions.

Viewed in this light, the relationship between Sam and Diane can still be considered as the "propeller" of *Cheers*, but not simply because their romance is the chief serial plot of the show. In the broader context of the series' structural principles, their relationship is one of the most prominent ways in which two sets of opposing traits are placed into conflict with one another and, in Diane's case especially, called into question. And because there are ways to enact this tension other than their romance, these dynamics can potentially survive the resolution of their on-again, off-again relationship.[ii] In fact, before Long decided to leave the show, its creators were already planning to enter the next season with Sam and Diane as a married couple. "We sort of felt we'd explored everything we could with two single people," Burrows remarked in 1987 (quoted in Harmetz, 1987: n.p.). And when Long did depart, the dynamics of the show adapted by replacing her structural role in the show, one of several instances of the show needing to adapt to the departure of existing characters and entrance of new ones.

Adapting the Dynamics: Departures and New Additions

Discussing the death of characters in sitcoms, Mills notes that these have to be handled carefully, "partly because upsetting the structure of any series too much could change the programme into something else" (2009: 6). This comment aligns with my own argument, namely that the coherent expansion of a series relies on particular configurations of characters. As such, the loss of an important character could potentially threaten the dynamics of the show, and thus its coherent expansion. However, television series call on a range of strategies to adapt to such change, and the concept of serial narrative dynamics can aid in the analysis of such 'evolutionary' techniques from a formal perspective. In this last section of the case study, I want to demonstrate how serial narrative dynamics can foreground the malleability of serial form (even in a series that has functioned relatively 'predictably'), before tracing the full implications of this malleability in chapters two and three.

Citing the example of *Last of the Summer Wine* (BBC;1973-2010), Mills writes: "the hole in the programme's format left by Compo's demise is quickly filled by the similar character Tom […] Through this method, the structure of the programme remains intact, showing how the series requires a particular configuration to maintain its comic impetus" (2009: 7). In the case of *Cheers*, this strategy would be employed twice – first when it came time to replace Coach, and again when a substitute for Diane was needed. But in each case, the strategy would be employed in distinct ways – in one instance the traits would be replaced like for like, while in the other it is the structural function of one key trait would be targeted.

The former approach was used when the actor playing Coach, Nicholas Colasanto, passed away during the course of the show's third season. At the start of season four, Coach's death was incorporated into the narrative and he was replaced – both behind the bar and in the show's serial narrative dynamics – by Woody Boyd, played by Woody Harrelson. Although, unlike Coach, Woody is a young man he does share Coach's key defining traits: Woody is not particularly smart and is very prone to misunderstanding the comments and jokes of the other characters, much as Coach had done. In addition, like Coach, Woody is a typically kind and good-natured person. As such, his traits were familiar not only to the audience but to the Cheers community, and his character was quickly integrated into their fold.

At the end of season five, *Cheers* would have to deal with another loss, this time as the actress playing Diane, Shelley Long, decided to leave the show. Potentially replacing her

character, however, would have greater structural implications than replacing Coach. As was discussed above, Diane's trait-paradigm was the one with the greatest amount of oppositional traits to those of the community, and thus her presence was a major source of ongoing tension and conflict. Unlike the replacement of Coach with Woody, the replacement of Diane with Rebecca Howe (played by Kirstie Alley) is an interesting example of how two characters can have mostly different personalities and traits, and yet can still perform a similar structural function (at least to begin with).

When the time came to fill the gap left by Diane, the creators of *Cheers* did not want go the same route they chose with Woody by replacing Diane with a very similar character. As a *New York Times* article of the day explained:

> All agreed that the show needed another female character. They decided very quickly that the most interesting thing they could do was reverse the relationship between Sam, played by Ted Danson, and the woman. Sam owned the bar and Diane was his waitress. What if this new woman owns or manages the bar and Sam is her bartender? (Harmetz, 1987: n.p.)

Eliminating "every actress who looked like Shelley Long", they thus began to audition for a "tough woman boss" (ibid.).

And, indeed, as the show returned for a sixth season the first episode emphasised difference. Not only was Diane gone, but Sam had sold the bar to a corporation and embarked on a sailing trip around the world. As a result, the bar acquires a new aesthetic – white tablecloths, a myriad of plants, uniforms for the staff – and a new clientele, with regulars like Norm and Cliff no longer feeling welcome. At the helm of this "new regime", as Carla puts it (6.1), is the manager Rebecca: a beautiful, seemingly confident and ambitious businesswoman. Although Rebecca describes herself to Sam as having "a great deal of training and education", she is not overly intellectual like Diane was. Nor does she have Diane's cultural and artistic pretensions, being instead more grounded, even able to converse with Sam using baseball metaphors (6.1). Despite these differences, Rebecca will come to reveal an important parallel with Diane, namely the divide between her reality and her aspirations.

It is true that, as the *Times* article above indicates, Rebecca's presence in Cheers subverted the gendered power dynamics within the bar (at least for a while, since Sam does buy back the bar at the end of season eight). But it is crucial to note that although Rebecca

holds a higher rank in Cheers than did Diane, both women are nonetheless positioned (and position themselves) on the borders of this community. Just as Diane was a waitress who aspired to being a writer, Rebecca holds a position much lower than she would like. Although she does indeed have education and training, Rebecca has not been very successful at the corporation where she works and her relatively lowly position as the manager of Cheers is symptomatic of this. Throughout the course of the next six seasons, Rebecca will continue to try and climb the corporate ladder, unsuccessfully, in much the same way that Diane attempted to make her mark artistically. And just as Diane's romantic partners often became a symbol of the intellectual status she aimed for, Rebecca will continually pursue wealthy businessmen. Thus although the two women do possess many differing traits, they also share one important one – their ambition. It is the juxtaposition between the life Rebecca envisions for herself and the one she has that makes her, in one important way, a structural parallel to Diane: since both woman would ultimately rather be 'elsewhere', they never allow themselves to fully integrate into the life of the bar, always waiting for an opportunity to expand beyond its borders. Indeed, it was a potential publishing opportunity that was constructed as the reason for Diane breaking her engagement to Sam and leaving Cheers at the end of season five.

Despite possessing a significant shared trait, these two characters do act on it in different ways. Whilst Diane is conceited and even self-deluded, Rebecca is ambitious but neurotic, resulting in a very different tone for the show. As Burrows recalls, when the character of Rebecca was written she was "a strict disciplinarian" but the casting of Kirstie Alley and the rehearsal process altered her traits (quoted in Stanhope, 2016: n.p). Finding Alley's flustered and clumsy mistakes in rehearsals funny, the creators made Rebecca "a character who thinks she's a strong woman, pretends to be a strong woman, but underneath there's this bundle of nerves" (ibid.).

The key difference between Rebecca and Diane is *at whom* this pretence of strength is directed. While Diane does her best to uphold her intellectual veneer in front of the Cheers community, using this trait to distance herself from them, Rebecca eventually learns to be vulnerable in front of her co-workers and customers. Although many plotlines revolve around her desire to advance herself both personally and professionally, she frequently shares her strategies (and failures) with the community. Thus, while both Diane and Rebecca are ambitious characters, Rebecca's character is not defined by the same sense of superiority that Diane attempts to maintain. "They started writing Rebecca more like I am," states Alley, "a little klutzy and self-deprecating. That's why it worked; I fit in with the rest of the losers"

(quoted in Raftery, 2012). While it can be argued that Diane, too, fits in with the 'losers' at Cheers despite her protestations to the contrary, it is the protestations that distinguish her from her successor. Thus, while both women share the structural function of being outsiders who reluctantly enter the Cheers community, their differing traits – Rebecca's vulnerability; Diane's pretentiousness – result in Rebecca's outsider status being gradually (and willingly) softened with time, a trajectory that Diane did not go through.

When it came to replacing Coach and Diane, the creators of *Cheers* opted for two different approaches. In the former case they created a character with a very similar trait-paradigm, while in the latter they pursued differentiation. Despite this, however, both Woody and Rebecca possess some similarities to their predecessors where structural principles are concerned. This is because both Woody and Rebecca were created to fill an unexpected gap in the show's community and therefore its dynamics. Analysing the traits of these new characters and their paradigmatic relationship to the existing community, we can better understand how series negotiate systems of what Holdsworth terms "generational replacement" (2011: 48). In some instances, however, new characters are not introduced to replace existing ones but rather join the community simply as new members that extend its ranks. Such was the case with Dr Frasier Crane in *Cheers*.

The creators of *Cheers* initially had only a short arc planned for Frasier, consisting of a few episodes, but the success of the character and Kelsey Grammer's performance resulted in his permanent integration into the *Cheers* community and cast (Bjorklund, 1997: 9). Frasier's initial role was as a new love-interest for Diane and thus the most recent complication in Sam and Diane's serial romance. But by the end of the third season this function had been fulfilled, and his move to becoming a regular character from season four onward meant that new plotlines would have to be constructed for this latest member of the community. As such, Frasier is a prime example of how a character can outlive his function in the plot and determine the ways in which a series expands. Frasier is also an illustration of the fact that in order to secure a recurring space in the discourse, characters simultaneously have to secure a place in the show's community.

While Woody and Rebecca's traits were specifically constructed to fill the void left by departed characters, Frasier's traits would need to be augmented so that the character could maintain a serial connection to the community. Geraghty notes that the community, "while it has its boundaries […] is still relatively open, available by an accident of geography to those born there and by patient study to those who move there" (1991: 92). As has been noted, the nature of the Cheers bar means that outsiders can easily enter its borders. But for

them to truly become part of the community, patient integration is still required. On a structural level, the character needs to demonstrate a degree of alignment with the community's trait-paradigm, while still maintaining enough individuating traits so that their presence provides narrative interest. To remain a part of the community after his relationship with Diane ended, Frasier – through patient study – became one of the bar's regulars. To achieve this, Frasier's trait-paradigm would be slowly augmented and nuanced over the course of multiple seasons to justify his place at the bar and in *Cheers*. Frasier enters the bar as an epitome of Diane's (professed) ideal man: he is well-educated and refined, with a love of high culture and a demure sexuality. Gradually, Frasier would come to share the bar's key communal traits – their love of sports, their attitude toward women and sex, their laid-back disposition. In chapter three, I look at this process in more detail as a revealing example of character change in a largely episodic show. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that even a small and relatively fixed community as the one in *Cheers* is still able to adapt to the addition of new members, not just in response to unforeseen changes of cast, but as an opportunity to expand the show in new directions while still operating on the same structural principles. With Frasier as a new major character in his own right, the show was able to exploit his narrative potential by making him the subject of plotlines outside of his relationship with Diane – an instance of outward expansion generating forward expansion. Thus, Frasier's serial presence in the community allows him to be liberated from any one function in a given plotline. Instead, Frasier becomes part of the dynamics that *produce* plot in the series.

Indeed, Frasier's serial presence in the community, and thus the diegesis, also allows the character to make more appearances *outside* of any significant plotlines entirely. As has already been stated, traits may manifest themselves in moments and jokes that do not progress the plot but are nonetheless vital to reinforcing the personalities of the characters and the dynamics between them. Generally, the guest stars in *Cheers* (even recurring ones) are connected to a key function in the plot. The more sparse their appearances, the more likely it is that their presence will be significant to the episode's events. Conversely, the show's principals feature in almost every episode, even when they are not directly involved in that episode's plotlines, in such instances providing commentary to the events. Thus, in season five when Grammer becomes a regular cast member of *Cheers* and Frasier becomes a regular at the bar, the character begins to have a consistent role in the 'mundane' activities of the community. As a point of comparison, Frasier appears in 15 of season three's 25 episodes, a season in which he has a clear function as a complication to Diane and Sam's

relationship. Out of these 15 episodes, six feature Frasier in an essential role in the main plot. By season five, however, Frasier appears in all 26 episodes, only two of which can be described as 'about' Frasier himself. In the remaining episodes, Frasier has a smaller role to play in plotlines revolving around other characters in the same way that Norm, Carla and Cliff have done thus far. This also demonstrates the point that, in television narratives, serial presence and the serial dominance of characters are not necessarily mutually exclusive, a point I return to again in the next chapter.

Frasier's integration into *Cheers* is thus yet another example of how serial narrative dynamics can adapt over time. Although series may seem to rely heavily on the continuation of a particular plotline or the presence of a certain character, by deconstructing the narrative form even further – by analysing what traits make up a character and what trait configurations fuel a plotline – we can better understand how series continue after an important plotline is wrapped up, or after a major character leaves the show. An ongoing narrative can operate as a distinct but malleable form because its components are equally malleable: characters' trait-paradigms may be augmented to integrate them into a community, while communities can in turn open their borders to admit outsiders and can reorganise to recover from a loss.

In the next two chapters, I would like to take a closer look at this 'elasticity' of the two components of serial narrative dynamics – characters and communities. For although serial narrative dynamics help a series to remain flexible, they also need to work to keep it coherent. Thus, while simultaneously allowing for adaptation to change, a show's dynamics also function to 'manage' that change – helping to define the impact that alterations to characters and communities might have on a show's coherent expansion. In this chapter I briefly noted that some traits play a more significant role than others in binding characters into communities. In the next chapter, I will expand upon this observation through a discussion of the hierarchical nature of traits and characters, and the relationship these hierarchies have to centripetal force.

Notes

[i] Of course there are narratives in which the status of events in the story itself can be called into question. This is especially evident in science fiction and fantasy narratives that purposefully complicate their timelines in order to make viewers question what it 'real', such as *Lost* and *Twin Peaks: The Return*. And in his discussion of 'conjectural' episodes, Sconce lists examples of series that call into question the status of events in a given episode (2004: 106-109). Cf.: Rosemary Huisman's critique of structuralist approaches to narrative (2005: 24); for Huisman, the simple chronological sequence of the 'story' invoked by these theories is too simplistic. Also see Herman (2004: 62-63).

[ii] Here I am referring to the show's survival on a structural level. There are, of course, other factors that may influence how an audience will respond to the consummation of an on-again, off-again relationship. For a discussion of the difficulties surrounding "reluctant romance" plotlines, see Sconce (2004: 102) and Robert Thompson (1996: 115).

2

TIES THAT BIND:
DOMINANCE AND CENTRIPETAL FORCE IN THE COMMUNITY

The unity of a television community is tentative. Its borders are not impermeable, and its traits are by no means entirely representative of each and every member. Nonetheless, its existence is vital to the serial narrative dynamics of a show. For the community aggregates and defines individual characters – both through the ways in which these characters belong to the community, and through the ways they stand out. Viewed in this light, the relationship between characters and communities becomes a microcosm of the formal tension I discussed in the introduction: the "opposition between the would-be autonomous part and the would-be totalizing whole" (Krieger, 1989: 40). The dynamics of a show need the totalising force of a community, which justifies the recurring presence of characters by affording them a place within its borders. Simultaneously, the dynamics also require that individual characters stand out from this collective background which demarcates their place within the diegesis. Consequently, character traits need to perform two important functions in order to keep the dynamics of a series operational: traits need to individuate characters from one another and also tether them to each other. In this chapter I will be focusing on the latter, 'tethering' function, discussing the centripetal forces that exist within a community – forces that help explain how potentially rebellious 'parts' are kept within the boundaries of the narrative, even if these boundaries are jagged and shifting.

Drawing partly on Alex Woloch's work on character dominance in the novel, I will discuss how both individual characters and shared communal traits (including shared settings) vie for dominance within the community. In a stand-alone narrative, such as a novel, dominance relates to the space afforded a character in the fixed discourse. In television narratives, however, dominance also corresponds to the role a character or their individual traits play in the coherent expansion of an ongoing discourse. Binding the community together is one such role, and a crucial one at that. In other words, the dominance of narrative elements in an ongoing series is frequently linked to what may loosely be described as centripetal force. The hierarchies that emerge from this structural competition help determine the impact of change on the narrative dynamics of the show. And, as I will demonstrate, they can also *regulate* the impact of such change through functional redundancies that often exist between dominant elements. Using *Glee* as my primary case study, I will consider how structural hierarchies can both intersect with and diverge from diegetic ones. Paying special

attention to the show's fourth season, I will analyse how the centripetal force of dominant characters and settings impacts upon the series' attempts at coherent expansion in the face of unforeseen production circumstances.

Defining 'Constructive' Dominance

In ongoing television series, as in most fictions, not all narrative elements are created equal: some characters or traits may gain more 'dominance' than others. Communities are more dominant than the individual characters they encompass; but within communities some characters are more dominant than others; and even within individual personalities, some traits dominate. This complex system of Russian nesting doll hierarchies ensures that a series has the greatest possible chance of staying the course of coherent expansion. Writing about literary form, the Russian formalist Yuri Tynianov notes that the "sensation of form is always the sensation of the flow (and consequently of the alteration) of correlation between the subordinating, constructive factor and the subordinated factors" (quoted in Woloch, 2003: 197). The key word to consider in Tynianov's statement is "constructive", for it directly links the concept of dominance to the function any given element performs in 'building' the narrative. And in television series, where the narrative is continually 'under construction', the elements that are likely to rise to dominance are those that prove most critical to the narrative's ability to expand coherently. As this chapter will demonstrate, those characters, settings and traits that are the most crucial to keeping the community together will be the structurally dominant elements in a series. Such an approach to narrative form allows the analyst to write about the structural functions performed by television characters, or any other narrative component, without limiting the terminology of 'function' to denoting *plot* function only. For as I argued in the previous chapter, characters can 'outlive' their plot functions, as when Frasier outlived his role as Diane's love-interest in *Cheers*. Such examples are numerous in television series: love-interests change, friends can become enemies, and villains may be rehabilitated into allies. Discussing the structural role that characters and their traits perform in the coherent expansion of a series accommodates such transferals between differing roles in the plot. This is because the process of coherent expansion, as I have been defining it, shifts attention away from any given plotlines and onto the character/community dynamics that produce them. As long as characters remain within the borders of the show's community, they will retain a recurring structural role in the narrative, even if their plot functions change.

How then, we might ask, does such constructive dominance manifest itself? One prominent way, as was touched on in the previous chapter, is through the amount of space granted to a narrative component in the discourse. Writing about the novel, Woloch states that "to read characters in narrative, we need to read the dialectical tension between the formed distribution of attention within the discourse and the potential patterning of distribution within the story" (2003: 41). He explains:

> On the one hand, we have the polycentric arrangement of the story, the plot that pulls in many different individuals, each of whom has a unique (perhaps unelaborated) experience within the story and a unique (perhaps submerged) perspective on the story. On the other hand, we have the single, delimited, finite, and particular shaping of this story into a fixed discourse, the actual discourse that arranges such characters in a specific way. (ibid.)

While this tension between potential and actualisation is still present in television narratives, in ongoing series the discourse is not "fixed" in the same way as in stand-alone works. Therefore, the shaping of the story need not necessarily be "single, delimited, finite". Consequently, initially "unelaborated" experiences and "submerged" perspectives may not remain as such, but have a much greater chance of entering the discourse as they become the subject of future episodes. In the early episodes of *Will & Grace* (NBC; 1998-2006, 2017–), for example, the dramatic and exuberant personality of Karen is partly curbed by the limited space granted to her by the discourse in which she plays a supporting role. But as the series progressed, Karen was granted an increasingly prominent role in the series, thus allowing for more of her unique experiences and traits to be featured in the episodes. But there is an important distinction between a previously subordinated character being granted a kind of 'temporary dominance' in an episode of a series, and a character possessing *serial* dominance.

As I mentioned in chapter one, a character may enter the narrative in a single episode and be granted a significant amount of screen-time. The episode may even be structured around their perspective. To use an example from *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (FX, 2005-12; FXX, 2013–): in an episode titled 'The Gang Gets Analyzed' (8.5), the majority of the screen-time is granted to an episodic character, a therapist, as she attempts (unsuccessfully) to provide a rational perspective on the irrational behaviour of the main characters. But if a character does not play an important role in the serial narrative dynamics

of the show, there is no (structural) reason why the series cannot 'move on' in the next episode and 'leave them behind'. Indeed, the very phrasing I use here suggests why there is such a crucial relationship between dominance and centripetal force in ongoing television narratives. It is because dominant elements in a series are capable of 'pulling' the narrative along with them, whatever their trajectories may be with regards to plot or character arcs. In his discussion of the relationship between protagonists and minor characters, Woloch's language already associates the structural dominance of a character with a kind of centripetal force that they exert on the narrative, organising the more subordinate characters around themselves. Woloch writes about the way minor characters "are both integrated into and exceed the protagonist's achieved *centrality*" (2003: 196; emphasis added). He also notes that "the space of a particular character emerges only vis-à-vis the other characters who crowd him out or potentially *revolve around* him" (2003: 18; emphasis added). But in ongoing series, this centripetal function is even more crucial than in stand-alone narratives. For in television narratives, not only does discourse shape story as character potential is employed in particular ways, but story also informs the expansion of discourse, as that same potential influences how the series will be constructed in a partially undetermined future. The elements that rise to dominance, therefore, are those that play the greatest role in determining the possibilities and limitations of how a series may expand. That is not to say, however, that in television narratives the more 'traditional' definition of dominance – as the space allotted to a character in the discourse – is no longer relevant. It certainly is. But in a series the continual elaboration of a character's personality is, somewhat ironically, contingent on their belonging to a collective group – the show's community.

Thus, the broadest level on which we can observe this constructive centripetal force at work is in the structural relationship between individual characters and the community. In a vast majority of television narratives, communities occupy the structurally dominant position, partly because they both subsume and define individual characters, even prominent protagonists. While series have shown the capacity to continue after the exit of an individual character – even a main character – there is little precedent for a show surviving the wholesale loss of a community. This does not mean that the composition of the community cannot change, but such change is typically both gradual and partial. While it would certainly be possible to continue *a* narrative under such circumstances, it would likely be defined as a *different* narrative to the one we have been watching. This is, after all, how spin-offs are defined. For an ongoing narrative to expand coherently, as a consistently recognisable entity, it requires the structural functions performed by the community.

One way of theorising the importance of the community to a show's 'construction', or coherent expansion, is to observe that the collective pull of the community – its centripetal force – exceeds the pull of any individual element within it. In shorthand, describing, say, *Mad Men* as a narrative about Don Draper may appear very similar to describing it as being about a community of characters gathered around Don Draper. But, on a structural level, the distinction is nonetheless important. As I stressed in chapter one, the community of a series does not encompass all the existents of that show's diegesis – it is not synonymous with its storyworld. There may be, for example, episodic 'visitors' that temporarily enter the community's boundaries without taking up residency. Because communities both subsume and define individual characters, the community's centripetal force within the diegesis exceeds that of any single character. The community, as a collective unit, provides the diegesis with its "central narrative field", to borrow a phrase from Woloch (2003: 246). But because this centre *is* collective it provides multiple entry-points into the narrative. In *Cheers*, Sam and the bar may gather the community around themselves, but once this community is assembled even its structurally subordinate members and traits function to draw new characters and locations into the diegesis, thereby contributing to the generation of new plotlines.

While television narratives revolve around communities, communities themselves revolve around dominant characters and traits; moreover, they are held together by them. In other words, although the pull of the community is often the most dominant centripetal force in a series, because the community is a collective entity we can further inspect the centripetal forces that operate *within* it. Indeed, communities are doubly composite because they can be defined both as a group of individuals and as an aggregate of their shared traits, with these two definitions by no means being mutually exclusive. As such, the competition for dominance and centripetal force in a community can occur both between shared traits, including shared settings, and between individual community members. While this approach may appear taxonomic, the chief purpose of this 'deconstruction' of the community is not to create any strict categories. Quite the contrary, I hope to illustrate how this detailed formal analysis can elucidate the structural fluidity of a television narrative. For a systematic understanding of what holds a narrative together can also aid the understanding of how the narrative responds to change, both planned and unplanned. Writing about the worlds of serial narratives, Tischleder describes them a as "provisional horizon", arguing that "a narrative world does not have clear-cut spatiotemporal limits; rather, we need to take into account their provisional nature and permeability" (2017: 123). Analysing exactly what binds communities

together can help us better understand how these provisional horizons are established and maintained across a range of series. Thus, I would first like to examine how shared traits, and especially a shared setting, can bind a community together. Thereafter, I look at how characters can perform a similar centripetal function. Finally, I will discuss how the structural functions of shared traits and dominant characters can overlap, a redundancy that allows series to continue their runs in the face of change.

The Centripetal Force of Shared Traits

In chapter one, I argued that it is not a character's identity alone that aids the processes of coherent expansion, but rather their identity in relation to a pattern of alignment with and difference from other characters. The community is both the source and consequence of this comparative process: we compare individuals because they have been grouped together into a collective unit, but we also think of them *as* a collective unit because of common traits found through comparison. Analysing the structural hierarchies that exist within communities can help us understand how this self-fulfilling process is generated and maintained. For the dominant elements within a community will often also be the inciting factors that justify the characters being grouped together at all, a point I return to in more detail more. Smith's notion of retrospective patterning (1968: 10), discussed in both the introduction and the first chapter, is helpful in analysing this process: upon an initial encounter with the diegesis we may formulate a hypothesis about what defines a group of characters as a community based on the most dominant commonalities between them. As the narrative continues, we will carry on assessing the various alignments and differences between the characters, thereby extending and possibly amending our cumulative knowledge of the community's trait-paradigm. Indeed, it is through this continual patterning that new characters are introduced into the narrative, be it as episodic visitors or as recently initiated community members. In both instances, their trait-paradigms will be configured in relation to those of the existing characters to generate plot. So when Alec Baldwin guest stars on *Friends* as the very enthusiastic Parker (8.17 & 8.18), his extreme positivity and cheerfulness are made strange partly through a contrast with the more cynical disposition of the six main characters. In *The Office*, however, Ed Helms' recurring guest role as Andy Bernard, introduced in season three, develops into a permanent position as a member of the show's community precisely because Andy is able to align with their off-beat, if somewhat annoying,

traits. (Frasier's similar integration into the *Cheers* community will be discussed in the next chapter.)

But a community seldom expands indiscriminately. Like the ongoing narrative itself, the community needs to grow according to some logic – some principles that allow us to maintain the distinction between the community and the rest of the 'world' (both diegetically and extra-diegetically, as we distinguish between the group of people in this programme and another). For as Geraghty reminds us, a community does have "boundaries" that allow it "to have a sense of its own separateness, its means of asserting its own identity against outsiders" (1991: 90-91). Dominant elements that generate the structural process of assembling a community will frequently continue to exert a centripetal force and thereby influence the exact nature and scope of a community's boundaries, which may be flexible and permeable to various degrees.

While these boundaries are often geographical, they are not always (and not always only) such. Though a dominant communal trait like a shared setting can literally bring characters together, there are instances where the communities' dominant traits are less tangible and 'aggregate' the characters' actions (and traits) on a structural level more so than on a diegetic one. In *Heroes*, the narrative shifts between multiple characters spread across settings around the globe. The shared trait that incites the grouping of these characters in the discourse is their possession of supernatural powers. Because of this dominant trait, we watch and compare how the characters may be alike or different in other respects as well. Often, this comparison is related back to the dominant trait of supernatural powers: how are the various characters finding out about the existence of their superpowers, how are they beginning to use them, how is this change affecting their lives? We might say that they form a community for the viewer on the level of discourse before they do so in the story. And while by the end of the first season the characters will come to know each other personally and will congregate in a shared physical space, at the start of the narrative this assemblage is more structural than diegetic.

Despite the existence and importance of more 'abstract' communal traits, a shared setting – be it domestic, recreational or professional – is perhaps the most ubiquitous communal trait to attain dominance and exert a centripetal force on television communities. This is due in part to the standard production practice of continually reusing the same locations and sets as a series continues, a strategy that yields significant economic advantages.[i] The prevalence of this aesthetic norm recommends it for closer inspection, as does a setting's physicality. While centripetal forces are not necessarily exerted by material

elements – a communal profession or skill, for example, may operate similarly – the tangibility of dominant locations make them especially effective and graphic examples of this concept. Correspondingly, communal settings foreground the way centripetal forces often do operate on both a structural and diegetic level simultaneously.

I use the term 'setting' relatively broadly here, to encompass spaces of various proportions. But despite this use of an umbrella term, it is vital to acknowledge that the precise nature of a show's setting will influence the size and make-up of the community that is able to dwell within it. A large geographical area like a city or town can pull in and accommodate a greater amount of characters than a smaller, confined space. Writing about *Coronation Street* (ITV; 1960–) and *EastEnders*, Geraghty states:

> Both soaps have at their heart a particular fictional space. The Street and the Square are public spaces; these serials, unlike, for instance, many situation comedies, are not locked into the four walls of the family home. Their geography allows for a large number of characters with a variety of reasons for living in the area and different ways of relating to the community. (Geraghty, 1990: 90)

Geraghty's comment also flags another important characteristic that influences how flexible a community's boundaries are – the relative accessibility of the setting. Similar comments have been made by other theorists in relation to a range of television narratives, noting that settings are often chosen for their ability to bring a variety of characters together (Allen, 1985: 20-21; Innocenti & Pescatore, 2018: 153; Smith, 2018: 60). In his analysis of *Cheers*, Dias Branco makes a comparable observation in relation to the bar: "because this is an establishment, it is open to the public. *Cheers* presents a limited sphere, but a porous one that lets us see what lies behind its limits" (2013: 96). Such "porous" spaces allow not only a larger number of characters to enter the community's borders but also facilitate a diverse cross-section of personalities to interact. Permanent 'membership' in the community frequently becomes contingent upon a character being drawn in to these central spaces on a recurring basis. Conversely, leaving the setting permanently also coincides with a character's exit from the community and the narrative, something I discuss again in chapter four.

Thus, while the nature of a shared setting can impact upon the diversity of the community, its very existence creates what Geraghty describes as "a minimum of homogeneity among disparate characters" (1991: 90).[ii] Indeed, as was explored in chapter one, sometimes the setting is the only trait that a character shares with their community

thereby making it all the more structurally dominant. This can be highly advantageous, for when characters with mostly differing trait-paradigms are grouped together it creates great potential for conflict and therefore plot. Such conflict may be 'asymmetrical', as when one character is contrasted with a largely homogenous community, as in fish-out-of-water narratives like *Cheers* or *Northern Exposure*. In other cases the entire community may share few common traits, with all of the characters being more disparate than alike. Such narratives are common when communities have been grouped less 'willingly'. Unlike, for example, patrons of the Cheers bar who elect to come there every night (even employees frequent the bar on their days off), characters instead have to share a setting out of necessity. A prison drama like *Orange is the New Black* is a particularly marked example of an 'involuntary' community. Between these two extremes lies a spectrum of possibilities, all directly related to the nature of the setting and the centripetal force that it exerts. For example, in workplace dramas and comedies, such as *Mary Tyler Moore*, *Hill Street Blues*, *Grey's Anatomy* or *Suits*, the characters 'have to' go to work and thus share the same setting. But their professions are often chosen and consequently reflect upon some element of their personality and, indeed, those of their co-workers. As Geraghty remarks,

> Whether it be a workplace or a region, the setting gives a sense of unified experience which draws on notions of the particular characteristics or attitudes generated by a common work experience or sense of place. (Geraghty, 1991: 90)

Or, as Tischleder puts it, "settings and characters mutually constitute each other" (2017: 123). In some cases the setting even becomes a visual metaphor for the characteristics that define its 'residents'. In *Hill Street Blues*, the somewhat dilapidated and chaotic Hill Street station mirrors the almost permanently exhausted and exasperated state of the police officers who work there. Of course, the setting need not always become a physical embodiment of the community's traits. In *Orange is the New Black* the harsh, impersonal prison setting is occasionally juxtaposed with the way in which the prisoners use its spaces to find intimacy (both physical and emotional) and even certain kinds of freedom and safety.

The correspondence Geraghty notes between setting and particular (shared) characteristics can run in both directions. On the one hand, characters may share a particular setting *because* they share other traits. Because the patrons of Cheers love beer, sports and small-talk, they spend their time at the bar. Because the residents of Cicely in *Northern Exposure* prioritise small-town values and frontier culture, they choose this town as their

home. Alternatively, *because* characters share a particular setting and the experiences that come with it, they are also likely to share other traits. Because the police officers work at Hill Street station, they are prone to being world-weary and cynical. Of course, these two directions are by no means mutually exclusive and frequently function simultaneously to reinforce one another. Equally, there will always be characters who prove the exception to this rule of correlation, for as was stressed in chapter one, a community's trait-paradigm is an 'ideal' and no individual character needs to be representative of it in its entirety.

This dual-directional reciprocity between settings and other shared traits exemplifies the broader point that dominant traits can prompt a further assessment of communal trait-paradigms. The centripetal force that a setting exerts on a diegetic level is a literal enactment of this structural process. Not only does a setting corral individuals into a community as they permanently inhabit or recurrently return to a specific place, but it also acts as a centripetal force on a structural level – a dominant centre around which we construct the rest of the community's trait-paradigm. A shared setting can cause us to move outward from this starting point and distinguish other shared traits which can then be related back to the setting itself. Writing about Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*, Woloch notes that in the novel the division of attention between the two co-protagonists is "elaborated in the formal organization of the narrative discourse, but it is motivated by the story's setting" (2003: 246). Similarly, a shared setting in television narratives can justify the discourse's shifts of attention between multiple characters and plotlines, a strategy key to an ongoing narrative's expansion. Subsequently, individual characters may themselves come to exert a centripetal pull on the community, sometimes working together with and sometimes rivalling the centripetal force of shared traits.

The Centripetal Force of Dominant Characters

While in some instances the boundaries of a community are defined by geographical borders, at other times these boundaries are less literal and come about not through occupancy but through allegiance. A dominant character in the community can exert a centripetal force on the rest of the members as they congregate not in a specific setting but around a specific person (or, indeed, specific people, as when the community gathers around a particular partnership or pairing, be it romantic, as in *You're the Worst*, or professional, as in *Cagney and Lacey* (CBS; 1981-1988) or *The X-Files*). And as is the case with the dominance of recurring settings, the dominance of main characters is both a consequence of

production norms, and a partial antidote to their contingency. The draw-power of a lead performer is seldom surrendered, and consequently, as Mittell remarks, "we all assume that main characters are bound to stay on their programs and highly unlikely to die or depart the story" (2015: 123). He adds that "This is particularly true of title characters, as we cannot imagine *Seinfeld* without Jerry or *House, M.D.* without Dr. House" (ibid.). Of course, there are exceptions to this aesthetic norm – a point I will return to later in the chapter when I discuss how redundancies among dominant elements allow for the departure of main characters.

As I mentioned in chapter one, the structural role of main characters in ongoing television narratives is, at least partially, to perform a centripetal function and bring the rest of the ensemble together. This function can liberate television protagonists from being defined solely through their role in moving the causality of the plot forward; as with centripetal traits, it allows television characters to perform a more fluid structural role in shaping the coherent expansion of a show. Like "porous" settings, dominant characters can allow the community to remain flexible, adaptable to unforeseen production circumstances, initially unplanned narrative developments or even to premeditated creative decisions. However, the 'boundaries' of communities that revolve around a particular character are more 'mobile' than the fixed borders of physical locations. The centripetal force of characters can allow a narrative to remain coherent even when moving between different settings. *Outlander* (Starz; 2014–), which has at its centre two dominant characters embroiled in a particularly complex evocation of an on-again-off-again relationship, traverses not only multiple geographical borders but also vast stretches of time as Claire, the female lead, time-travels between the 18th and 20th centuries.

The centripetal force of main characters is perhaps most evident in shows where that character brings together two groups of people (and two settings) that otherwise may not coexist in a single narrative. Again, title characters are a good example of this. In *Frasier* (NBC; 1993-2004) and *Mary Tyler Moore*, the narratives move between two distinct spheres: the main characters' home life and their workplace. Of course the two spheres do intersect – Frasier and Mary's colleagues visit them at home, while their friends and family sometimes stop by the office. But without the centripetal function of Frasier and Mary, we would have little reason to group the rest of the ensemble together as part of a coherent narrative. And like dominant settings, dominant individuals not only bring together other characters on a diegetic level but on the level of discourse also. Even in episodes where Frasier's producer, Roz, does not interact with his father or brother, her traits may still be compared to theirs on a

structural level in order to ascertain the trait-paradigm of the community that revolves around Frasier Crane. Thus, as with setting, the centripetal force of dominant characters can create "a minimum of homogeneity" among the community (Geraghty, 1991: 90).

On the one hand, the dominance of Frasier and Mary may encourage us to think of these shows as being 'about' them. Kristin Thompson notes that in sitcoms based around one protagonist the other characters are less likely to regularly take turns at being "the center of the A plot" (2003: 57). On the other hand, their centripetal function does allow the show to have a more diverse community than if they were confined to just one centripetal setting. And this, in turn, provides more opportunities for plot differentiation. For as I argued at the start of the chapter, once a community is assembled even its subordinate members can act as sources of coherent expansion. Thus, the centripetal function of Frasier and Mary ironically creates more potential opportunities for plotlines 'about' a range of other characters, even if these plots are not always the 'A' plot.

The importance of Frasier and Mary to those around them also raises the question of distinguishing between the structural and diegetic centripetal force of characters, just as I have in relation to dominant communal traits. There is often a connection between a character's structural ability to exert a centripetal force and their diegetic dominance within a community. Such correlations can play out in a variety of ways. Sometimes, a character may be diegetically dominant because of their status within a community as well as the valued traits that they possess. In *Cheers,* Sam is a good example. His status as the owner of the bar already grants him some superiority, while his athletic and sexual achievements grant him the admiration of his employees and customers. As such, the *Cheers'* community frequently mobilise around Sam – he is their 'ringleader', as Diane puts it (3.14). In such cases, allegiance to a dominant character may generate "particular characteristics or attitudes" in a similar fashion to the way a "common work experience or sense of place" does in Geraghty's analysis of setting (1991: 90). The community's reverence of Sam says much about their shared "attitudes" and provides diegetic justification for why they rally around him. But just as not all habitations in a shared setting are voluntary, not all commitments to a central character are either. Sometimes characters may hold a position of power within the community but lack the esteem accorded to, for instance, Sam in *Cheers*. Remaining within the realm of the sitcom, we can turn to *The Office* for an example. Michael Scott may be regional manager at the Scranton branch of a paper company, and thus has some diegetic authority, but the humour of the show lies in the fact that Michael is not very good at his job and is not respected by most of the employees. Indeed, Michael's attempts to gather the

community together via meetings and other initiatives are frequently unsuccessful and divisive. Nonetheless, Michael still remains a structurally dominant character with the community 'revolving' around his central position. In the *Glee* case study, I will further examine how characters can compete for diegetic dominance in a mirroring of their structurally dominant roles.

But there are also series where a character's dominance and centripetal force emerge not from any diegetic superiority but rather from the discourse. Let us compare two medical dramas to illustrate the point. In *House, M.D.* (Fox; 2004-2012), Dr House is a preeminent doctor and the head of his department. Thus, his diegetic dominance neatly aligns with his structural dominance – the more subordinate characters are literally gathered around him and follow his idiosyncratic diagnostic methods, which also give each episode its problem solving structure. At the start of *Grey's Anatomy*, however, Meredith Grey can claim little pre-eminence over her fellow interns at Seattle Grace (except perhaps that her mother was a famous surgeon and her current lover the chief of neurosurgery at Seattle Grace, neither of which are *her* achievements – a fact that is utilised to create tension within the narrative). But despite this lack of diegetic dominance, Meredith remains a structurally dominant character and exerts a centripetal force on the level of discourse.[iii] This is in large part due to her voice-over, which almost always introduces and concludes the episode by aggregating the actions of the characters and distilling from them a common theme. Thus, Meredith's subjectivity becomes a central point around which (and through which) we make sense of the actions and traits of the community as a whole. Kristin Thompson makes a similar observation about Carrie in *Sex and the City* (HBO; 1998-2004), who also provides a voice-over that both narrates and commentates upon the actions of her three friends (2003: 51-52). In such examples the centripetal force of a character comes less from any diegetic justification for their dominance, but rather from the way they help the viewer perform the critical function of making sense of all the characters' behaviours in relation to one another. In other words, their perspectives become an important guiding influence in the process of patterning individual trait-paradigms in relation to one another.

Thus far, I have been discussing the centripetal pull of shared traits, such as shared settings, and dominant characters in isolation. However, in most ongoing television narratives centripetal forces do not operate in this way. Seldom is dominance or the centripetal force that correlates with it absolute: shared traits or particular characters may acquire *relative* dominance and the strength of their centripetal force is typically *partial*. This means that the 'pull' of individual elements can work with one another or against one another to shape the

overall narrative. In many series, multiple centripetal forces will operate simultaneously and reinforce one another. For example, referring back to the *Cheers* case study, I have mentioned both its setting and its main character as centripetal forces that the community gathers around. Their coexistence is by no means contradictory. Rather, these two centripetal forces work so seamlessly together that their individual pull is seldom put to the test. Not only is Sam the owner of the bar, thus creating a proprietary relationship between him and the shared setting that binds the community together, but it is also Sam's individual trait-paradigm that lends this setting *its* unique character. The point is most clearly illustrated in the face of (relatively) dramatic change – one of the few instances where the two centripetal forces are separated. As I discussed in chapter one, Sam sells the bar to a large corporation in the story-time between seasons five and six, opting instead to sail around the world. When we, as the viewers, return to the bar at the start of season six, its casual and light-hearted ambience has changed into a more formal atmosphere. Aside from some aesthetic changes, the first episode of the season reveals that part of the community has dispersed as the clientele of the bar have changed and neither Norm nor Cliff frequent it any more. It is only at the end of the episode, when Sam is given a job as a bartender at Cheers, that the regulars return and the community is reassembled once more. The episode therefore illustrates that it is neither Sam nor the bar on their own that keep the community together, but that each exerts a partial centripetal force that is both diegetic and structural. Furthermore, the example shows that these forces are most effective in keeping the community together when compounded.

This kind of synergy between a dominant character and a dominant location is so common in television that teasing these elements apart may appear unnecessary. But it is only through this process of deconstruction that we can fully consider the structural motivations for duplicating centripetal forces. Understanding the functional redundancies that exist between dominant traits, such as settings, and characters is helpful for analysing ongoing narratives that are subject to change. For these redundancies are a crucial part of what lend the serial narrative dynamics their 'give', their ability to remain flexible – they help ensure the structural stability of the community but they can also allow it to remain flexible when under the pressure of change.

Functional Redundancy and Change

The structural hierarchies that exist within communities, both in terms of shared traits and individual characters, are flexible and interconnected. Thus, although such hierarchies

help assign structural functions to particular traits or characters – such as the tethering function under discussion in this chapter – their existence within the narrative does not preclude the possibility of change, either to the hierarchies themselves or the diegesis more broadly. Instead, the hierarchies help to determine the consequences of any change on the structural principles of the narrative. And, in some instances, they can also help offset some of this impact, allowing for coherent expansion to remain structurally possible even in the face of relatively major changes to the community. In short, the hierarchies can be viewed as facilitating change by determining and regulating its impact, ensuring that the change does not compromise the narrative's coherent expansion.

Within each hierarchy, any alteration to a dominant element will, by definition, be most likely to impact upon the structural principles of that show. In *Mad Men* the narrative would likely be less affected if all the members of the community suddenly quit smoking than if they all quit the advertising business, since the latter is a much more dominant communal trait. This does not mean that the former change would have no effect on the series – it would certainly impact upon its themes as well as it mise-en-scène – but what is under discussion here are the structural effects of change, effects that force questions about a show's possible continuation. For example, if a community is held together by a dominant setting, can the narrative continue if that setting is removed? What if it is a dominant character binding the community together; will their exit terminate narrative perpetuation?

One way for coherent expansion to be assured is for the serial narrative dynamics of the show, as well as its components, to remain stable. This, then, simultaneously necessitates stable hierarchies. Traditional episodic series that revert to a 'status quo' are prime examples of this tendency: their dynamics typically revolve around established communities made up of recurring characters that change little, their consistent traits brought together in (sometimes predictable) patterns to produce plot. Changes in such shows will tend to target subordinate rather than dominant elements to sustain this stability. Lou Grant becoming divorced is unlikely to impact the coherent expansion of *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* in the same way that, hypothetically, Mary becoming dishonest and hostile would (I am referring here to a permanent change to a trait-paradigm, not temporary changes like mood, which were discussed in chapter one). Similarly, the show readjusted structurally to Mary moving apartments, but not to the WJM news station being disbanded, which indeed was used as a device to end the programme.

However, pervasive stability is not always possible in ongoing narratives, as unforeseen production circumstances may disrupt unwavering constancy. Moreover, the

producers of some programmes may not desire this level of stability in the first place, being instead interested in generating greater levels of change. Indeed, a show like *Game of Thrones* demonstrates how unpredictability can be a powerful marketing tool and a draw for audiences in the increasingly competitive industrial conditions of post-network television. But regardless of whether change is an outright aesthetic decision or is thrust upon the series due to unanticipated production circumstances, the effect of this change can be regulated by the relationship between centripetal forces in a community. This is because dominant elements are not only mutually constitutive, as was discussed above, but also typically possess a degree of functional redundancy. That is, the same elements within a community – be they traits or characters – will perform the same structural function of binding the community together.

Redundancy has often been commented upon in relation to ongoing television narratives with regards to series' predisposition to repeating and recapping information from previous episodes (Allen, 1985: 20; Newman, 2006: 18; Nannicelli, 2009: 196-198). While this is certainly an important observation, what I am discussing here is a different kind of redundancy – the tendency to assign the same structural function to more than one narrative element. Writing about the classical Hollywood cinema, Bordwell, Thompson and Staiger note the presence of redundancy in the aesthetic paradigm of this "group style" (1988: 5). In the classical Hollywood film, one device may "do duty for another" or may "repeat information conveyed by another", functionality that is primarily governed, on the broadest level, by the needs of narrative causality (Bordwell, Thompson & Staiger, 1988: 6). For the chief imperative of the classical Hollywood film is to ensure an audience's understanding of and immersion in the story. Similarly, I argue that in ongoing television narratives the aesthetic norms are tied to, first and foremost, the goal of coherent expansion. Consequently, "redundancy" among dominant elements and their respective structural functions exist to reinforce one another, safeguarding the stability of the show's structural principles. Thus far I have argued that more than one narrative element can be tasked with fulfilling the same structural function in the community – both characters and traits, physical and abstract, can gain (some) dominance and exert a centripetal force on the community's members, binding in them into a (provisional) unit. The principle of redundancy, then, stresses that in many television series these various centripetal forces intersect and thus work in cooperation with one another simultaneously. As Tischleder notes with regards to *Orange is the New Black*, "redundancy informs ongoing serial production and reception" in the way that "recurring characters are tied to recurring settings" (2017: 122). What is significant about this aesthetic

norm is not just the way in which it can ensure structural stability, but the way it can help facilitate change.

If one trait or character can no longer fulfil their centripetal function, other dominant elements will ensure that the structural principles can readjust well enough for the narrative to continue as a distinct form. In such instances, the centripetal forces may no longer operate redundantly, but their separation helps to prolong the coherent expansion of the show. This may occur on an episodic basis or on a long-term one. Examples of the former include episodic absences of lead characters or temporary shifts in setting, be they made by design or to accommodate unforeseen circumstances such an actor's unavailability. An interesting example occurs at the start of *Orange is the New Black*'s second season. In the first episode, Piper is temporality relocated to a new prison and the entire episode takes place in this foreign setting amid a strange community. The second episode chronicles events that occur at Litchfield Prison in Piper's absence. These two episodes – mirror images of each other – demonstrate how centripetal forces can work in atypical isolation to produce instalments of what we still understand to be *Orange is the New Black*.

This accommodation of change is even more crucial when the change is permanent, for this will have a much greater impact upon the potential longevity of a narrative. The US version of *The Office* can continue (structurally) when Michael Scott leaves the show because its community of distinct individuals is still held together by the centripetal force of the setting. Indeed, we may even note that the relative dominance of the setting increases as it no longer shares its function with a lead character. The same is true for major location changes: *Nip/Tuck* (FX; 2003-2010) relocates most of its major characters from Miami to Los Angeles in season five based on the centripetal pull of its two main characters. *Halt and Catch Fire* (AMC; 2014-2017) similarly moves its community from Texas to California at the end of the second season.

Of course, whether television shows are actually able to survive such major changes is determined by many factors from both the production and consumptions sides of the medium. A lead actor's 'star-power', for example, may mean that audiences are unwilling to tune in to a series if that actor departs the show. For example, the episode of *Stranger Things* cited in the introduction (2.7), in which the narrative departs from the core community to follow one major character into a new city, was generally not well-received by viewers. If we were to take an evaluative perspective on why this is the case, we might be able to cite both structural and non-structural factors. From a structural perspective, the syntagmatic rhythm of the series does little to prepare viewers for such an episode, which comes as a 'shock'. While such

disruptions of a show's dynamics are formally possible, they may certainly by evaluated by viewers based on their 'necessity' – either to progressing the plot or to elaborating our knowledge of a character – as well as the quality with which the disruption is executed, be it of the writing or performance or any other feature. But, to reiterate an earlier point, what is under discussion here is structural integrity – a programme's general ability to reconfigure its elements in such a way as to ensure the prolonged existence of its ongoing form.

The kind of redundancies discussed above also foreground another reason why it is productive to distinguish between the centripetal force *of* the community, as discussed at the start of this chapter, and the centripetal forces *within* a community. For if there is more than one element ensuring that the community remains intact, then the continuation of the community will in turn safeguard the continuation of the narrative as a whole. To further explain why 'deconstructing' these different levels of dominance is productive for an analysis of ongoing series, it is helpful to compare the notion of centripetal force as I have been discussing it and Mittell's notion of "centripetal complexity". For the difference in approach foregrounds the distinction between analysing a 'total' narrative structure, and structural principles that are subject to unpredictable change. While discussing the overall shape or form of a series requires a somewhat totalising vision, analysing the dynamics that continually mould that (sometimes shifting) shape allows for a more contingent analytical approach to a contingent narrative form.

Centripetal Force vs Centripetal Complexity

In *Complex TV*, Mittell distinguishes between two forms of narrative complexity in television – centripetal complexity and centrifugal complexity. Centripetal complexity is defined as "dense television", in which

> narrative movement pulls the actions and characters inward toward a more cohesive centre, establishing a thickness of backstory and character depth that drives the action. The effect is to create a storyworld with unmatched depth of characterisation, layers of backstory and psychological complexity building on viewers' experiences and memories over the program's numerous seasons. (Mittell, 2015: 223)

In centrifugal complexity, on the other hand,

> the ongoing narrative pushes outward spreading characters across an expanding storyworld. On a centrifugal programme, there is no single narrative centre, as the action traces what happens between characters and institutions as they spread outward. It is not just that the series expands in quantity of characters and settings but that its richness is found in the complex web of interconnectivity forged across the social system rather than in the depth of any one individual's role in the narrative or psychological layers. (Mittell, 2015: 222)

The distinction is certainly important, and it is one that has been noted before. Brett Martin, for example, writes

> *The Sopranos*, for all its baroque plot twists and turns, was essentially inward facing – a psychological drama about a man seeking to fill a void he didn't really understand. In the tradition of great post-Freudian literature, it was about the gulf between the inner and outer world. *The Wire*, meanwhile, was almost pre-modern in its expansive view outward, its Balzacian ambition to catalog every corner of its world. (Martin, 2013: 112)

Centrifugal complexity, especially, aligns with descriptions of the way character alignment is spread across multiple figures in soap operas. Identification in soap operas is "decentred", states Geraghty, "it is invited across a range of characters not with a particular central figure" (1991: 17). It is for this reason that soaps "can survive major changes", since "the audience's commitment is engaged across a range of characters and stories and not dependent on one or two individuals" (Geraghty, 1991: 16).

These analyses all point to the capacities of ongoing narratives to depict both depth and breadth, potential that can be used in a variety of ways and with multiple purposes in mind. Indeed, Mittell's motivation for creating these categories of complexity is precisely to illustrate that each show should be evaluated on its own terms (2015: 217). And while I do think that Mittell's point is an important one, his concepts are of course designed for application to complex narratives and not to more traditional programming. My primary motivation, however, is to find commonalities between a wide variety of ongoing television narratives so that they may be analysed (and then possibly compared and contrasted) using

the same theoretical concepts. This goal requires an approach that investigates how the same narrative components – characters, settings and other shared traits – can be configured into a variety of formations. Thus, while Mittell distinguishes between two distinct 'shapes' that ongoing narratives, in their entirety, can take, I am subdividing a series' narrative into a range of interrelated centripetal forces. In doing so, I hope to devise an analytical approach that foregrounds the flexibility of the form – its 'shape-shifting' abilities, if you will.

A key difference is that in defining these categories, Mittell uses character as the only narrative element around which the definitions are constructed. As in Martin's comparison of *The Sopranos* and *The Wire* (HBO; 2002-2008), the distinction becomes about the dichotomy between inner and outer world (2013: 112). Indeed, the same is also true of Woloch's (2003) work since he specifically discusses the role of *character* distribution in the novel. This is obviously different from my approach, in which other elements – shared traits, including shared settings – are included as potential 'centres' of interest that exert a centripetal force. This is because in television, factors such as a dominant setting or a shared profession can be just as crucial to the show's ability to expand from its premise while remaining coherent. It is therefore necessary to be able to consider the structural role of these elements in conjunction with – and alongside that – of character. Indeed, elsewhere in *Complex TV* Mittell does fully acknowledge the importance of setting. Discussing the role of character alignment, Mittell writes of *The Wire*: "The vast breadth of attachment locates Baltimore itself as an immersive place functioning as the core aligned character, with its various inhabitants providing access to the city's interior subjectivity" (2015: 129).[iv] Later in the book, however, *The Wire* is used as the principal case study of centrifugal complexity. But if setting and character are treated as simply two co-existing narrative entities, then the focus on Baltimore's "subjectivity" which is at the "core" of the narrative can be compared to narratives where it is the subjectivity of a character that takes the central position. *The Wire* may be defined by centrifugal complexity as far as the characters are concerned, but Baltimore can still be said to exert a centripetal force on this (very large) community, the borders of which the narrative will not cross so as to remain coherent.

Because Mittell is writing about complex narratives, the examples that he uses – *The Wire* for centrifugal complexity, *Breaking Bad* for centripetal complexity – are rather exceptional (in both the literal and evaluative sense of the word). Indeed, even in the context of complex shows, it would be difficult to fit all narratives into these two categories as neatly as *The Wire* and *Breaking Bad* do. And of course the categories were never intended to apply to more traditional programmes. Part of what makes these two shows 'exceptional' is that

they seem to present the analyst with a very deliberate and complete shaping of the narrative as a 'whole', a quality that can be viewed as valuable in a medium so often governed by indeterminacy. But by breaking down the narrative into multiple components, and examining hierarchies within and between them, we can analyse how centripetal forces come together in a wide variety of narratives, creating a spectrum of possibilities. Mittell's examples are complex precisely because they deliberately push the outlying possibilities of this spectrum, but a spectrum it nonetheless is. In *The Wire* the dominance of Baltimore so greatly exceeds that of any single character that its centripetal force creates a vast community able to pull in a huge array of characters and plotlines. In *Breaking Bad*, Walter White's dominance is equally remarkable and therefore any characters that enter the community revolving around him are inevitably related back to his character arc. But in between these two extremes there is a multitude of structural possibilities, shaped by the number and nature of centripetal forces as well as the relationships between them, all of which will help determine the scope of the narrative.

Furthermore, we must also acknowledge that the form of a series may change over time, as far as centripetal forces are concerned. Thus while Martin may cite *The Sopranos* as an inward facing narrative (2013: 112), Martha P. Nochimson also writes about the way in which "the centre shifted in *The Sopranos* as it moved into its fourth season", thereby changing the tradition of the American gangster genre with its tendency to focus closely on the protagonist (2003: n.p.). This shift is yet another example of why it is helpful to differentiate between the centripetal pull of the community and centripetal forces within the community. Even in a narrative like *The Sopranos*, which has a clear and very dominant protagonist, more minor characters can still initiate new plotlines or inaugurate new characters. That these plotlines may, eventually, reflect back on Tony Soprano is a separate (if interconnected) structural choice. It rests on the difference between distinct but interrelated centripetal forces as I have been outlining them, and Mittell's concept of centripetal complexity.

This discussion of centripetal forces in television narrative may be related back to much broader questions about the very nature of narrative and literary form. Discussing the concept of a poem being in a unified state of tension, Murray Krieger states that "the very notion of 'tension' constitutes a continual threat to formal reconciliation and would counteract its very claim. Under its dominion the centrifugal is at every moment there to war with the pretended dominance of the centripetal" (1989: 47). This sentiment relates to Tynianov's definition of literary form being "the sensation of the flow" between dominant

and subordinate elements (quoted in Woloch, 2003: 197), and equally parallels my own conception of ongoing television narratives as being governed by the impulse to both expand and cohere. Indeed, reflecting back on Mittell's definition of centrifugal complexity, we can note several properties therein that I have associated with ongoing narratives more broadly: the desire for the narrative to push "outward" as it expands its "storyworld", as well as the emphasis placed on relationships "between characters and institutions", an "interconnectivity" that is key to the operation of any show's dynamics. On the other hand, ongoing narratives also seek to form some kind of "cohesive centre" that will govern this expansion, be it a character, a place, or something more abstract entirely. Of course, these processes may not always be carried out to the degrees notable in the examples cited by Mittell, but they are nonetheless present in all ongoing television narratives.

This tension between the 'centrifugal' tendencies of ongoing narratives and the centripetal forces that help structure them are often most clearly displayed in moments when narrative expansion is under threat from contingent production contexts. When unforeseen circumstances result in changes to the dominant elements of a show, the frequently symbiotic relationship between centripetal forces – both of the community and within the community – may be disturbed and thereby more prominently revealed. It is precisely such a case study that I would like to turn my attention to now. In *Glee*, the unforeseen circumstances encountered by the production result in the second half of the show's run being a prime example of how discrete centripetal forces can come into conflict with one another. In doing so, they shift from their usual state of redundancy in which the centripetal pull of each element overlaps to provide the narrative with its collective centre. Instead, each element begins to pull the narrative in two different directions, changing the shape of the community and thereby also the diegesis as a 'whole'.

CASE STUDY: *GLEE*

Centred around the community of a high school glee club, *Glee* is a series in which the themes of teamwork, individuality and competition permeate the narrative. Set largely within the boundaries of McKinley High School in Lima, Ohio, *Glee*'s pilot begins with disillusioned teacher Will Schuester (or Mr Schue, as the students call him) taking over a glee club that he christens the New Directions. Over the seasons, the club's members will compete both with each other – for more solos and a bigger share of the spotlight – while also learning to compete *as* a group, with rival glee clubs in the show choir championships. As such, *Glee*'s narrative is a particular, and particularly prominent, iteration of the tension between would-be autonomous parts and a would-be totalizing whole. It is the story of stars and soloists who simultaneously have to be a choir – an apt expression (if a slight exaggeration) of how numerous ongoing series are structured.

The New Directions form the central community of the series – a community that fosters both unity and individuality, a productive tension that is essential to the serial narrative dynamics of most shows. On the one hand, the collective identity of the glee club inspires character individuation. Mr Schue frequently encourages the students to embrace the traits that make them distinct, even in the face of social pressure, while simultaneously stressing the importance of teamwork for the glee club's success. Indeed, the latter often becomes a means of achieving the former: it is *because* of the glee club's comradery that its members gradually learn to become secure in who they are as individuals. On the other hand, the characters' pursuit of individuation is part of what gives them their collective identity. Most of the students in the glee club harbour dreams of stardom, an ambition that unites them as a community. But the notion of stardom is one that, by definition, is founded on the centrality of a dominant individual. Writing about *Le Père Goriot*, Woloch states that in the novel "the assertion of one's individual superiority against a multiple field is itself typical" (2003: 247). And so too with *Glee*; the characters' desires to be seen as individual stars is also what binds them together as a group. As a result, *Glee* exemplifies a point raised in chapter one: that traits need not be oppositional in order to generate conflict. Some traits are inherently confrontational, like Sam and Diane's competitiveness in *Cheers*. In *Glee*, the characters' ambition is a trait most of them have in common, but it is this shared trait that is the source of much conflict as it creates competitiveness within the community. As such, the diegetic struggle for dominance in the community frequently comes to mirror the same struggle taking place structurally.

Additionally, *Glee* makes for an interesting case study because of how it contended with unforeseen circumstances during its production process, ones that impacted upon the planned expansion strategies of the creators – an experience typical to television production (Geraghty, 1991: 34; Mittell, 2015: 67). For *Glee*, the first major obstacle occurred halfway through its run, when before the start of the fourth season plans for a potential spin-off were aborted. However, my aim in this case study is not to undertake a detailed investigation of the show's production history. Staying chiefly within the purview of formal analysis, I would like to use a notable aspect of this history in order to demonstrate how structural hierarchies and centripetal forces relate to the process of a show's coherent expansion. Specifically, examining these hierarchies can aid in the understanding of how structural principles adapt to change.

For initially, *Glee* was representative of the kind of structural stability that many television series aim for. During the first three seasons, the productive tension between the whole and its parts, the community and its constituents, was enabled by multiple centripetal forces working concurrently to keep the New Directions together. To understand how these centripetal forces and their redundancies would be destabilised in season four, and the role they would play in managing unforeseen change, it is first necessary to understand how they were originally structured to attain relative stability. To return to a metaphor from the beginning of this chapter – the Russian dolls that make up *Glee*'s various hierarchies need to be 'unpacked'.

New Directions: Diegetic Competition, Structural Dominance

On the broadest level, *Glee*'s diegesis, or storyworld, revolves around a central community – the New Directions. From a diegetic point of view, the New Directions are more often than not the "underdogs" in *Glee*'s diegesis (the trope of centring the narrative around a 'social underdog' is one that is popular to both film and television narratives set in high-school). The New Directions typically find themselves at the bottom of the school's social hierarchy, nor do they always manage to out-perform rival glee clubs in show choir competitions. Structurally, however, the glee club retains the dominant position enjoyed by communities in most television narratives. As such, its centripetal force exceeds that of any of its individual members. It is chiefly through membership of the New Directions that characters secure a serial presence in the diegesis and a recurring function in the show's serial narrative dynamics. Thus, while the first people to join the glee club were those that struggled

to belong elsewhere at McKinley – Rachel, Kurt, Mercedes, Tina and Artie – many subsequent recruits are students who were initially members of more popular clubs – the football player Finn, the cheerleaders Santana, Brittany and Quinn, and a member of a rival glee club, Blaine. While these and other characters would join the New Directions for a variety of reasons and integrate into this community to different extents and at a varying pace, what they all have in common is that their serial presence in *Glee* is tied specifically to their glee club membership.

While the glee club exerts a centripetal force on the diegesis as a whole, there are also elements within this community that help keep it together. At the start of series, three important centripetal forces are established that jointly will keep the New Directions united as a community – a good example of how functional redundancy operates in ongoing series. Firstly, as with so many television communities, setting plays a key role. Not only are the members of the glee club corralled by the borders of McKinley High School, but particular spaces within the school represent the glee club specifically – the choir room, the auditorium. Additionally, a more abstract shared trait also helps tether the community, and that is their ability to express themselves in song. This refers not only to the characters' singing skills, but also to the specific way in which they use them – namely, to communicate their emotions and work through life-problems. Of course this is partially attributed to the musical genre of *Glee*. But it is important to note that this trait is attributed specifically to the New Directions and not necessarily all the other glee clubs that exist within the diegesis. The practice sessions of Vocal Adrenaline, for example, are defined by the group's unwavering commitment to perfecting, technically, the numbers they will perform at competitions. By contrast, the meetings of the New Directions are organised around a weekly topic selected by Mr Schue and frequently designed to address issues in the students' personal lives; the selection and perfection of their competition numbers is often left until the last moment. Finally, Mr Schue himself acts as an important centripetal force within the community. His status within the glee club – as an adult, a teacher, and the club's leader – grants him a certain degree of dominance, both diegetic and structural. His centripetal force is made quite literal as he brings the students together to form the New Directions and continues to teach them the value of teamwork. Indeed, the pilot episode of the series centres around whether Mr Schue will stay on as a teacher at McKinley, thereby dramatizing the question of narrative continuation by threating one of the community's dominant centripetal forces.

Bound together by these centripetal forces, the members of the glee club themselves begin to compete for dominance and centrality within the community. In *Glee*, this structural

struggle also expresses itself diegetically as a competition for the spotlight. This is because members of the New Directions often measure their standing in the club by the quantity of solos they get to perform. Because *Glee* tackles the theme of competition so directly, it becomes a distinct example of how character dominance operates in television narratives – not simply in opposition to a community 'context', but simultaneously through a secured presence therein. For in ongoing television narratives, serial dominance in the discourse necessarily comes about through serial dominance in the community. In *Glee*, characters try to bypass this tension diegetically by quitting the glee club and attempting to gain stardom elsewhere. An early example occurs in the fourth episode of the first season and involves Rachel, the character who is the most preoccupied with becoming a star and, consequently, is perhaps the most consistently selfish member of the club. When Mr Schue gives Tina a solo to boost her confidence, Rachel is outraged that the decision is being made at what she believes is her expense. Quitting glee club, Rachel puts all of her energy into the school musical instead, where she has been given the lead. This defection, and others like it, are never permanent and the next episode sees Rachel return to the glee club where she will slowly learn the value of teamwork while simultaneously continuing to prize solos. The example demonstrates that in *Glee*, as in most other ongoing television series, serial structural dominance can only be achieved *through* the community, not in opposition to it.

But as I stated earlier in this chapter, the importance of the community does not make obsolete the discussion of how much space characters are granted in the discourse. It merely signifies that in a series, the path to serial dominance is necessarily by way of serial presence and, hence, through membership of the community. *Glee* demonstrates both implications of this structural principle at work. On the one hand, it depicts how characters can gain a serial presence in the community but nonetheless remain minor characters, at the bottom of the community's hierarchy. On the other hand, *Glee* also demonstrates how serial presence can gradually escalate into serial dominance.

Woloch describes the two extreme modes of characterization in the novel as that of the protagonist and the minor characters who "hover vulnerably on the borderline between name and number" (2003: 7). Between these two extremes lies an "embattled middle space" (ibid.). In television narratives, a character need not *belong* to a community in order to *be* a character – they may enter the diegesis as episodic visitors or linger on the community's borders as recurrent outsiders. But nor does membership of the community guarantee the status of characterhood. Indeed, individuals may exist within the diegesis simply to be 'extra' members of the community without having any defining traits that individuate them as fully-

fledged characters. In *Glee*, this "borderline between name and number" is regularly dramatized in the story itself. In *Glee*'s second episode, it is revealed that according to show choir rules a club needs twelve members to qualify for competition. Over the course of the programme's run, this rule will continue to be invoked in order to create narrative tension by jeopardising the New Directions' ability to compete. As a result of this rule, the glee club must have a set number of members in its community to survive (at least during certain parts of the narrative). Thus, while the community as a diegetic entity has at least twelve spaces that need to be filled by individual members, the discourse does not always grant space for twelve, equally elaborated, characters. Consequently, some individuals exist in the glee club (and the narrative) simply to 'fill out' the numbers. In the first season, a character named Matt Rutherford joins the glee club in the fourth episode along with Puck and Mike. And while Puck and Mike will go on to become prominent characters, Matt is only granted one or two lines of dialogue throughout the course of the season after which he exits the show. With his sole purpose to be the twelfth member of the glee club, Matt is a very literal example of the "borderline between name and number".

Such character hierarchies, however, are not necessarily fixed. In some cases, a character's dominance may change over an extended period of time. Brittany, for example, begins as a relatively minor character in the glee club. Like Matt, her function in season one seems to hover between name and number, although she does get more dialogue than Matt and, unlike him, is featured in supporting roles in the season's plotlines. But in the second season Brittany's dominance in the community increases both diegetically, as she becomes revered for her exceptional dance skills, and structurally, as she is granted her own plotlines, voice-overs and musical numbers. This process is then intrinsically linked to her trait-paradigm as an individual character being elaborated, demonstrating yet again that the continual elaboration of a television character's personality is dependent on their belonging to the series' community.

Thus, throughout *Glee*'s first three seasons, its characters competed for both diegetic and structural dominance within the community they were a part of. But because other centripetal forces operated redundantly in the show, this competition could take place in a relatively 'safe space'. Gathered together by Mr Schue and their love of singing in a shared setting, the characters' dominance could wane or increase within the boundaries of McKinley and the choir room without drastically affecting the coherent expansion of the series. After season three, however, this structural stability would change. The third season ended with the graduation of eight glee club members, including some of its biggest 'stars', leaving only five

of its members behind at McKinley. And as the graduates embarked on different paths, the dominance of individual characters as well the McKinley setting would be put to the test in a new way. The centripetal force of each would pull the community in literally different directions, thereby changing the shape and scope of the narrative. The hierarchies that had been contested over the course of the first three seasons would now come to play a key role in the show's attempts at coherent expansion.

Two Directions: A Community Divided

After running for a long-enough period of time, a great majority of television series will have to adapt to change, be they changes intrinsic to the series' premise or plot, or changes brought about due to unforeseen production contexts. In its fourth season, *Glee* had to deal with both types of change simultaneously. As a result, the show's coherent expansion faced several noteworthy obstacles. And in the process of adapting to these changes, functional redundancies that have been operating unobtrusively become foregrounded as they are pulled apart. The analysis of such a case study can demonstrate why it is beneficial to break down the 'total' structure of a series – a structure that may change shape as the series continues – into the structural principles that help determine the parameters of this change. Such an approach allows the theoretical concepts being used to remain as flexible as the form they are designed to analyse.

Built in to the premise of *Glee* is a teleological trajectory that is a challenge for ongoing series with an initially indefinite duration. Focusing as it did on high school students, *Glee* would have to navigate the complications of its characters (and actors) growing up and graduating as the series progressed – a challenge faced by various other programmes that start out in a high school setting, such as *Fame* (NBC, 1982-1983; Syndication, 1983-1987), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Gossip Girl* (The CW; 2007-2012) and *Awkward* (MTV; 2011-2016). As one glee club member puts it on her graduation day, "the glue that holds high school friendships together is high school" (5.10). Consequently, series set in high school become instructive case studies of how the centripetal force of character and setting can come into conflict with one another. As students grow up and have to move beyond the borders of the place that defined them as a community, structural hierarchies play a key role in determining how (and whether or not) the show will continue its coherent expansion. Some series opt to remain rooted to the setting, as does *Fame*, while others primarily follow the characters instead, as in *Gossip Girl*. *Glee* is an interesting example as its narrative bifurcates at the start

of the fourth season in order to accommodate both. Over the course of the next three seasons, the narrative will expand in order to accommodate both graduates and current students while still working to bind them together structurally for the purposes of coherence.

Part of the reason this bifurcation of the community took place was because of the production contexts surrounding the fourth season, which changed the initial plans for how the series would deal with the graduation of some its most dominant characters. In July 2011 it was reported that three of *Glee*'s stars would graduate at the end of the upcoming third season and would not return for the fourth: Lea Michele (Rachel), Chris Colfer (Kurt) and Cory Monteith (Finn). The announcement launched speculations that the actors had been fired, and statements made by the actors seemed to support the assumption. Soon after, one of the show's co-creators, Ryan Murphy, gave an interview in which he explained the 'misunderstandings' behind the announcement: up until recently, Murphy had been working on an hourlong spin-off to *Glee*, but the plans were put on hold "after several of the show's stars claimed surprise at Murphy's announcement that this year would be their last on the first series" (Weiner, 2011: n.p.). The spin-off was meant to have taken place in Julliard college in New York City, a decision that was made in consultation with the three lead actors. In Murphy's own words:

> [W]e were asked to investigate doing a spin-off and it was a spin-off specifically for three of them, Chris, Cory and Lea […] In March, Brad Falchuk and I started talking to all three of those actors about it […] At the time, all three of them expressed interest. 'Yeah, that sounds good. It's good to graduate. It's good to grow the characters. It's good to not have to sit in that choir room. It's good to sort of expand and continue the evolution of these people.' (quoted in Weiner, 2011: n.p)

That a potential spin-off was planned "specifically" for Chris, Cory and Lea illustrates a point I touched on earlier, namely that actors' popularity and standing within the production will impact upon the space granted to their characters within the discourse. In this instance, the studio (and Murphy) deemed these three characters and actors as popular enough to support an entirely new show, thereby giving them a new discourse-space in which to 'expand' and 'evolve'. Similarly, when the plans for a spin-off were aborted, the extra-diegetic standing of the actors and their characters would impact the reformulated progression of the narrative. "Those actors have a contract for seven years," stated Murphy, "So just because they're graduating and so many of them are beloved, if they don't go to New York, maybe they'll do

something else" (ibid.). The comment is a clear example of how the coherent expansion of a show is intertwined with the appeal of recurring characters, and is here further linked to matters of labour in the entertainment industry. Because the actors are contractually obligated to the show, and because their characters are beloved by viewers, the ongoing narrative will be shaped to accommodate them. While it is possible to analyse this confluence of production, consumption and aesthetic matters from a variety of perspectives, here I would like to examine the impact of *Glee*'s abandoned spin-off plans on its structural principles.

Both the premise and production circumstances of *Glee* together created a context in which, at the start of season four, the graduated characters would be at risk of falling beyond the boundaries of the narrative as it had been shaped thus far. This is precisely because they were at risk of moving beyond the borders of the show's community as it had existed for the first three seasons. And as I have repeatedly stressed, in an ongoing series a character's serial presence in the narrative comes only through serial membership of the community. Indeed, the aborted spin-off plans are evidence of how close some of the characters came to escaping the totalising force of the community altogether – rogue 'parts' that had been destined to initiate the coherent expansion of an entirely new 'whole'. But since these plans were cancelled, and because the characters were beloved, and because the actors were under contract, the existing narrative would have to be reshaped in order to accommodate them. This would mean, first and foremost, reshaping the existing parameters of the community through a separation of its centripetal forces.

In the first three seasons, *Glee*'s community operated very similarly on both a structural and diegetic level. The New Directions were both the community anchoring the show's dynamics, as well the diegetic community to which the recurring characters belonged. Furthermore, the community was tethered together structurally by centripetal forces that were also tangible diegetically – the McKinley setting, Mr Schue's presence. And although the dominance of the club's members would fluctuate, because they were all gathered in the same location, the centripetal force of any dominant character almost always coincided with the centripetal force of the setting, thereby granting relative stability to the dynamics of the show.

But with the graduation of eight of the glee club's members at the end of season three, the community is set up to disperse diegetically as these graduates pursue different paths after high school. Most of them are accepted into higher education institutions of their choice while others follow a range of career paths, all of them scattered across the country. Without the centripetal force of McKinley holding the group together, they are set to disintegrate *as* a

group. Significantly, the community is pulled in two distinct directions – directions that are evidence of the hierarchies amid its components. On the one hand, the McKinley setting remains a dominant centripetal force. "When you have events like we're going to have – Sectionals is our Thanksgiving episode, the musical, there's great opportunities for people to come back and share what's going on with them in their lives," remarked Murphy before the start of season four (quoted in Goldberg, 2012: n.p.). Or as Rachel observes of the McKinley auditorium: "This place is kind of like our Jerusalem, All roads seem to just lead us back here" (4.4). But in addition to this existing setting, New York emerges as a competing centre of interest. And while New York may be said to have its own centripetal pull for the characters of *Glee* – it represents a place where one can pursue one's dreams – structurally its inclusion in the narrative speaks to the 'pull' of the glee club's most dominant (and prominent) graduate, Rachel. Ahead of the fourth season's debut, it was Lea Michele who was the first cast member confirmed to be returning to *Glee* (Sager, 2012: n.p.) and was also the only actor contracted to do all 22 episodes of the season (Stanhope, 2012: n.p.). Thus, initially it is only Rachel who goes to New York and it is 'around' her that other graduates begin to assemble as first Kurt and then Santana relocate to the city and move in with Rachel.

Thus, *Glee*'s community becomes split by the centripetal force of two settings and the characters therein. Significantly, the three dominant characters that were singled out for the spin-off are used to reinforce the centripetal force of each location. While Rachel and Kurt are based in New York, Finn returns to Ohio by the fourth episode of season four and is asked by Mr Schue to take over the glee club while he is in Washington, thus temporarily taking over Mr Schue's centripetal function. But with this diegetic bifurcation of the community, *Glee* raises an important question about the structural status of its New Yorkers. Can these spatially separated characters still be defined as part of the show's original community, or do they represent some kind of secondary community in the show's narrative? On a diegetic level, the latter may initially appear to be true, as new recruits are brought in to 'repopulate' the New Directions and fill the spaces left by the graduates, while the graduates in turn seek out new communities to belong to in New York. However, both of these endeavours are ultimately unsuccessful – evidence of the fact that, structurally, the show still has at its centre *one* community which is held together by an important centripetal force that both factions still have in common.

In order to justify the presence of both the New York and Ohio settings as part of one coherent narrative, *Glee* would structure them as two factions of the same community. To do this, a centripetal force would be needed to tether them together. To perform this function, the

show uses a dominant communal trait that is abstract rather than physical in nature – the characters' ability and preference to work through their personal problems in song, as was discussed earlier. Throughout the course of *Glee*'s fourth season, the glee club's 'theme of the week', as set by Mr Schue (and later Finn) will continue to structure not only the plotlines taking place at McKinley, but New York as well. This not only provides thematic unity to each episode, it also encourages viewers to consider these two groups of people as one community, united structurally if not diegetically. Thus, the traits of the New York characters are configured into the narrative dynamics of the show not through some new, secondary community but through comparisons with the glee club. Have the graduates learnt the lessons taught to them in the glee club? Do their values still align with those Mr Schue is teaching a new generation of New Directions? In this way the structural principles of *Glee* delimit the "evolution" of the characters (in comparison to, for example, what could have occurred in a hypothetical spin-off) because their identities are still being constructed in relation to a pre-existing community trait-paradigm.

In episode twelve, for example, the theme of nudity extends across both the McKinley and New York settings. In New York, Rachel must decide whether she will perform a nude scene in a student film whilst at McKinley the boys of the glee club opt to do a topless calendar to raise funds for the club. In both plotlines, the characters come to the conclusion that they should say no to situations that they are uncomfortable with. Both factions of the community are thereby united by their commitment to personal beliefs – a trait fostered by Mr Schue and their experiences in the glee club. Rachel thus opts out of the film at the last moment, and the glee boys decide to balance the calendar's topless and clothed photos to accommodate everyone's views and comfort levels. In one telling scene, Rachel envisions having a conversation with her 'old' self in the mirror. The dress and hairstyle of this imagined Rachel are clearly an evocation of her character when she was at McKinley – more conservative in matters of both dress and sexuality. This previous version of herself cautions Rachel against the nude scene, while her newer self argues for it. Since the plotlines in this episode are about being true to oneself, one of the glee club's primary values, it is significant that it is the views of the 'old' Rachel that win out in the end, emphasising that Rachel's 'true' identity is still inherently linked to the traits of the glee club.

Because *Glee* structures New York and Ohio as two factions of one community, the diegetic hierarchies within the glee club no longer neatly mirror the structural hierarchies of the (now bifurcated) community. The first episode of season four, suggestively titled 'The New Rachel', quickly demonstrates that while certain graduates have relinquished their

diegetic roles as 'stars' of the glee club, structurally they remain the dominant members of *Glee*'s community. With Rachel in New York, the remaining members of the New Directions compete to determine who will become what they call "the new Rachel" – the community's star performer and chief soloist – a term that highlights the characters' awareness of the diegetic hierarchies within their club. During the glee club's auditions for new members, a character named Marley takes the stage to try-out. Marley's audition is then intercut with another key event in the episode – Rachel's first public performance at the New York Academy of the Dramatic Arts. As Rachel is called to perform, she begins to announce her song: "Hi, I'm Rachel Berry and I'll be singing 'New York State of Mind'…". The scene then cuts to Marley, who completes the sentence, "Written by Billy Joel". As the music begins, the sequence continues to crosscut between Rachel and Marley as both perform the song, each clearly impressing their respective audience. On the one hand, the point being made by this sequence is clear: it is Marley who will become the 'new Rachel'. On the other hand, the editing complicates this conclusion on a *structural* level. Although Marley will not have to share the literal spotlight with Rachel, her character will still have to compete with Rachel for structural dominance. The episode may be entitled 'The New Rachel' but it opens with Rachel Berry, not Marley, and chronicles Rachel's adjustment to life in New York. Even the song that she and Marley share is linked much more strongly with Rachel: 'New York State of Mind' is associated with Barbara Streisand who is Rachel's long-time idol, and is about New York City, which is Rachel's new home. The sequence demonstrates that while new characters may attempt to replace the graduates on a diegetic level in the glee club, the glee club is no longer the diegetic simulacrum of the show's community. Hence, the structurally dominant positions of some graduates, at least, remain occupied.

And while new glee club members struggle to carve out a space for themselves in the community, in New York the graduates grapple with a converse problem – finding a new community to belong to. For just as the new members of the glee club cannot be granted the same amount of space in the discourse as the original characters, any potential new communities that may develop in New York are not given the space to expand. Several alternatives for new communities will present themselves over the course of seasons four and five – the diner at which Rachel, Kurt and Santana all work; NYADA, which first Rachel then also Kurt attend; the offices of Vogue.com where Kurt interns; and the Broadway production of *Funny Girl* in which Rachel is cast. But none of these potential new communities are given enough space and time to develop and expand in either characters or, crucially, traits. This is partly due to a practical consideration, namely the limited nature of

the discourse. Even in a long-running and ongoing narrative, screen-time is limited. Because the creators of *Glee* opted to cross-cut between New York and Ohio, any potential communities in New York necessarily have less screen-time to develop than is typically afforded to the introduction of new communities (as, for example, in pilot episodes and first seasons). This is yet again a symptom of the fourth season being a consolidation of an unrealised 'new' show and the continuation of an existing one. But perhaps even more significant than the limited space of the discourse is the fact that the pre-existing trait-paradigm of the glee club is still being used in later seasons to configure the graduates into the narrative dynamics of the show, as I have already discussed. The actions of the graduates are continually compared and contrasted to the traits of the glee club, aggregating them into a collective entity, thus eliminating the structural need for any new community to develop.

The lack of space afforded to potential new communities in New York and new characters like Marley raises the question of whether the process of coherent expansion can be stretched *beyond* its limits in an ongoing series. For while the community in *Glee* changes and expands in such a way so as to accommodate a wider variety of characters and plotlines, we may ask whether the show takes on too much. Although the community may expand, the discourse is still limited and thus there may not be space to do justice to all of these elements. In other words, the needs of serial presence may come into conflict with the related needs of serial dominance – the series may not have the capacity to multiply characters, settings and plots that are both recurring *and* fully elaborated. And this structural dilemma could, in turn, affect the quality of the writing, directing or the performances. The full consideration of this implication is beyond the limits of my thesis, partly because it crosses the borderline between formal analysis and evaluation. Nonetheless, I hope that the theoretical concepts this chapter has been developing demonstrate themselves as useful in discussing such evaluative questions.

The question of whether *Glee*'s narrative 'works', and works 'well', in its later seasons is a multifaceted one. The important note on which to conclude this chapter, however, is that there is more than one way for a series to 'work', to echo Mittell (2015: 217). The structural principles of most, if not all, ongoing series are flexible enough to ensure that the coherent expansion of the show can, in theory, take more than one direction. The serial dynamics of an ongoing television narrative like *Glee* do not necessarily prescribe just one way that the narrative may expand. To understand why this is the case, we need to analyse the nuances of how a series is structured over time. Although a series' dynamics and structural hierarchies may create and sustain a relatively stable diegesis and familiar plot

patterns, this need not be the case. Indeed, these hierarchies can work to manage change, allowing a series to explore avenues that may at first appear beyond its initial premise. From a theoretical perspective, it is important to employ concepts that accommodate this structural flexibility, whether for purposes of analysis or evaluation.

In chapter one, I ended by stressing the fact that communities are malleable entities, able to admit new members and recover from the loss of existing ones. In this chapter, I looked in detail at the mechanisms that allow for such flexibility while still working to retain a coherent identity for the community and therefore the series as a whole. Often, communities are held together by multiple centripetal forces working redundantly together to create stable, tight-knit groups that are often diegetic and structural at the same time. This was the case with *Glee*'s first three seasons, in which a dominant setting, several major characters and a shared approach to music held the New Directions together as a group. Sometimes, however, the centripetal forces binding a community may separate or be diluted, thereby changing the shape of the community. Faced with unforeseen production circumstances, the various centripetal forces of *Glee* were put to the test. The diegetic competition for dominance between members of the glee club would now come to have a profound impact on the coherent expansion of the series, as the community of the show split in two in order to accommodate both dominant characters and dominant settings.

Throughout such shifts, however, the community itself remains at the centre of the narrative, more dominant than any one character because it is the cumulative nucleus of the series. Indeed, the changing shape of the community affects the shape of the narrative as a 'whole'. Earlier in this chapter I noted examples of sitcoms in which one very dominant character helps to bring together two settings which otherwise may not be able to share a diegesis coherently. A similar process occurs in *Glee*. Except in this case the dominant centripetal force that rises above all others to bind together a community that is splitting apart is music, and the specific way the characters use it – a product and a testament to the musical genre of the series. And as in the sitcoms I cited earlier, the power of this centripetal force allows the narrative to diversify. Whereas in the previous seasons the tight-knit shape of the community limited the expansive possibilities of the discourse, in its newly reformed state the community would generate more entry-points for new characters, and more starting-points for new plotlines. For example, both McKinley and New York would serve as temporary entry-points into the narrative for those graduates who relinquished their serial presence in the discourse after season three. Thus, although they would no longer be recurring members of *Glee*'s community, these graduates would become episodic visitors to either one or both of

its factions – visiting Rachel and Kurt in New York, or coming back to McKinley for special occasions, as Murphy described. What this demonstrates is that the complex system of centripetal forces in a series – both their nature and their hierarchies – create a spectrum of possibilities for how the narrative form will be perceived overall. The scope of some series may be extensive when the community is structured around a large setting, as in *The Wire*, or when the community follows itinerant characters, as in *Outlander*. On the other hand, small locations like the *Cheers* bar create communities and narratives that are much more tightly configured. And in the case of *Glee*, the shape of the community and thus the narrative was able to change over time precisely because the narrative dynamics of series are typically constructed to accommodate and manage change.

While this chapter focused largely on hierarchies and centripetal force within the community, discussing the relationship between these elements and the narrative's ability to adapt to change, in the next chapter I would like to extend the relevance of this discussion to the concept of individual character change. For if a character is conceptualised a paradigm of traits, their uniqueness may also be said to 'revolve around' their dominant traits. Consequently, a character's identity is partially bounded by the traits that link them to a community as well as those traits that individuate them from it. But amid this structural negotiation a certain degree of character change can indeed occur. Thus, although historically television characters, just as television diegeses, have been associated with stability, the question warrants closer re-examination.

Notes

[i] Recurring settings also aid production through their contribution to recurring camerawork. Dias Branco remarks of the bar in *Cheers*: "this piece of furniture structures the mise-en-scène with its central position. It has the centripetal function of, not only aggregating the characters' actions, but also of establishing the camera's positions and angles" (2013: 96).

[ii] This narrative strategy is not unique to television. Viktor Shklovsky, for example, discusses the centripetal function of a location in *Don Quixote*: "This is indeed a remarkable inn. It was set up by Cervantes in accordance with a patent that was evidently issued with strictly literary purposes in mind. Dozens of tales and recognitions cross paths within its confines. This place constitutes the geometric center of the individual crisscrossing lines of the novel" (1990: 87). The economic incentives of recurring locations in television production simply make this strategy much more prevalent that it may be in other media.

[iii] These comments are made in relation to the early seasons of *Grey's Anatomy*. But, as with much of serialised television, the narrative is subject to change. By season 12 Meredith has become the Chief of General Surgery at the renamed Grey Sloan Memorial Hospital – an instance of a character's diegetic dominance slowly increasing to meet their dominant structural status.

[iv] Tischleder problematises Mittell's approach for a similar reason, stating that in his work "storyworlds are seldom reflected in their own right, and, if so, they are seen mainly as a setting for human action" (2017: 122). She writes: "*The Wire's* Baltimore evolves as an urban chronotope by virtue of a spatial dramaturgy that focuses on a particular institution or social network in each of its five seasons; it is quite apparent that the city rather than any individual character is the show's true 'protagonist'" (2017: 121). The statement, ironically, mirrors Mittell's own comments about the show in certain sections of his book.

3

PARADIGM SHIFTS:
PATTERNS OF CHANGE IN CHARACTER TRAIT-PARADIGMS

Structurally speaking, television characters need to do two things – they need to belong to a community, and they need to stand out from the community at the same time. This structural configuration of the narrative may seem to put certain limitations on character identity. And indeed it does. But simply because character identity is delimited in ongoing television narratives in certain respects, does not mean that television characters are an inherently static entity. Just as hierarchies within communities allow the diegesis of a series to remain flexible while remaining distinct, so too with individual characters. The dynamics of television narratives do not preclude fluid conceptions of character and character change. Rather, they determine bounded alternatives for the way in which such change is likely to occur – a possibility that different shows take advantage of in a variety of ways and to disparate degrees.

In chapter two I discussed how the hierarchies within communities help to regulate change by determining its structural impact. In this chapter I want to trace the bearing these observations have on character change, examining how the open-ended trait-paradigm of a given character is made contingent in ongoing series. This contingency is due partly to the structural principles of the series, which position individual characters in relation to collective communities and their internal hierarchies. But it is also due to the indeterminate run of the show, which complicates the possibility of teleological progression. Of course, these two ways in which character change is bounded – or made conditional – are inherently interrelated. It is *because* series have an indeterminate run time that they rely less on the teleological trajectory of a single character than on the renewable and shifting dynamics between multiple characters. Understanding the various ways characters can change thus becomes a matter of understanding how individual series shape their characters in response to these interrelated contingencies.

In this chapter, I will begin by discussing existing scholarship on change in television characters, paying special attention to the work of Roberta Pearson, Jason Mittell and Radha O'Meara. Developing on from this, I examine how two key formal contexts shape the spectrum of possibilities as far as character change is concerned: the relationships between characters and communities, and the indeterminate run of ongoing series. In relation to the former point, I draw especially on examples from series that are mostly episodic in order to

demonstrate that even in relatively 'traditional' series, certain possibilities for character change do exist. Then, turning to more serialised shows, I analyse how they use their indefinite run-times in order to actively engage with teleological conceptions of change, facilitating complex reflections about the very nature of change itself. The chief case study for this chapter is *Orange is the New Black* – a series that simultaneously acknowledges the possibilities of character change as explored in complex shows like *Breaking Bad*, while also employing structural principles typical to many ongoing series, including episodic ones. The result is a narrative that questions the possibility of change in individuals, continually foregrounding the social and temporal contingencies of identity.

A Spectrum of Possibilities: Theorising Character Change

The dominant approach to analysing television characters has been one that emphasises the characters' stability in the face of contingent production processes. Roberta Pearson's comments are representative in this regard:

> Characters are suited to their particular fictional forms. Protagonists of one-off novels, plays or films may complete teleological trajectories to lifechanging epiphanies. The central protagonists of television dramas must perforce exhibit relative stability in keeping with the repetitive nature of the series/serial format. (Pearson, 2007: 50)

Indeed, the comment does encapsulate a *general* tendency exhibited by many, if not most, ongoing series, especially those created during television's network era – a time during which narratives were designed to accommodate irregular viewing patterns. But this general description of television characters also elides certain nuances of their construction. Radha O'Meara rightly notes that existing conceptions of television characters as stable, while helpful in some respects, "have also curbed our understandings of television and character" (2015: 192). "Close analysis of television texts can reveal aspects and forms of character change sometimes overlooked," she contends (ibid.).

Similarly to Pearson, O'Meara states that "character change can take various forms across different media and genres" (2015: 198). She goes on: "A novelistic formation of character change is not necessarily desirable, achievable or profitable in a television series that might continue for many years, or be cancelled at any moment" (ibid.). For Pearson, these differences necessitate a need to develop a critical language better suited for television

characters, one that differentiates between "highly elaborated" and "well-developed" characters (2007: 55). For O'Meara, it requires assessing the value we may associate with certain forms of character change:

> It seems that character change is granted less significance by critics, screenwriters and scholars when it is treated comically, or its signs seem contained within a single episode. This hierarchy of change seems to privilege a more long-form character change. (O'Meara, 2015: 198)

Mittell seems to have both concerns in mind when broaching the topic of character change in relation to complex narratives. To illustrate that "change" may mean different things in different shows, Mittell creates a list of possible sub-categories of character change, including character "growth", character "education", character "overhauls" and character "transformation" (2015: 137-141). But in creating this expanded vocabulary, he is also careful to distance it from the formulation of a hierarchy: "by concluding this roundup of different models of character change with transformation, I do not mean to suggest that television's dominant approach to characterization is flawed by overemphasizing stability or less organic models of change except for a few notable exceptions" (2015: 141). Yet it is precisely a notable exception that Mittell singles out for detailed analysis in his chapter, namely the case of Walter White in *Breaking Bad*. Mittell himself acknowledges this fact, beginning his analysis "with the clear caveat that it is an exceptional and atypical example" (2015: 151). As a result, close analysis is reserved for a form of change that is deemed unusual for ongoing series, rather than using the opportunity to explore how typical structural principles can also generate insightful examples of character change.

The above accounts of character change in television narratives demonstrate the desire to both determine the limits that the form may impose while also displaying an enthusiasm for the possibilities it may afford. Striking a balance between these two endeavours can sometimes be problematic: too great an emphasis on either the typical limitations or the atypical experimentations can (sometimes inadvertently) shift focus away from the spectrum of possibilities ongoing series make available in relation to character 'change', broadly defined. In this chapter I hope to tease out more of these possibilities. While retaining a focus on the specificities of ongoing television narratives, as called for by scholars such as Pearson and O'Meara, I also wish to broaden the way character change can be theorised. As in the previous chapter, I would like to focus less on the specific categories

television series may be classified into and instead examine the structural principles that make a range of narrative formulations possible.

Writing on the subject of character "totality", Chatman states that this totality is a theoretical construct, never fully achievable in a given narrative (1978: 121). He then posits a second question with regards to this quality: "Is the totality organized in some sense? Is it a teleological set, or merely an agglomerate?" (ibid.). While some structuralist approaches to narrative have argued for the latter interpretation of character[i], Chatman proposes that "an open theory should probably argue for both eventualities. Instances of both in fact occur in literary history" (ibid.). The question has added resonance in the context of ongoing television narratives, where the lack of a determined end-point complicates notions of teleology. As was argued in chapter one, Chatman's concept of character trait-paradigms results in characters being relatively malleable entities, in formal terms. With this in mind, Pearson and Mittell's terminology can be seen as attempts to define various ways that character trait-paradigms may be organised and augmented over time – "elaboration", "development", "growth", etc. While such classification can be useful, here I wish to supplement the discussion by examining the narrative contexts that make all these (and other, perhaps unlabelled) augmentations possible.

In the introduction to the thesis, I posed the following question: if the coherent identity of a television narrative is partially founded on character, and if character is theorised as a fundamentally open construct, then does anything exist within a television series to delimit that openness? The answer, I argued, was other characters or, more specifically, communities of recurring characters. In this chapter, I will trace the implications of this on character change. I will examine how the serial narrative dynamics of a show can accommodate both dramatic 'transformations' and less remarked upon forms of change, and how this spectrum has more formal properties in common than it may initially seem.

Character Change in Relation to the Community

"The requirement that television characters sustain a series distinguishes them from their counterparts in psychologically realist cinema," states Pearson (2007: 50), a comment that echoes my own emphasis on character as a cornerstone of a series' coherent expansion. For Pearson, this requirement links to the specific way in which character traits are treated in ongoing series as opposed to stand-alone texts:

> Over the course of a long-running series, the routine augmenting of traits and biographies for novelty purposes can lead to highly elaborated characters. But a highly elaborated character is not the same as a well-developed character; just as characters are suited to their particular fictional forms, so must our critical language be. For literary and dramatic critics, development has often meant that the protagonist grows, achieves a higher degree of self-awareness and makes life-transforming decisions. But the repetitive nature of the television series dictates a relative state of stability for its characters, whose failure to perform key narrative functions and to interact with other characters in pre-established fashion could seriously undermine a series' premise. (Pearson, 2007: 55-56)

This description certainly contains very useful starting points for analysing television characters. And although Pearson is here writing about a relatively episodic series, *CSI*, her comments are echoed in the sentiments of scholars writing about more serialised narratives also. Mittell for example, draws on Pearson's analysis when writing about 'complex' television narratives (2015: 133). But certain implications of this passage can benefit from more detailed explication, following Pearson's own call for an attention to critical language. Specifically, the relationship between a character's "narrative functions" and the "series' premise" needs to be examined in detail.

A show such as *Breaking Bad*, although an exceptional case, demonstrates that change, or specifically character development as Pearson defines it, can indeed be built into the very premise of a series. This, however, does not negate the observation that characters "perform key narrative functions" in a given series, functions that are connected to the "way they interact with other characters". These two comments, although very closely related, are not always and not necessarily interchangeable. Although characters and their interrelationships do play a fundamental role in determining how a series will expand from its premise, these dynamics do not necessarily preclude change. Rather, they create bounded possibilities for how such change may occur. One reason why character change remains a possibility in ongoing series is the precise way a character's 'function' becomes manifest in such narratives.

In the previous chapters, I noted that conceptualising television characters in terms of *plot* function is restrictive for analysis. Instead, I suggest that we can examine how a character's traits are put to functional use. Similarly, it is important to note that in Pearson's analysis the term "function" is not necessarily equated with plot function, as it might be in a

Proppian analysis, but rather more broadly with "narrative function". For Pearson, such function is also tied to a character's traits: "The lack of an immediate denouement requires that the core psychological traits and behaviours of television characters remain stable" (2007: 50). The statement seems to imply that *some* traits, ones less critical to maintaining the series "premise", may change while the "core" traits need to remain stable. Using the concepts I have discussed in the previous chapters, I would like to develop and reframe precisely this inference.

In chapter one I argued that television characters are delimited both by the space granted to them in the discourse, and the place they occupy in the community. This fact does not necessarily preclude change, but it does mean that change in an individual character will happen in relation to the community. Namely, if a character is to retain a serial role in the narrative dynamics of a series, then they need to maintain a connection to the community of that show. And in chapter two it was further discussed that within the make-up of a community, some traits and characters possess greater dominance than others – dominance that manifests itself as a centripetal force, tying the community together. These hierarchies, then, help determine the 'stakes' of individual character change – if a character changes in such a way as to lose a dominant communal trait or relationship, they become at risk of also losing their place in the narrative dynamics of the show. Let us, for a brief moment, stay with the example of *Breaking Bad*, precisely because it so frequently cited as an exceptional rather than a typical example of character change in television series. The characters in *Breaking Bad* need to maintain a connection to Walter White, who exerts a centripetal force on the community around him. But, equally, Walter needs to remain a participant within the meth trade – an activity (and its associated traits) that is equally important to binding the core community of characters together and thus ensuring the show's coherent expansion. Thus, although in some respects *Breaking Bad* does push the boundaries of how character change is depicted on television, in other ways it may be argued that the show is still working with (and within) structural principles typical to the medium.

At the same time, a character needs to retain traits that individuate them from the community, even if some of these traits change over time. Returning to the notion of structural hierarchies, we might say that within each character's trait-paradigm, numerous traits will jostle for structural dominance. The traits that are likely to usurp this position are those that play the most critical role in constructing a character *as* an individual – in other words, the traits that individuate the character from their community. Without such traits, a

character may be an exemplary community member but they will struggle to attain the status of a unique persona. Woloch notes that:

> In classical Chinese landscape painting there is a rule that you can never place more than five trees in the foreground, as though five were the largest number of units that can be individually distinguished by a human mind. With any more than five units we will start to blur individuals into some larger group. (Woloch, 2003: 119)

For Woloch, some novelistic characters seem to bear out this formal philosophy, "hovering uneasily between foreground and background" (ibid.). In the *Glee* case study, I noted a similar point with regards to some of its 'extra' community members. Woloch's comment also has an interesting parallel in Gitlin's account of the making of *Hill Street Blues*, a television show considered revolutionary (in US prime-time at least) for the number of characters and plots it asked viewers to keep track of:

> NBC asked a consulting psychologist for a scientific opinion about the number of plots an audience could hold in its mind simultaneously. The general industry assumption was that no more than three subplots were manageable within a single episode. The consultant relayed empirical psychology's conclusion that the "magic number" was seven, plus or minus two; but added the qualification that as characters became more familiar, their appearance could trigger associated memories and boost the viewers' capacity to handle subplots. (Gitlin, 1985: 298)

If this empirical conclusion is to be accepted, it allows for the possibility that the seriality of television (even if confined to recurring characters rather than serialised plotlines) facilitates our ability to follow the actions of a greater number of characters simultaneously because of our familiarity with them. Despite this, however, there is still a limit to the amount of space that can be allotted to characters within the discourse. This may result in some characters being relegated to the "background" of the community: fifth trees with few or no individuating traits. In *Cheers*, certain background characters recur in multiple episodes and are used to extend the Cheers community beyond the major characters. Often this is achieved merely through their recurring presence in the bar, seated next to Norm, Cliff or Frasier. Sometimes they will be seen participating in the community's characteristic activities: watching sport, listening in awe to Sam's dating stories, partaking in the bar's hijinks. Only

on rare occasions will they be given a line of dialogue, and equally exceptional is the utterance of their names by the other characters. Indeed, I learnt most of their names by watching the end credits of the episodes. Interestingly, these background 'regulars' were named after the actors playing them, further emphasising that their only individuating quality is the recurring, embodied presence of a specific actor.

Thus, the maintenance of a character's individuality is just as critical as their belonging to a community. Writing about *Law and Order* (NBC; 1990-2010), O'Meara remarks that Mike Logan is a "good example of how a series character maintains a sense of individuality amidst continual change," change enacted through the "considerable number of significant events" that Mike has "accumulated" (2015: 194). Pearson would likely label this accumulation of events as "character elaboration" rather than "development". But O'Meara's statement nonetheless points to the balance that every series must find between individuating a character from the rest of the community and subjecting their trait-paradigm to change over time – whether this change is a teleological development or a less end-directed elaboration. One way to achieve this balance is to target more subordinate traits in a character's paradigm, those that play a less dominant role in either tethering them to the community or individuating them from it. Thus, even in *Breaking Bad*, Walter retains some of the most crucial individuating traits that define him from the start of the series – his pride, his unsurpassed ability to cook an extraordinarily pure form of crystal meth, and his self-regard because of his skills. The alterations to Walter's morality occur as a result of these key traits being manifested to greater degrees and in new ways, rather than the traits themselves changing entirely. And they, in turn, ensure that Walter continues to engage in behaviour that keeps him tied to the community of the show.

What this demonstrates is that character change is bounded in a television series both by the need to preserve a character's individuality and the need to retain a link between them and the core community. Yet within these parameters, change certainly is possible. Of course the extent to which an individual series will take advantage of these bounded possibilities will depend on many factors aside from the structural principles themselves – factors determined by both its production and consumption contexts. *Breaking Bad* was able to experiment with character change to the extent that it did not only because of the vision of its creator, but also because the production and consumption practices of US television had become such that this kind of narrative content was feasible.[ii] Yet this statement should not imply that there is no evidence of character change in more traditional, network-era programming. Rather, keeping the above structural parameters for character change in mind, we can certainly re-evaluate the

possibilities for its existence in such series. Let us then, for the moment, put aside 'complex' programming such as *Breaking Bad*, and turn our attention to a genre that O'Meara cites as being neglected where character change is concerned – the sitcom.

Discussing the genre, O'Meara describes what she takes to be the common view of it, namely that "even when sitcom characters change, it is not radical, enduring or serious enough to be considered meaningful" (2015: 97). In contrast to this assessment, O'Meara suggests that episodic shows can be thought of as being made up of "recurring changes" and that the "gravity of this change is negated by neither its fleeting nature nor its comic treatment" (2015: 198). Additionally, O'Meara notes that sitcom characters are also capable of demonstrating longer character arcs, citing *Community*'s (NBC, 2009-2014; Yahoo! Screen, 2015) Jeff Winger as an example: "The mercenary, cynical and smug former lawyer gradually warms to his new friends, and becomes an active and integral member of their community" (2015: 196). Important to note about this statement is the way Jeff's change is linked to his integration *into* the community of characters around him, thus demonstrating that his development occurs within the structural parameters I have been describing. Overall, these observations indicate the need to more fully investigate the relationship between episodic plotting and character change, an occurrence typically associated with seriality.

O'Meara's analysis draws attention to the fact that (significant) change is frequently equated with serialised plotting. Hence it is important to stress that characters can change serially – in others words, undergo a permanent development that persists for a significant duration of the show – through the course of several (or many) self-contained episodes and plotlines. One reason why such change may not be as 'striking' as more exceptional (and serialised) examples, is due to the fact that these character arcs are less compressed, both in terms of story and discourse. Instead of using a prominent and ongoing storyline to draw our attention to a character's development, signs of change are spread over many plotlines, episodes and seasons, not prominently strung together in such a way as to be perceived as "radical", to use O'Meara's word. O'Sullivan remarks that until recently, seasons of the hourly drama "have been too long, and too irregular in their alternation between new and old episodes, to offer a sustained narrative experience" (2010: 61). Nevertheless, comprehensive analysis of these more 'extended' narrative experiences can indeed reveal changes that warrant being termed "character development". For a 'mini case study' of such change, let us return to an already cited character – Frasier Crane in *Cheers*. Like Jeff Winger in *Community*, Frasier is a character that changes so as to secure a permanent and well-integrated position within the community of the series – a process I have already touched on

in chapter one. Here, I would like to return to this observation in order to demonstrate how Frasier's integration is made possible through a long-term change to his trait-paradigm, one achieved via a series of self-contained plotlines.

Frasier initially enters the *Cheers* community in season three as a love interest for Diane. And based on Diane's prior claims of the traits she wants in a romantic partner, Frasier appears to be the perfect match: he is intelligent, well-educated, well-spoken, cultured, polite. These also happen to be traits that are at odds with those of the bar's community. Indeed, unlike the Cheers regulars, Frasier is not much of a drinker and seems to have little interest in sport. As such, Frasier would have little reason to frequent Cheers were it not for Diane. But over the course of the next three seasons, Frasier gradually acquires key communal traits that will tether him to the bar: their sense of humour, their attitude to women. Along with these more significant changes will follow more minor ones, like an appreciation for sport and beer.

The first major shift in Frasier's representation occurs midway through season three, in 'The Heart is a Lonely Snipe Hunter' (3.14) – an episode with a stand-alone plotline that nonetheless initiates a serial change. The plot revolves around a fishing trip that Sam and several other (male) regulars from Cheers embark on. Reluctantly, they take Frasier along because he has had a taxing day at work. The rest of the episode centres around a prank that the men pull on Frasier, leaving him in the woods 'snipe hunting' when in fact there is no such thing as a snipe. When Diane finds out about the prank, she calls it "immature, low-minded, aberrant". Sam attempts to alleviate her worries, saying that "Frasier's got a sense of humour". When Frasier returns to the bar from the woods, haggard and upset, we question whether he shares Diane's point of view. But Frasier quickly declares the opposite. Seemingly excited by the hunt, Frasier apologises to the other men for not catching a snipe. He toasts the "comradery of this night" and chastises Diane for "interfering with male bonding". At this point we see Frasier aligning himself with the largely male community of the bar instead of with Diane, who has thus far been his chief link to this community. But the narrative also suggests that this may be at his expense, since his naïve outsider status is being exploited for humour. In the episode's chief plot twist, however, it is revealed that Frasier has indeed recognised the prank and confides to Diane that he is now orchestrating one of this own. When Diane remarks this this behaviour is so unlike him, Frasier replies: "No, but it's what guys do, darling: we screw each other to the wall. Boy, it's great to be one of the gang, I'll tell you". It is this moment that contributes the most to integrating Frasier into the *Cheers* community. Instead of simply being an outsider who can *take* a joke, Frasier embraces traits

that are "so unlike" him to actively participate in the shenanigans. Frasier's ability to share the community's sense of humour is his first entry-point into the Cheers inner circle, a trait that is all the more crucial considering the genre of the series.

After Diane leaves Frasier at the end of the third season, the fourth season becomes an intermediary one for Frasier's development, in which he spends a great deal of time trying to get over Diane. This emotional arc has resonance on a structural level also, since in this season Frasier must demonstrate his ability to integrate into the Cheers community on his own, not simply because of his connection with Diane. The first reason that is established for Frasier's continued presence in Cheers is a newly acquired drinking habit – one of his initial actions is to rapidly down a neat whiskey, a dramatic change for a man who used to order white wine spritzers. Another mid-season episode will demonstrate that Frasier is not only getting over Diane, as he attempts to re-enter the dating world, but that his attitude to women may not be that different from the rest of the community. In 'Second Time Around' (4.17), Frasier goes on two dates that bifurcate him between the 'intellectual' sphere and the Cheers community, illustrating his attempt to reconcile two sides of his character – the serious traits associated with his profession, and the fun, adventurous traits that the Cheers community has brought out in him. After Frasier's unsuccessful date with a fellow psychiatrist, Carla suggests that Sam set Frasier up with one of 'his' women, thus showing the Cheers community reaching out to him. Sam sets up Frasier with Candi, a woman who never "met a man she didn't like, a lot". Although Diane protests that Frasier "is far too sophisticated a man to be swept away by her transparent charm", Norm disagrees: "Come on, Diane. Frasier's a guy, no different from the rest of us". As with the 'snipe' episode, Diane is proven wrong as Frasier returns to the bar announcing his plans to marry Candi. Although Diane eventually dissuades the two from going through with the wedding, the episode shows that Frasier shares the community's heteronormative views and, like all the other men in the bar, is very susceptible to the "charms" of beautiful women.

Due to these tentative steps of integration, the Cheers community itself begins demonstrating a willingness to embrace Frasier in a way they do not Diane. And as Frasier becomes a regular patron of Cheers, his frequent appearances allow for greater opportunities to show the everyday ways in which he has integrated himself into the community: Frasier joins Cliff and Norm in giving another one of Sam's failed relationships the '21-peanut salute' (an activity that involves spitting peanuts into the air) (5.1); he watches the 'Miss Teeny Bikini' beauty pageant with Norm, Cliff and Sam (5.13); he helps Cliff and Norm plan Sam's bachelor party (5.18) and he is now regularly shown drinking beer and taking interest

in sports. These mundane activities, part and parcel of the bar's usual milieu, demonstrate that Frasier has integrated some of the community's key traits into his own paradigm. Despite this, Frasier also retains many of the traits that defined him when he was first introduced – and continue to individuate him from the community in later seasons. These examples, minor as they may seem, illustrate that Frasier is able to amalgamate traits of the Cheers community – an enthusiasm for sport, an admiration for beautiful women, an occasional propensity for silly behaviour and humour – with his own individuating traits – his intelligence, his cultural knowledge, his high-class taste.

"The potentially long run of a television series, coupled with a stable ensemble cast of characters designed to complement each other, multiplies the opportunities for interactions which reveal different aspects of a character," states Pearson (2007: 45). In the case of Frasier, these multiple interactions over an extended period of time do even more than reveal different aspects of his character – they *change* his character as he learns to embrace those traits valued by the Cheers community rather than only those traits Diane initially valued in him. And because this is a change that allows Frasier to integrate into the Cheers community, it works in favour of the show's coherent expansion. Nor is Frasier the only example. Remaining in the realm of sitcoms, other notable examples include Mary Richards in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* and Rachel Green in *Friends*. Although Mary remains an exceptionally friendly, honest, generous and loyal person, she also matures notably throughout the show's run (and especially its early seasons) to become a more professionally and sexually confident woman. A similar, but even more dramatic change occurs in Rachel, who develops from being a naïve and spoilt 'daddy's girl' in the pilot, to an independent career woman in the show's later seasons. Working within the typical structural parameters of ongoing television narratives, characters such as Frasier, Mary and Rachel do indeed "grow", achieve greater "self-awareness" and make "life-transforming decisions" – all criteria Pearson cites as defining character development (2007: 55-56). And they all do so in a way that does not sever their links with the core community of the show. Indeed, in all three cases this connection helps to facilitate change. As with Frasier, in can be argued that Mary and Rachel change in such a way so as to integrate them more fully into their respective communities. Both women invest themselves in independent lives and promising careers, a trait shared by most of the other characters around them.

But as previous chapters have demonstrated, communities themselves are fluid entities and thus subject to change – both in terms of their character make-up and their trait-paradigms. This possibility for communal change will therefore affect any potential for

individual character change as well. While sometimes a character will change against the backdrop of a relatively stable community – as was the case with Frasier – at other times individual characters and communities will both go through periods of transformation, sometimes in synchronicity with one another, sometimes in opposition to one another, but always *in relation* to one another. In *Friends*, for example, although Rachel's change is the most striking, all of the main characters do indeed undergo a gradual process of maturing as they enter their thirties and move towards more settled lifestyles. In other series, such as *Grey's Anatomy*, *Breaking Bad* or *Outlander*, the very composition of the community changes over time as major characters, save a few exceptions, come and go. These reformations of the community, too, create new opportunities for individual character change. This chapter's chief case study on *Orange is the New Black* will explore a complex example of how individual character change is negotiated in relation to a community that itself undergoes significant changes to both its trait-paradigm and its 'population'.

Mittell notes that some series produce a "perspectival illusion of change" by creating "the perception that characters are fluid and dynamic through the shifts in how other characters relate to them" (2015: 136-137). This is certainly valid. Indeed, that existing character and community traits may be configured in different ways for novel effect is a key argument of this thesis. But amid these shifting dynamics, we should not lose sight of actual changes to characters' trait-paradigms. Tracking such changes, however, requires detailed analysis of actions and behaviours that are often greatly dispersed over time (in both the story and discourse). Equally challenging is that these actions and behaviours may not necessarily strike us as 'going anywhere' in the traditional sense. As both Pearson and O'Meara observe, the indefinite run-time of many series complicates the possibility of teleological character change. "The core psychological traits and behaviours of film characters can alter as they experience the narrative trajectories that bring them to the denouement," writes Pearson (2007: 50). Without such demarcated denouements, television characters – even ones in serialised narratives – are much more likely to 'accumulate' narrative experiences rather than changing from them, suggests Mittell (2015: 133). But just because television narratives are less likely to engage *in* the process of teleological transformation does not mean that they do not actively engage *with* the concept of teleological transformation, questioning what such 'transformation' might mean. It is this capacity of series to complicate the notion of linear progress that I would like to turn my attention to next.

Character Change in Relation to Teleological Progress

The indefinite durations of ongoing series, rather than creating open-ended opportunities for character transformations, have instead been seen as a primary reason why television characters remain static – namely to sustain the open-endedness of the narrative itself. But rather than simply being a liability, the indeterminate duration of a series can uniquely position it to address teleological notions of character change (and, by extension, identity more broadly). Writing about "*The Sopranos*, *Six Feet Under*, and their descendants," Brett Martin remarks that a significant source of these series' realism came from the "tenacity" of "man's battle with his inner demons" – "their characters stubbornly refused to change in any substantive way, despite constantly resolving to do so" (2013: 104). Martin goes on:

> After all, the goal of a TV show, unlike that of a movie or novel, no matter how ambiguous, is to never end. One way to address that basic economic mandate is to create a world in which there is no forward progress or story arc at all, just a series of discrete, repetitive episodes – in other words, the procedural. But if you're interested in telling an ongoing story while remaining true to your own sense of the world, it helps for that worldview to be of an endless series of variations in which people repeatedly play out the same patterns of behavior, exhibiting only the most incremental signs of real change or progress. (Martin, 2013: 105)

Writing about long-form television narratives, Nelson makes a similar remark: "This mode has even greater potential to address the complexities and ambiguities of contemporary life" (2016: 28).This resonance between serialised television narratives and the way we experience real life also surfaces in Logan's interrogation of 'quality' television. Asking why serial television drama has "achieved its compelling presence in the forms that it has," Logan suggests that "Such a question might move us to ask what it is in our lives to which these dramas speak in a way that should earn our conviction" (2016: 162). For Logan, one answer to this question lies in serial fiction's manifestations of the provisionality of our own self-image (ibid.). Drawing on the writing of Robert Pippin, who takes identity as "a matter of 'practical self-knowledge' achieved in relation to others," Logan sees a resonance between Pippin's observations and the appeal of serialised drama (2016: 163). Logan writes:

> This seems particularly so given the extent to which, in much of the best serial television fiction of the past thirty years (both dramatic and comedic), we have seen issues of commitment, belonging, companionship and related dramas of purpose, allegiance and self-knowledge prominently played out across long periods of time, as if what were of concern was something like the sustenance and survival of these matters across the fragile spans of an unfolding, uncertain fictional history. (ibid.)

Logan's analysis therefore finds value in precisely those factors that make character change (and identity) contingent in ongoing television narratives – namely, characters' positions in relation to others in the narrative[iii], and the uncertain duration of these narratives. Such a perspective encourages a view of characters not as static wholes, but as entities that are ever susceptible to re-formulation – both in terms of their position in relation to others and their position in time.

In the previous section I noted that characters going through relatively episodic plotlines can still undergo serial transformations – and thus "discrete, repetitive episodes", to return to Martin's phrase, are not necessarily at odds with "forward progress" (2013: 105) or, at least, with change more broadly defined. Nonetheless, serialised programmes do have an opportunity to engage with change in a different way. Their serialisation, combined with their indefinite duration, allows such shows to negotiate between the narrative legacies of linear progress, associated mostly with stand-alone texts, and the cyclical processes and episodic repetitions more typically associated with television. Just as with the interpersonal relationships that constitute a show's narrative dynamics, these temporal negotiations do not preclude the possibility of character change but, rather, create a framework within which it may take place. Analysing a show's particular engagement with this framework can elaborate on a critical understanding of character change. In some instances – as in the comments of Martin, Ball, and Logan – it can point to a certain kind of realism in dealing with the notion of change or, indeed, a resistance to it. But specific implications of realism and 'quality' aside, what interests me here is an examination of series' temporal manipulations of characters' trait-paradigms as these are configured into a variety of patterns over time, of which a strictly linear transformation is only one possibility.

A useful concept to return to is Chatman's observation that a character's trait may have a limited domain in the story (1978: 126). In other words, that a character may possess a certain trait for only a limited duration of story-time. Using *Great Expectations* as an example, Chatman illustrates the concept: "Pip's trait of shyness is replaced by one of

snobbishness after his inheritance, and that in turn ultimately changes into one of humility and gratitude after his discovery of the source of his good fortune" (ibid.). Chatman's description is a classic example of what may be traditionally thought of as character change or, to use Pearson's more specific term, character development. The notion of a trait having a domain is equally useful in the analysis of television narrative. However, circumscribing a trait's domain can be much more tenuous in ongoing narratives. Yet this is by no means a 'problem' of applying the concept to television narratives; rather, it is an opportunity to explore nuanced uses of the concept while simultaneously analysing the distinctive ways in which television narratives are able to construct character. As Nelson argues, in the flexible narratives of television, created under contingent production circumstances, traditional narrative arcs are less important (2016: 33). When we consume a stand-alone work, such as a novel or a film, we can make relatively stable judgements about the domain of a given trait within the set confines of the discourse.[iv] Having finished watching a film or reading a book, we know the parameters within which we can trace a trait's domain. But in an ongoing narrative, where the borders of the discourse are ever expanding, there is much more room for potential re-formulations (and re-evaluations) of a character's trait-paradigm. And this, in turn, can have significant implications for how a show deals with the matter of character change.

Firstly, the indefinite duration of a series can complicate any pronouncement of a trait's domain as having ended. Just as we may make a hypothesis about the presence of a trait in a character and then wait for cumulative action to substantiate this hypothesis, so too can we hypothesise about the elimination of a trait from a character's trait-paradigm. Such absence, however, can be more difficult to confirm than presence. Precisely because of the indefinite duration of a show, hypotheses about a trait's domain ending are much more likely to remain tentative as we allow for the possibility that a trait may 're-emerge' later in the discourse. How this re-emergence is then evaluated can certainly vary – it may be seen as an instance of bad writing, in which a trait has not been consistently and realistically cultivated over time; or, quite the contrary, it may be viewed as clever plotting, where a possibly forgotten characteristic is called upon to generate new narrative material. Where character change is concerned, such manipulations of a trait-paradigm have the capacity to make us question whether a trait's domain has ended, or whether it has only been 'submerged' or dormant for a lengthy period of time. This, in turn, will impact upon a given show's treatment of the possibility *for* character change – it can allow a series to ask whether people do indeed

change ‘for good’, or whether their capacity to act on a given trait remains within them, even if it has not manifested itself for a long period of time.

In *This is Us* (NBC; 2016–), Jack’s alcoholism is introduced as a threat to his marriage and family life early in season one (1.2). The issue appears to be resolved fairly quickly as Jack earnestly promises to stop drinking in the same episode. Despite this, however, the indefinite duration of the show leaves open the possibility that the trait will return as a source of conflict in the future. *This is Us* takes further advantage of the uncertainty the open-endedness of the discourse encourages by revealing in episode five that Jack passes away sometime between the show’s past and present timelines, albeit without revealing the circumstances of his death. As these details are slowly revealed to the viewer over the course of the first two seasons, we wonder whether the character’s death will be linked to his latent alcoholism, a possibility that the show teases with at the end of season one as Jack gets into a car drunk, only to survive the drive (1.17). The issue is made even more complex because of the nature of the trait. Representations of alcoholism frequently stress the pervasiveness of the disease – it is something one deals with on a daily basis rather than ‘cures’ oneself of permanently. In narrative terms, then, the domain of this trait becomes more complicated to identify – do we indefinitely define a character as an alcoholic even when the trait has not been manifested through action for a very long period of time? The answer for many people, I speculate, would be yes, precisely because of a cultural and medical understanding of what alcoholism is. We may forget that the trait exists in a character’s paradigm, but if it is called on again to generate plot we will likely accept that the trait has been part of the character’s make-up all along. In *Hill Street Blues*, Frank is revealed to be a recovering alcoholic at the end of season one. This trait is seldom called on again to generate plot, but when it is prominently foregrounded again in the fifth season, we do not question its coherent place in Frank’s trait-paradigm. But the question of dormancy and domain becomes more murky when the traits are less clearly coded in this way. A series’ engagement with this murky terrain can raise complex ideological questions about the possibility of change in an individual, a topic I will touch on again in this chapter’s case study.

The second point that needs to be considered with regards to indefinite duration is the way in which a show not only plays with a character’s future, but can also elaborate upon their past. For while the discourse of a series moves forward – from episode one to two to three – this can facilitate an expansion both forward and backward in terms of story time. This expansion can allow us to learn more about a character’s traits as they existed before the

'present day'. The resulting comparisons between a character's past and present can be used to ask pertinent questions about the nature of and possibility for change. Do a character's actions 'then' cohere with their trait-paradigm as we know it to be 'now'? If not, can we surmise that the character has changed in the interim? Or should we rather be alert to the possibility that a long dormant trait may re-emerge in the present? The answers to these questions will, of course, vary from text to text, and from one interpretation to another. Let us consider a brief but telling flashback in *Breaking Bad*.

Generally, the narrative of the show does not dwell on elaborating upon Walter's backstory before the events of the pilot. After the scattered exposition presented in the first few episodes, the main thrust of the narrative is forward, following Walter's transformation. But the finale of season three gives us a rare glimpse of Walter's life before the events of *Breaking Bad*. The episode opens with a young Walter and Skyler looking around the house that we eventually know to be their home, discussing whether they should buy it. Skyler is eager, but Walter seems to want more of his future home. The short scene seems to contribute little if anything to the forward progression of the plot. Instead, the chief contribution of this scene is to elaborate upon our knowledge of Walter's character. Specifically, it invites a comparison of Walter's traits in the past and the traits he is exhibiting in the present. What emerges is less an opposition than an extension. The flashback reveals Walter to be ambitious, placing little value in being cautious, while investing pride in being able to provide the best for his family. These traits are by no means at odds with the Walter we know in the present – he is still ambitious, proud, and despite his assertions to the contrary, not an entirely cautious man. This juxtaposition of past and present seems to suggest that the traits that define Walter have not completely changed over time, but rather that his cancer has given him a reason and an excuse to act upon certain traits in a way that he otherwise would not or could not have.

Writing about flashbacks in relation to character change, Mittell notes that their role is primarily to fill in backstory, thereby making "a static figure seem more dynamic, so that our own shifting knowledge and attitudes create the illusion of character change" (2015: 136). On the one hand, this statement seems to accurately describe the role many flashbacks play in television series. Indeed, my own analysis of the *Breaking Bad* flashback above can be seen to corroborate this point, as its main purpose is indeed to fill in backstory and thus contribute to our knowledge of Walter. Yet, on the other hand, the statement also elides the nuanced purposes and potency that flashbacks can have. In the *Breaking Bad* example, the flashback makes us question the nature of the character change taking place in the present – are we

watching a total transformation or an escalation of a personality, or some mixture of the two? Mittell's statement becomes especially difficult in light of his own definition of character transformation, namely his description of character change as a shift in a character's "core morality and ethics that would prompt a change in *our allegiances*" (2015: 134; emphasis added). In both statements the emphasis is on a changed relationship between the viewer and the character, yet in one statement this is linked to a "perspectival illusion of change" whereas in the other it becomes evidence of 'real' change. The distinction seems to imply an unnecessarily limited view of how flashbacks can operate in ongoing narratives, especially serialised ones. Is a show's depiction of change any less 'real' if that change is depicted out of chronological order and in a fragmented fashion? Rather, I would argue, the discourse's exploration of a character's past can have as great an impact on our conception of their (potentially shifting) trait-paradigm as those events that move the story forward in time. More than being transformations depicted in reverse, such temporal plays also have the capacity to make us question the processes and possibilities of change itself, as I have already indicated. To illustrate some of the potential of this approach to character change, it is helpful to turn to two series that take the relationship between past and present as a chief source of both their content and form – *Mad Men* and *Transparent*.

Both *Mad Men* and *Transparent* use frequent flashbacks as a key tool for exploring the identities of their characters. The juxtaposition between past and present is used to depict the ways in which the characters have changed, albeit in a non-linear chronology, while simultaneously questioning the nature and extent of this change. In *Transparent* we see Maura when she was still Mort, a middle-aged man secretly attending cross-dressing camp. In the case of *Mad Men*, the first season revolves around the revelation that Don, whose real name is Dick Whitman, stole his identity from a deceased Lieutenant while serving in the Korean War. In both cases, however, the very notion of 'total' development or transformation is complicated through suggestions that, to some extent at least, Mort has always been Maura, and Dick has always been Don. As Don's estranged brother tells him upon their reunion, "Look at you. You look more like you now" (1.5). As far as identity is concerned, the past and present are not portrayed as mutually exclusive binaries in these series. Consequently, change is not depicted as a complete transformation from one set of traits to another. Rather, it becomes a gradual, sometimes confused and conflicted inspection of the traits that have been accumulated over the course of one's life in order to bring to the surface those traits that are deemed as 'authentic' to one's identity. It is precisely through this process that *Mad Men* and *Transparent* negotiate between character 'elaboration' and character 'development'

(Pearson, 2007: 55), as characters come to interrogate their 'accumulated' narrative experiences (Mittell, 2015: 133).

"To criticize classical narrative because […] it is based on a suspect notion of progress and then criticize soap opera because it isn't will never get us anywhere," writes Tania Modleski (1979: 18). Stuck somewhere between the heritage of both the classical film and the soap, the characters of *Mad Men* and *Transparent* exhibit an anxiety about the prospect of stasis while at the same time being sceptical about the viability of linear progress. While the characters continue to pursue new goals and embark on new experiences, what frequently follows is a disruption of the potentially symbiotic relationship between the fulfilment of specific goals and more general personal satisfaction. As such, a formal tension between two types of narrative structures becomes the source of the narratives' content. This tension is perfectly expressed at the start of *Transparent*'s third season through the comment of its main character, Maura. When Maura's friend asks her "You okay?", she replies: "Yeah, everything's great. Vicky loves me and she's great. And my kids are doing great. I mean, they love me and accept me for who I am. […] My thing I do at the LGBT call centre is wonderful. […] So, why am I so unhappy?" (3.1). The disconnect between goals and happiness becomes a key aspect of the shows' regeneration, as characters cycle through new plotlines to achieve this 'happiness'. To return to Martin's phrase, the series' "basic economic mandate" of not ending is thus reconciled with the need to stay true to its "own sense of the world" (2013: 105). In the case of both *Mad Men* and *Transparent*, this influences a worldview where self-awareness becomes a complex and ongoing process, not the end-point of a teleological journey. As O'Sullivan writes about *Mad Men*, the self is depicted "not as line but as curve, or as both line and curve […] a subject most fully explorable through serial narrative's headlong rush toward dawdling" (2011: 126).

As the characters move from reflecting upon the accumulated events of their lives to questioning why these events have left them unhappy, this critical contemplation of their elaborated biographies provides the opportunity for greater self-awareness and development. The question 'what do I want?' becomes revealed as a subset of a bigger question, namely 'who am I?'. But this process of a true, 'suppressed self' coming out is fraught with complications precisely because it is depicted as neither a complete erasure of the past, nor a simple continuation of it. The difficulty of reconciling the various aspects of a character's identity are frequently expressed by those surrounding them. In *Mad Men* the question of 'who is Don Draper' permeates the narrative, taking on multiple layers of meaning depending on who asks it. In *Transparent* Maura's coming out causes the people in her life to question

the past. “How long has this been you,” Maura’s ex-wife asks her, whilst Maura’s son wonders “So what does this mean? Everything dad has said and done before this moment is a sham?” The answers to these questions by no means prove straightforward, and the narratives of these series are spent trying to figure them out. Development becomes an ongoing and fluctuating process that is interrogated by the characters and the discourse alike. The domain of a character’s trait – indeed, the trait’s very existence – are treated not as fixed givens but tentative hypotheses that are constantly subject to change. Nelson makes the argument that in long-form television, the process of self-recognition is located with the viewer (or in Nelson’s terms, the experiencer) rather than with the character, as would be the case in traditional Aristotelian drama (2016: 33). “Indeed, it is often the characters’ multiple perplexities which leave any attempt at drawing insights to the experiencer through her/his encounter with the text” (ibid). Viewed in this light, the temporal plays of series like *Mad Men* and *Transparent* may be said to encourage the kind of affective engagement with character Nelson is describing, precisely because they make any rational, linear reading of the characters difficult to realise.

Indeed, the fragmented temporalities of *Mad Men* and *Transparent* may be viewed as distinct examples of the fact that fragmented personalities, in general, are especially suited for exploration through television’s equally fragmented and serialised forms. For example, in his book-length analysis of *Breaking Bad*, Logan describes the show’s “main dramatic material” as “the issue of Walter White’s fragmented personality and his gradual, willed transformation of self and world” (2016: 26). For Logan, the major subject and organising principle of *Breaking Bad* is dignity, with dignity taken as a “contingent” and “fragile” state which encompasses the relationship between “one’s inner self and its outer realisation” (2016: 24-25). Logan’s reading thus demonstrates that fragmentation can have a social dimension, too. His comment relates to an observation I made in chapter one, namely that the traits a character associates with themselves may not align with their traits as manifested in their actions, interpreted by the community or represented otherwise by the discourse.

In other genres, such as science-fiction and fantasy narratives, fragmentation can manifest itself in yet more ways as characters’ identities become split across different timelines and realities. Examples include *Lost*’s ‘flash-sideways’ to an alternate timeline; *Stranger Things’* depiction of an alternate world that is the mirror image of our own, called the ‘upside-down’; the presence of doppelgängers in *Twin Peaks’,* as first Leland and then Cooper become possessed by the evil spirit Bob. Although a detailed comparison of this tendency for fragmentation across a range of genres and shows is unfortunately beyond the

scope of this chapter, its presence does seem to suggest that rather than moving a character from one coherent set of traits to another, television series can thrive on complicating the relationship between 'parts' of their identity.

We can thus conclude that in ongoing television narratives, identity is both socially and temporally provisional. We make sense of a character's trait-paradigm in relation to the rest of the community as well as our shifting knowledge of that character's own past, present and future. Consequently, changes to this identity become equally contingent on a character's position within the community and the indeterminate duration of the series. The fragmented identities of television narratives do not preclude all character change as such, but rather only those changes that would undermine the dynamics and hence the imperative for the coherent expansion of the show. Within this framework, however, there is still a spectrum of bounded opportunities for ongoing narratives to experiment with character change, experimentation that often coincides with an exploration and re-examination of the notion of change itself. Part of the challenge of applying specific terminology to such narratives is their potential to treat concepts such as elaboration, development or transformation very fluidly.

Having outlined the general parameters for character change in ongoing television narratives, I would now like to turn to a more detailed analysis of a show that foregrounds its engagement with the temporal and social contingencies that delimit an individual's potential for change. *Orange is the New Black* knowingly teases viewers with the possibility of a dramatic transformation of its main character, only to subvert any such expectations precisely by emphasizing that change does not occur in a vacuum. Instead, the closed confines of the prison setting accentuate the individual's relationship with what Tischleder describes as the show's "compulsory community" (2017: 122). In its narrative, the show actively engages with the question of how residency in this community can *effect* change within the individual. At the same time, the structural principles of the show ensure that this community also *regulates* the potential for individual character change. Bounded by a definite sentenced time in the story and the indefinite running time of the discourse, the characters must negotiate how their identities will fare over time in this context.

CASE STUDY: *ORANGE IS THE NEW BLACK*

"Okay Pipes, while I'm really proud of how evil prison has made you, I think you're overestimating your villain index. You're still transitioning. You're not Walter White yet, you're Walter White-ink."

- Cal Chapman to Piper Chapman, *Orange is the New Black* (3.13)

Orange is the New Black begins with white, upper-middle class Piper Chapman being sent to prison for drug trafficking crimes she committed a decade prior in her more 'experimental' youth. In the show's first episode, and indeed its first season, Piper can accurately be described as its protagonist. In line with a common pilot strategy noted in chapter one, Piper's role as new-comer to Litchfield Prison allows us, as the viewers, to familiarise ourselves with this new television community. And it is Piper's adjustment to life in prison, and her survival there, that give the first season its chief narrative arc. A key question that *Orange* sets up is precisely how this environment will impact upon Piper and her relationships. In season three, a suggestive answer seems to manifest itself as we witness some changes to Piper's character – she has seemingly shifted from being a sweet, unthreatening novice in the prison community to ascending its leadership ranks, and doing so with a more ruthless temperament. By the end of season three, Piper has set up an illicit prison business; gathered a number of fellow prisoners under her employ; gotten her brother on the outside, Cal, to help her maximise its profits; and exacted revenge on a former business partner and lover who stole from her. When Piper brags to Cal about her thriving business and her new white-ink tattoo, he comically cautions her with the words of advice quoted above: "You're not Walter White yet, you're Walter White-ink".

The reference may be seen as setting up – or even confirming – expectations about Piper's character arc. Namely, that it will follow a relatively linear development defined largely by a decline of her moral code and accompanied by an increasing diegetic dominance within the community. But as Cal's words humorously suggest, Piper is not Walter White. And perhaps more importantly, *Orange is the New Black* is not *Breaking Bad*. Although Piper certainly will undergo changes while in prison, the narrative strategies of the show serve to complicate a strictly teleological reading of this change. Key to this is Piper's positioning in a community whose diegetic and structural hierarchies are frequently subject to

change. Unlike *Breaking Bad*, whose community is (structurally at least) consistently organised around Walter White, *Orange* is more fluid in its approach to character hierarchies. Woloch writes that the "more dynamic examples of asymmetric characterization do not simply represent […] minor characters but represent characters becoming minor within a complex narrative system" (2003: 44). In *Orange* a converse process is also present – the process of characters becoming dominant as their structural role in the show's dynamics increases. Thus, Piper's initially distinct role as protagonist becomes gradually compromised, a process that is intrinsically linked to the way her character change is delimited by her placement within the prison community. This complication to linear character change is then further facilitated by the show's frequent use of flashbacks – a technique that calls into question the temporal organisation of many characters' trait-paradigms.

I will thus begin this case study by examining the impact of the prison community on Piper, focusing especially on the way this community seems to encourage the trait of selfishness within her. I then complicate this linear reading by demonstrating how *Orange is the New Black* questions the temporal domain of this trait within Piper, and by also looking at how the prison community's tolerance of selfish behaviour curtails the trait's escalation within her. Finally, I conclude the analysis by examining how these interrelated changes affect the hierarchies of the show's dynamics, continually shifting dominance away from any one individual in order to increasingly prioritise the community as a whole.

Piper and the Selfish Trait

In several respects, Piper's trajectory over the first three seasons of *Orange is the New Black* does resemble Walter White's in *Breaking Bad*. Like Walter, Piper employs pre-existing skills that she possesses in a new (criminal) context. And while this re-application of a 'respectable' skill begins in a way that is, somewhat, morally defensible, it soon escalates, becoming increasingly selfish and dangerous. In Piper's case, the skill that is being appropriated is her entrepreneurial aptitude. In the second episode of the show, flashbacks of Piper's life outside of prison tell how her health-conscious lifestyle led to an entrepreneurial opportunity when she went into business with her best friend, Polly, selling artisanal soaps. In prison, Piper quickly finds herself in a position where these same skills – her knowledge of natural ingredients, her ingenuity – will need to be called-upon in order to survive.

One of the first major plot complications of the show involves Piper insulting Red, a powerful and important member of the prison community, by calling the prison's food

"disgusting" without knowing that Red in fact runs the kitchen. As punishment, Red endeavours to starve Piper, and the show's second episode centres on Piper's efforts to remedy the situation. Piper's first solution is to simply and sincerely apologise to Red for her mistake. Red's response to this apology is significant because it highlights the traits that she (and we) associate with Piper at this point in the narrative:

> Red: You seem sweet. You really do, honey. But I can't do shit with 'I'm sorry'. Not in here. Might not look like it, but there's rules in this place. The most important of which is: the second you're perceived as weak you already are.
> Piper: What do you want me to do?
> Red: You're a smart girl. Figure something out.

Although Piper is "sweet" and polite, these traits have little currency in the prison community and are thus not useful to either Red or Piper herself. Instead, Piper will have to use her intelligence in a way that corresponds with the rules of the community she now finds herself in. Drawing on her experience of running the business with Polly, and through a combination of asking favours and bartering, Piper acquires the ingredients she needs to make a healing rub for Red's back pain. The strategy works and Red ceases depriving Piper of food. This early example of Piper using her entrepreneurial skills places her in a relatively positive light: her insulting comment to Red is a mistake and her solution is both shrewd and harmless. By season three, however, Piper's entrepreneurial spirit will emerge in a very different context and one that is defined not simply by surviving but thriving in prison.

In season three, Litchfield becomes a private prison and some of its inmates, including Piper, are assigned a new job – making underwear for the brand 'Whispers'. Piper soon notices that if the underwear patterns are arranged slightly differently on the material, an extra set of panties can be cut out from the cloth. Piper tries to inform the Whispers' representative of her observation, but her suggestion is speedily dismissed. So instead Piper makes a pair for herself in an attempt to make herself feel beautiful. But what begins as a harmless action soon escalates as Piper comes up with a new business idea: selling panties worn by the inmates to men on the outside who enjoy sniffing them. On the one hand, then, the action sees Piper's capacity for criminal behaviour re-emerge in her character. At the start of the series Piper is framed as an 'unlikely' criminal. Her traits, and the cultural values associated with them, contrast with the stereotypical depiction of criminality – she is white, comes from an affluent family, is well-educated, well-spoken and well-mannered. Piper's

first crime, the one she is doing time for, is relegated by her to the past – a youthful mistake made under the influence of an ex-girlfriend, Alex. "It was my lost soul, post-college adventure phase," Piper tells her fiancé Larry (1.1). But neither the narrative of *Orange* nor its flashback structure allow for the events of the past to comfortably rest there. Instead, the temporal domains of character traits are continually called into question, Piper's included. The show makes us question whether the traits associated with Piper's "phase" have indeed lost their place in her trait-paradigm as it exists in the present, or whether it is more accurate to describe them as having been dormant for a long period of time. Indeed, Piper's ex-girlfriend Alex becomes a personification of the past's persistence into the present. The pilot ends on a cliff-hanger as Piper discovers that Alex is also serving time in Litchfield, and although she is initially hostile towards her, Piper soon re-establishes a relationship with Alex. The Whispers plotline then furthers this continuity between past and present.

Pitching the business idea to Alex, Piper attempts to distance herself from the negative implications of her actions:

> Piper: You may think that I stole these from Whispers. But technically I didn't, because I made them from material they were just gonna throw away so I repurposed trash and there's no official crime happening here.
>
> Alex: You are such a good girl. (3.7)

Here the traits of Piper's "good girl" persona (Alex's words an echo of Red calling Piper "sweet") are being melded with the riskier traits of her "post-college" self. And as the Whispers business quickly escalates in scale, so does Piper's ruthlessness. By the end of the season, Piper tells Alex that she wants to be perceived as a "good and benevolent dictator" (3.13). But Alex warns her that these contradictory traits cannot be so easily balanced: "There's no such thing as a benevolent dictator. Only a weak one or a dead one" (3.13). Again there is a reiteration of Red's sentiments from season one – weakness in prison can be fatal. By the end of the episode, when Piper discovers that her partner and lover, Stella, has stolen her profits, she is unforgiving. Piper plants contraband in Stella's bunk, thus sabotaging her imminent release and getting her transferred to a maximum security prison.

What is significant about Piper's actions is that they demonstrate an escalation of her capacity to act for purely 'selfish' gain. I use the word selfish rather broadly here, to signify any behaviour that puts self-interest above the interest of others. For as the analysis below will demonstrate, *Orange* often blurs the line between acting in acceptable self-interest and

being ‘selfish’ to an unacceptable degree. Indeed, this is an example of how questions around the naming of traits can facilitate productive thematic and ideological analysis and debate, a point I touched on in chapter one. Unlike at the start of season one, when Piper used her entrepreneurial skills to remedy an innocent mistake and ensure her survival, the end of season three sees Piper using these skills purely for her own betterment. And unlike in season one, the events surrounding the Whispers business have detrimental consequences for others. Furthermore, in the timespan between these two series of events, Piper’s ‘selfishness’ is increasingly emphasised as problematic in the dialogue of the show.

At the start of season two, Piper returns to Litchfield after time spent in solitary and then at a detention centre in Chicago. As she enters the cafeteria, Piper asks fellow inmate Nicky if everybody is staring at her. “It’s great to see you evolving, Chapman, and getting past the whole ‘I’m the star of my own movie and everyone else is too’ complex,” Nicky replies (2.3). Not only is the line of dialogue an acknowledgement of Piper’s self-centredness as a character, it can also be seen as a reference to her role as the protagonist of the series – a role that will begin to change from the second season onward. Indeed, the second episode of season two demonstrates the show’s ability to function without Piper (at least temporarily) as it chronicles events occurring in Litchfield in her absence. As the show progresses, the moral implications of Piper’s self-interest become more and more complex. Along with more minor incidents, like Piper trying to “trade” a trusting inmate’s sexual favours for a blanket (2.4), Piper’s self-serving ways are demonstrated by her use of relationships to fulfil her personal needs and desires. In season one Piper starts having an affair with Alex despite having a fiancé on the outside, justifying the action by saying that “I can’t get through this without somebody to touch, without somebody to love” (1.10). By the end of season two, Piper takes an even more morally problematic step in ensuring companionship. Alex, out on parole and fearing for her life, confides to Piper that she is planning to leave town. Afraid of losing Alex, Piper asks Larry and Polly to inform Alex’s parole officer of her plans, an action that results in Alex being sent back to prison. And her unforgiving and ruthless treatment of Stella has already been noted above.

Since Piper’s selfishness becomes more and more apparent as the series progresses, and her actions become increasingly morally questionable, this trajectory seems to encourage a linear reading akin to the one typically applied to Piper’s ‘predecessor’, Walter White. Furthermore, it may elicit the conclusion that it is Piper’s prolonged exposure to the prison community that fosters this trait within her. However, in *Orange* this linear reading is complicated in two key ways. Firstly, the temporal status of this ‘change’ is called into

question, both in terms of Piper's past and her future. And secondly, this development of Piper's character is curtailed due to the dynamics between Piper and the prison community.

To begin with the former point. I have already stated that in *Orange,* any possible continuities or ruptures between past and present are explored through its flashback structure, as the actions of the inmates in the present, prison context are compared to events that occurred in their past, on the outside. In Piper's case, the relatively wholesome identity and comfortable lifestyle she cultivated before being sent to prison are disrupted by her sentence. Not only was the forward progress of events in her life – her relationship, her business – interrupted, but the transformation of her personality – from youthful recklessness to a more stable maturity – would be questioned. As we watch Piper's self-centred and risky behaviour escalate, our growing knowledge of both her present and her past calls into question to what degree these traits have always been present in her character. Indeed her fiancé, Larry, begins to wonder the same thing. Early in the series, Larry asks Piper's brother, Cal, if he saw something like this coming. To this Cal responds: "No, not jail, but something, yeah. She wants to feel like she's different. Likes the whole 'I'm risky' thing" (1.3). Thus, Piper's tendency to stand out, to view herself as the "star" of her own movie, as Nicky puts it, is traced back from the present into the past. Seen in this light, some of Piper's later actions in prison can be viewed not as evidence of the prison corrupting Piper, but rather providing a context in which certain traits can re-emerge more strongly in her character than she has allowed them to for the last few years. (In this way Piper is indeed similar to my own reading of Walter White, as discussed earlier in this chapter). Indeed, a flashback in the fifth season shows Piper drunkenly calling Alex one night, indirectly admitting a kind of disenchantment with the stable life she had created with Larry (5.12).

Towards the end of season one, Piper herself begins to acknowledge the effect prison is having on her identity – one based on the re-emergence of supressed traits, rather than the emergence of 'new' ones. Speaking to Dina, a cocky and obstinate teen from the Scared Straight programme, Piper warns her of the real danger of prison:

> I know how easy it is to convince yourself you're something that you're not. And you can do that on the outside. You can just keep moving, keep yourself so busy you don't have to face who you really are. But you're weak. […] I'm like you, Dina. I'm weak too. […] I'm scared that I'm not myself in here and I'm scared that I am. Other people aren't the scariest part of prison, Dina; it's coming face to face with who you really are. (1.10)

All of these fluctuations within Piper's character – between her immediate past, just before being sent to prison, the more distant past of her youth, and her present as it unfolds in Litchfield – serve to portray identity not as a strictly linear construct in which development and change is one-directional and consistent, but rather as fluid and circular, allowing for character traits to become dormant and then re-emerge more or less strongly at different points in time. As Logan aptly puts it, "Serial television drama is especially, perhaps even uniquely, well suited to depicting how the build-up of personal history places pressure upon the always-shifting constitution of a person's present identity as a foundation for the future" (2016: 90). And in *Orange*, the pressures of personal history are compounded by the pressures of the prison setting. In the series, prison's capacity to both reveal and affect one's identity is variously acknowledged, with the exact nature and pattern of character change varying from one prisoner to another.

In Piper's case, the re-emergence of traits from her past and their gradual escalation in the present proceed in a relatively steady manner throughout the first three seasons, culminating in Piper's business and her cruel revenge on Stella. But right from the start of season four, this trajectory begins to be undermined. "No one know you're gangsta with an 'a'," prisoner Chang tells Piper less than five minutes into the season's first episode. And, indeed, as the season progresses Piper's newly acquired power gets stripped away from her as she becomes, once again, not the perpetrator but the victim of prison conspiracies. Simultaneously, Piper's self-centeredness and her propensity to take risks decreases. She once again begins to display a concern for the fates of others and by the end of the season Piper and Alex have decided to live an "easy", quiet life, vowing to stay away from the prison's incendiary activities. To understand why the development of these traits in Piper is curtailed and does not continually escalate as, for example, in the case of Walter White, we need to shift our attention from examining Piper's character in its own right, to placing it within the context of the show's community and its dynamics.

Litchfield Prison and the Selfish Trait

Orange is the New Black is an extreme example of an involuntary community, with the dominance and hence the centripetal force of the shared setting binding the characters together much more so than any other shared traits. Indeed, the almost unbreakable centripetal force of the prison allows for the creation of a rather diverse televisual community since the characters need not have much else in common aside from the prison itself. That

said, however, Litchfield still has its rules, as Red reminds Piper (1.2). Some are imposed on the prisoners by the authorities, while others emerge from within their ranks. Within this framework, the trait of selfishness – or self-interest, more broadly defined – holds a complex position within the community's trait-paradigm. On the one hand, this trait is necessary for survival within the prison – each character, ultimately, needs to keep their own interests in mind. On the other hand, one's individual needs have to be balanced with the interests of the group, since the two are invariably interlinked. Thus the *degree* to which this particular trait is manifested becomes critical in the show. In this way, the diegetic reality of life in Litchfield mimics the structural principles of the show – while each character needs to 'stand out' in their own right, they also need to retain their position within the community in order to remain a part of the show, the coherent expansion of which relies on the dynamics between individuals and the community. And as was stated in chapter two, in this regard the community always remains structurally dominant over any one individual.

Indeed, the battle for dominance in *Orange* can be seen as an echo of a similar tension observed in *Glee* – while almost each character strives to meet their own needs and wants (these needs and wants being intimately connected with positions of power and authority in the community), they also belong to a community in which teamwork and interpersonal cooperation are critical for the community's survival and well-being. This similarity is by no means coincidental. Instead, I would suggest that these two shows are notable examples of a tension that is prevalent in many television narratives – a tension between the interests of the self and the interest of the group. Because the narrative dynamics of so many ongoing television narratives are founded on the relationships between individual characters and collective communities, this tension is readily encouraged within them. In some instances, this formal tension is prominently taken up within the diegesis itself, resulting in narratives that actively explore themes of self-interest. Selfish characters abound in contemporary television narratives, with examples including *Arrested Development*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, *Transparent*, *Halt and Catch Fire* and *You're the Worst*. In *Orange is the New Black* this results in a diegesis where a battle for dominance is common, but total isolationism is impractical.

Piper's arrival in Litchfield is immediately used to highlight the tension that exists in this community between the individual and the group. As prisoner Morello gives Piper (and by proxy us) an introductory tour, she emphasises the collective character of the prison: "It's not so bad. *Everyone's* okay."; "*Everyone* uses last names here."; "*We* [the prisoners] do everything around here." (1.1; emphasis added). At the same time, however, Morello greets

and introduces other prisoners by name, giving an outline of their individual character. When Piper arrives in her room, we see an early example of needing to balance such individual and collective traits. One of Piper's roommates, Anita, insists that they will make Piper's bed for her because they know how to do so in a way that passes inspection. Anita also instructs Piper to sleep on top of the bed. When Piper asks what happens if she sleeps in the bed, Anita tells her: "Look, you can do what you want, but you will be the only one in this entire prison that does. You want that? Be my guest." (1.1). Here individual preferences and skills need to be subordinated to communal ones in order to ensure the welfare of the group – passing inspection avoids potential trouble with the guards, ensuring that the community as a whole remains relatively stable. This, in turn, is of course good for the individual. Writing about Jane Austen's depiction of society in *Emma*, Blakey Vermeule posits that social control is not something that is "imposed from above" in this narrative (2010: 190). Vermeule goes on:

> Austen presents a completely realistic picture of what happens to a small group of people interacting with one another over time. The group tends to become stable – not because stability benefits the group as a whole but because it benefits individuals to choose long-term stability over short-term gain. To be sure, a person can choose to take the short-term pleasure and forget about the long-term benefits, but she will be forcefully presented with reasons why she should not – not because of some mysterious force of culture but because it is in everyone's narrow interest to enforce the contract. (ibid.)

Vermeule's analysis creates striking, and perhaps somewhat unexpected, similarities between *Emma* and *Orange*. The prisoners, too, have to frequently choose between "short-term pleasure" and "long-term benefits", a binary that often correlates with the choice between self-interest and collective interest. The early incident with the bed is only a minor example of this tension at work. In season two, however, there will occur a much more dramatic and lengthy illustration of the balancing act between the needs of the individual and those of the community. Indeed, the season's main narrative arc can be seen as a cautionary tale of what can happen when the degree of self-interest exhibited by a character is not kept in check.

A great deal of the second season of *Orange* revolves around a new character named Vee, who is initially introduced to the viewer through the flashback of an existing character, Taystee. The flashbacks depict Taystee's time spent in the foster care system and tell how she eventually came to work for Vee, a drug dealer from her neighbourhood. Subsequently we

also learn that this is not Vee's first time in Litchfield and that there is also a pre-existing and antagonistic history between Vee and Red. The season's plotlines revolve around the way Vee uses her charm and skills of manipulation to win over Taystee and her friends, thereafter using their support and labour to gain power within the prison's hierarchy. What is crucial is that for most of the season, Vee claims an alignment between her interests and the interests of the group. In this case, that group is not the prison community as a whole, but rather one faction of it – the black women. Vee repeatedly express her dismay at the fact that the black women are no longer at the top of the prison's hierarchy, as was the case 'back in her day'. Part of Vee's agenda, then, appears to be to restore the racial hierarchy to what it was – a goal that seems to align Vee's interests with those of the other black women. And for several episodes this is indeed the trajectory that the plot follows. Vee sets up a business smuggling cigarettes into the warehouse and selling them to the prisoners using Taystee and her friends as distributors – an operation that gives the black women renewed importance and power in the prison system. But in episode seven an incident with one of the distributors demonstrates that Vee will not tolerate an abuse of this status for purely personal gain. When Black Cindy begins to trade the cigarettes for junk food instead of the stamps Vee instructed them to use as currency, Vee immediately removes Black Cindy's distribution privileges. The occurrence illustrates that Vee is only interested in the betterment of the group on terms that are directly beneficial to her. And as Vee's business grows and moves from selling cigarettes to hard drugs, her ruthlessness becomes all the more apparent.

Flashbacks in subsequent episodes further demonstrate that while Vee convinces people to work for her through promises of mutual gain, if these people act in a way that undermines her personal interests then she turns on them without hesitation. In episode nine flashbacks show how Vee betrayed Red when they were first incarcerated together. And in episode twelve it is revealed that Vee had one of her dealers (and Taystee's close friend) killed by a crooked cop because he wanted to go into business for himself. By the end of the season, however, Vee's selfish nature will prove to be the cause of her downfall. Having brutally beaten up Red in episode twelve, Vee sets up the mentally ill Suzanne to take the fall by manipulating her into believing that she attacked Red. Vee also convinces two of her 'employees' to testify to this effect. While they initially agree, Vee's later violent outburst against Black Cindy causes them to change their mind. "Here's the thing about mamas, they only mamas as long as they got kids," Taystee tells Vee as she and her friends confront her. To this Cindy adds: "You gotta have people, especially in here" (3.13). The statement is an echo of Vee's own words to Red in a flashbacks from episode nine: "Your first mistake is not

having backup". Having lost both her business and her supporters, Vee starts to panic as her position in the prison becomes vulnerable. Her solution is to escape the community she has ostracized herself from, using a secret tunnel in the greenhouse to flee the prison. But Vee's time on the outside doesn't last long. Simultaneously, another prisoner is making her own escape in the prison's van – the terminally ill Rosa, to whom Vee has been unnecessarily rude and aggressive in previous episodes. Seeing Vee at the side of the road, Rosa swerves the van straight into Vee, killing her. Vee's death at the end of the season is framed as a moment of justice being served, our sympathies lying with Rosa as she drives away, laughing at Vee's demise.

Vee is the closest *Orange is the New Black* comes to having an unredeemable villain. Indeed, Vee fit's Modleski's description of a soap opera villainess quite well – a woman who often uses her children in order to "further her own selfish ambitions" (1979: 16). One of the defining qualities of *Orange* is its ability to make us empathise, sympathise or at least better understand characters that initially may come across as unredeemable. Unlike with the other characters, Vee's appearances in flashbacks do not really help us understand why she is the way she is. They only reaffirm the steadfast nature of her character, defined by her innate selfishness. And it is precisely Vee's unrelenting selfishness that vilify her (a structural decision that could certainly also be analysed in terms of race and identity politics). In contrast to the norm of the show, Vee is written into the narrative for only one season as a character for everyone else to hate and is then killed off without any remorse. Why then, we might ask, does Vee receive this idiosyncratic treatment? One reason, I would argue, is to present Vee's story as a cautionary tale that demonstrates the potentially lethal consequences of indulging too heavily in selfish behaviour that overlooks the needs of the group. It shows that while looking out for one's own interests is necessary for life in Litchfield, equally crucial is having the support of others: "You gotta have people".

In the context of changes to Piper's character, Vee's storyline is especially significant. Vee's smuggling business is the immediate precursor to Piper's own operation in season three – both rely on the loyalty of the 'employees' in order to function. Thus, as Piper navigates the line between benevolence and ruthlessness, we may be reminded of what can happen when a character too forcefully pursues her own self-interests – she is expelled from the narrative, unable to sustain the necessary balance between self and community. Vee's fate therefore acts as a justification for why the changes in Piper's trait-paradigm need to be curtailed. In order to survive – both diegetically and extra-diegetically – Piper needs to retain a link to the show's community and not alienate herself from it. The point is further

emphasised by the fact that Piper's increasing selfishness in season three occurs in juxtaposition to a decreased manifestation of this trait in Litchfield as a whole. Precipitated by Vee's removal and a change of assistant warden, season three portrays greater communal harmony within the prison. One of the central themes of the season is spirituality and the power of belonging to a group. Multiple characters search for meaning in their lives through different activities, each of which is practised within a collective: a group of Wiccans gather on the lawn; Norma begins practising 'magic' and a cult following develops around her; the guards unionise to face cutbacks at the prison. This sense of communal spirit is evident from the very first episode of the season which breaks the norm established thus far by having the episode's flashbacks revolve not around a single character, but multiple characters, unified by the theme of motherhood.

The changes to Piper as an individual therefore need to be seen within this broader context of the show's community. Unlike the protagonist of a stand-alone film, Piper's development does not occur within a finite duration or within a narrative that is driven solely by her character-centred causality. Instead, the indefinite duration of the narrative and its dependence on the dynamics between individuals and the community results in any change being conditional on these two things. Yet this does not mean that character development cannot take place. For the first three seasons we see past traits from Piper's personality emerging more and more strongly within her character. But this *particular* trajectory is disrupted precisely because of the formal context of the show's structural principles. Instead, it is replaced in season four by a new one – Piper's realisation that her selfish and callous behaviour has gone too far. Indeed, this new trajectory may be more akin to what Pearson has in mind when discussing traditional notions of character development in terms of growth (2007: 55). Nevertheless, this trajectory, too, occurs within the parameters of the show's narrative dynamics. Put another way, although select patterns of change to Piper's trait-paradigm may be read as resembling those of a traditional protagonist in a stand-alone narrative, such similarities should not obscure the fact these changes happen within and through the show's specifically *serial* narrative dynamics. The point can further be demonstrated by analysing how even as the diegesis chronicles changes to Piper's character, the discourse minimises her role as *the* central character of the show.

Changing Hierarchies

Ironically, as Piper attempts to ascend the diegetic hierarchy of the prison, her structural dominance in the show decreases. Instead, the dominance of the community over and above any one individual is increasingly emphasised. Piper's growing self-centredness, then, her desire to be the 'star of her own movie', conflict not only with the diegetic rules and traits of the Litchfield community, but with the shifting dynamics of the show's structure. Because the more the narrative of *Orange* expands, the more it shifts away from relying on any one central character. While the series begins with Piper serving the function of a protagonist, her continued status as such becomes increasingly diminished as the seasons go on. Indeed, the very possibility of there being a single such character is made unlikely by both the subject matter and form of the show. In this regard, *Orange* can be compared to Woloch's analysis of the realist novel, which he argues is "structurally destabilized" by too many people: "It is the claim of individuals who are incompletely pulled into the narrative that lies behind the larger empirical precision of realist aesthetics. […] The novel gets infused with an awareness of its potential to shift the narrative focus away from an established center, toward minor characters" (2003: 19). Unlike the stand-alone narrative, however, the ongoing television series has more opportunities to act on this potential. And this is precisely what *Orange* does, gradually moving away from Piper as a central protagonist toward a structure more akin to the soap opera which, as Modleski notes, emphasises the collective rather than the individual fate (1979: 12;14). One succinct way to illustrate Piper's changing dominance is by comparing the finales of each season.

We can begin to map Piper's decreased dominance in the series by noting the amount screen-time she is given in each season finale:

	Episode Duration	**Piper's Screen Time**
Season 1 Finale	60 minutes	17 minutes
Season 2 Finale	90 minutes	14 minutes
Season 3 Finale	90 minutes	11 minutes
Season 4 Finale	75 minutes	9 minutes
Season 5 Finale	55 minutes	9 minutes
Season 6 Finale	90 minutes	23 minutes

As the seasons progress, we see a general decrease in the amount of screen time Piper is afforded, even when the total episode length itself increases. The only notable exception is the sixth season, but as the analysis below will indicate, this increased screen-time is used to drastically alter Piper's relationship to the prison community. In addition to these changes in screen-time, Piper's role in the finale plotlines also changes. Although Piper starts out as an active protagonist whose actions determine the direction of the plot, in the later seasons she becomes a much more passive observer. In the finales of season four and five, for example, in the screen-time Piper does have she acts mainly as a witness to the actions of others. Both Piper's diminishing space in the discourse, and her diminishing role in the syntagmatic progression of plot are symptoms of a broader structural change – Piper's waning dominance and centripetal force in the community and the show. A closer look at each finale can help illustrate these changes at work.

The show's first season cliff-hanger is all about Piper, who gets attacked by an opponent nick-named Pennsatucky. In the final moments of their encounter Piper gets an upper hand and starts brutally beating Pennsatucky, raising questions as to whether Pennsatucky will survive, and what the consequences for Piper will be in season two. The fight is juxtaposed with another event that is occurring at the same time – the prison's Christmas pageant, at which most of the community is present. The pageant is portrayed as a moment of communal gathering characterised largely by positive emotions: joy, levity, contemplation. Despite this, it has little significance to the narrative in terms of plot development. It is Piper's fate that is foregrounded in this finale.

In season two, the narrative interest of the finale is more evenly distributed. While Piper selfishly plots to ensure the return of Alex to Litchfield, the rest of the episode shows the various factions of the prison community all doing their part to exercise the villainess Vee from their ranks. And with the appointment of a new assistant warden, narrative questions posed for season three revolve not only around the fate of Piper and her relationships, but on the way the dynamics of the entire community will change.

In season three the balance continues to be evenly distributed between Piper and the rest of the community. The season ends with several miraculous coincidences which allow the prisoners to temporarily escape through a gap in the fence onto the shores of a lake. What follows is an extended sequence of pure joy in which friendships are forged, romances begun, alliances mended. Once again, in an echo of season one, the community comes together in a rare moment of idyllic harmony. But, once again, Piper is absent. This time she is not the victim of a brutal attack, as in season one, but its instigator, as she sabotages Stella's release

in an act of revenge. However, as in season two, the consequences of Piper's actions are balanced (if not outweighed this time) by changes to the community. Not only does the lakeside sequence instigate several new plotlines to be followed up in season four, but the episode ends with a whole new group of prisoners arriving at Litchfield. Piper may be attempting to become a "benevolent dictator", but her actions will prove to have little weight in light of these bigger changes to the community.

The season four finale becomes a reversal of the first season's ending, in which the entire community is involved in the cliff-hanger, while Piper and Alex have decided to try to live a quiet life apart from the prison's dangerous activities. The episode ends with the start of a prison riot, with almost every member of the community present as prisoner Daya holds a gun pointed at a guard. But in a visual representation of the shift in narrative focus, Piper and Alex are shown running in the opposite direction as the rest of the prisoners congregate in one central space. It is important to note that in all four of these finales, Piper is still singled out from the community – a by-product of her central role at the start of the narrative. But as the seasons progress, this centrality is increasingly problematized, both within the diegesis, as characters call her out for being too self-centred, and by the structure of the narrative, which gradually decreases the magnitude of her importance to the plot.

Season five brings Piper's separation to an end. Having spent much of the season staying out of the activities of the prison riot, Piper ends the season by standing together with nine other prisoners – the last women remaining within Litchfield as security forces storm its walls to reclaim control of the prison. This is the first time in the show's run that Piper is depicted side by side (literally) with other prisoners in a seasonal cliff-hanger – her fate is entirely intertwined with theirs. The closing image seems to suggest that Piper is no longer *the* main character of *Orange is the New Black*, just *a* major character. In order for her to retain a place within the narrative of the show, she must retain a link to its community – a community that is always shifting in its character and make-up, but that nonetheless supersedes the dominance of any single individual.

The end of the sixth (and latest, at the time of writing) season of *Orange is the New Black* is perhaps the most dramatic reconfiguration of Piper's relationship to the prison community. The finale sees Piper granted an unexpected early release and consequently leaving Litchfield at the end of the episode. While the creators of the series have confirmed that the seventh (and potentially last) season of the series will include Piper's journey as she readjusts to life outside of prison (Strause, 2018: n.p.), this new trajectory will nonetheless drastically alter Piper's structural and diegetic position in relation to the rest of the major

characters. Crucially, the season six finale makes sure to establish a link between Piper and the Litchfield community that will persist after her release – her relationship with the still incarcerated Alex. Indeed, nearly half of Piper's screen-time in the finale is used to depict her 'prison wedding' with Alex. While the event is a culmination of their tempestuous relationship, it also fulfils the important function of ensuring that Piper will still have a place in the series' diegesis in season seven – a diegesis that has gradually shifted from revolving around her to revolving around Litchfield prison and the community it contains and creates.

In a magazine article published shortly before the release of the show's second season, the creator of *Orange is the New Black* admits to using Piper as a "Trojan horse" to showcase a diverse cast of characters (Kohen, 2014: 110). But once inside this televisual community, Piper's function as well her character begin to change. While Piper's self-centeredness and self-interest escalate over the course of the first three seasons, this trajectory comes into tension with both the diegetic imperatives of the prison community as well as the structural dynamics of the show. In both instances, the fate of the individual becomes inextricably linked to the fate of the community. An *excessive* privileging of the 'one' over the 'many' can result in both a diegetic demise and an expulsion from the discourse, as was the case with Vee. As such, this particular pattern of change within Piper is curbed in the fourth season, and another one initiated in its place – this time defined not by separation but by integration.

Furthermore, the temporal plays of *Orange* frame these patterns of change not as strictly linear transformations but as fluid fluctuations within a trait-paradigm that is informed by our knowledge of events in the present as well as our expanding knowledge of the past. This simultaneous expansion of the storyworld in two temporal directions results in character portraits that question to what extent people change, and to what extent they are comprised of traits that re-emerge to various degrees over time, depending on the circumstances they are in, and the people they are surrounded by. In doing so, *Orange is the New Black* demonstrates some of the possibilities of dealing with character change in ongoing television narratives. It shows that the factors delimiting this change – the uncertain duration, the reliance on inter-personal dynamics – can be utilised in constructive ways, both formally and ideologically.

Thus far in this thesis, my objective has revolved around analysing how the structural principles of an ongoing series continually operate and adapt to ensure coherent expansion. That is why, I argued, serial narrative dynamics are configured as a series of mutually defining character relationships; it is why communities are reinforced by multiple centripetal forces; and why individual identity is delimited in the precise ways this chapter has

described. But there is a point, for some series at least, when the goal of coherent expansion is replaced by another – the need for closure. At this point in a series' run, the serial narrative dynamics, and their systematic disruption, come to serve their final purpose – to justify why a series that has been structured to be indefinitely ongoing must now come to an end.

Notes

[i] See, for example, Culler (1975: 237).

[ii] Both Robert Thompson (1996), in relation to 'quality' TV, and Jason Mittell (2006) in relation to 'complex' TV, note that greater control of viewing practices made feasible by technology such as VHS and DVD, resulted in television narratives that placed more emphasis on viewer memory, be it through serialised plotting or through character development and change.

[iii] Philosophically, this view of selfhood complicates Mittell's observation that a show can produce a "perspectival illusion of change" (2015: 136) by altering how characters relate to one another. For what Mittell terms an illusion in an actually 'stable' character can be seen as the very source of an identity's inherent instability.

[iv] I use the word 'relatively' here because even in such stand-alone works, a re-reading may produce new interpretations of a character's trait-paradigm and how it is configured over the course of the work.

4

ENDINGS:
DISRUPTING SERIAL NARRATIVE DYNAMICS

In many respects, this thesis began at the end. Or, rather, it began with endings. My journey into this research began with me questioning how a narrative that has been designed to proliferate indefinitely can come to a meaningful close, both structurally and affectively. In the finale of an ongoing series, the conclusion of any single plotline or the completion of any individual character arc would seem to lack the closural force it might have in a stand-alone text, especially in traditional films that employ a three-act structure. Although the completion of a long-running plotline may certainly provide *some* sense of closure in a series, solely focusing on this kind of plot resolution would seem like an incomplete way of accounting for the process by which series draw to a close. For one thing, not all television narratives contain plotlines that span the entire duration of the show. Episodic narratives are an extreme example of this, but there are also many serialized television narratives that cycle through a multitude of plotlines over the course of their lifespan, with no single plot defining the show from start to finish. These questions, elicited by examining series finales, then began to generate others: what can finales teach us about a series' simultaneous drive toward expanding the narrative and its need to cohere?; how can something akin to a structure of ongoing television narratives be defined?; how can we compare the way episodic and serialized narratives generate new content from existing structural principles? My analysis of endings thus slowly developed into an analysis of middles and beginnings, of which this thesis is the product and this chapter both a culmination and a starting point.

The difficulty of writing about television endings – and television finales specifically – is a difficulty rooted in finding the language with which to undertake such analysis. It raises the challenge of finding descriptions that are both specific enough to analyse how *television* narratives conclude, but also general enough to compare different *types* of television narratives. In this respect, the challenges of analysing television endings are symptomatic of analysing the structural principles of television narratives in general. Let us return, for example, to Kozloff's terminology cited in chapter one. Writing about ongoing television narratives, Kozloff states that "as long as the series continues, the viewer can bank on the fact that the central tension or premise will not be resolved: Magnum will never "grow up," the Enterprise will never complete its mission and return to earth" (1987: 69). The comment is certainly valid, and crucially it points to a central regenerative source at the 'heart' of each

narrative – a premise, a tension. The difficulty, however, comes in comparing the tension or premise of one series with another. For as Kozloff's own remarks indicate, while one series may have an overarching event or goal built into its premise (the Enterprise's mission and return to earth), another may not, with its premise founded on character traits alone (as with Magnum). An added obstacle is that some series may *begin* with a clear plotline defining the show's premise or generating its tension, but as the series continues that plotline's structural role may wane or disappear entirely. Shows like *Desperate Housewives*, or, more recently, *Stranger Things*, demonstrate that a show's success may require it to expand beyond the contours of an (initially) well-defined plot arc. And looking beyond the question of plot, the previous chapter showed how the nuances of a premise may change in other ways, too, as when Piper's structural role in *Orange is the New Black* changed from central protagonist and 'Trojan horse' to being one major character in an ensemble. To better understand the formal continuation of a series – and its corollary conclusion – it then becomes necessary to define in more detailed yet fluid terms precisely what structural principles the premise of any given series sets into motion. This has been the primary task of this thesis. For the enquiry of how a series continually attempts to structure its coherent expansion, I have proposed the approach of examining what I have termed its serial narrative dynamics – the shifting relations between individual characters and communities that have the capacity to generate multiple plotlines. In this chapter, then, I wish to turn my attention to how these serial narrative dynamics are disrupted or altogether dissolved in series finales, thereby creating a formal justification for why no more narrative can be generated beyond a particular end-point. Undertaking such an analysis of series finales can in turn help illuminate the serial narrative dynamics that the show relied on for coherent expansion throughout the course of its run.

This approach to conclusion and closure is akin to that of other scholars who have similarly written about the way endings allow us to reflect upon the entirety of a work. In *Closure in the Novel*, Marianna Torgovnick writes that

> Endings enable an informed definition of a work's "geometry" and set into motion the process of retrospective rather than speculative thinking necessary to discern it – the process of "retrospective patterning." Moreover, in completing the "circle" of a novel, endings create the illusion of life halted and poised for analysis. Like completed segments of human lives and as representations of them, completed stories illuminate and invite examination of human experiences. In part, we value endings because the retrospective patterning used to make sense of texts corresponds to one process used

> to make sense of life: the process of looking back over events and interpreting them in light of "how things turned out." (Torgovnick, 1981: 7)

The statement is an echo of Frank Kermode's sentiment in *The Sense of an Ending* that "Men, like poets, rush 'into the middest,' *in medias res*, when they are born; they also die *in mediis rebus*, and to make sense of their span they need fictive concords with origins and ends, such as give meaning to lives and to poems" (1967: 7). Kermode goes on: "We project ourselves – a small, humble elect, perhaps – past the End; so as to see the structure whole, a thing we cannot do from our spot of time in the middle" (1967: 8). These observations strike me as having especial significance in relation to ongoing television narratives that – more so than stand-alone narratives – mimic the uncertain duration and progression of 'human experience'. As Tischleder puts it, "serial storytelling, in its open-ended form, reflects the routines, ambiguities, and unknown futures of our life worlds" (2017: 124). And while therein may lie an important aspect of their appeal – for producers and consumers of television narratives alike – this quality also presents a challenge to analysing their endings in relation to the "geometry" of the work. The notion of ongoing series being "completed stories" or "whole" structures is a problematic one, as was discussed in the introduction. Consequently, the task of relating a television narrative's ending to its beginning and middle raises those same questions around wholeness and unity.

Torgovnick, for example, states that "To study closure and the shape of fictions, we begin with the ending, but evaluate its success as part of an artistic whole, as the final element in a particular structure of words and meanings" (1981: 6). But since the literal notion of "wholeness" has been established as problematic in relation to ongoing series, can such a statement be useful where television narratives are concerned? Can series finales unify and complete the work in a way that is at all comparable to stand-alone narratives? It is difficult to think about television endings as a final piece in the "geometry" of the completed work precisely because the particular "geometry" of ongoing television narratives is one that is designed to be a regenerating one – a geometry without a final piece. Yet this does not mean that Torgovnick's comments are entirely irrelevant to the study of television endings. Significantly, they stress that closure is something that occurs in relation to what has come before. "Upon rereading," Torgovnick writes, "pattern and rhythm – connections between beginning, middle, and end – may be more easily discerned and more fully understood by the reader. Appreciating such connections through retrospective patterning provides the primary pleasure of rereadings" (ibid.). Of course, the process of re-watching television series may

also bring with it the inverse effect – namely, becoming aware of the challenges of integrating each element of the narrative into a totalising whole. Indeed, we may be more aware than ever of instances where contingent circumstances have placed strain upon the series' coherent expansion. Nevertheless, television endings can help to reveal the "pattern and rhythm" of the narrative that has come before, even if these patters do not 'add up' to traditional notions of unified 'wholes'. As Holdsworth writes of television series, ending and beginnings can be viewed "as privileged spaces for reflection and remembering, where patterns are initiated and revealed. […] Endings or 'milestone moments' often function as reflective and self-reflexive spaces within serial drama that 'reference back' on their own long perspectives" (2011: 36). Torgovnick's thesis that closure relies on the "appropriateness of the ending's relationship to beginning and middle, not the degree of finality or resolution achieved by the ending," (1981: 6) can thus be as applicable to the finales of ongoing series as it is to stand-alone works. Indeed, it is especially useful when considering that total "resolution" may be difficult for narratives that have generated a great deal of content over their durations. And although Torgovnick differentiates her terminology from that of Barbara H. Smith, Smith does indeed take a similar stance regarding endings' relationship to beginnings and middles. "Our sense of the completeness of a form," states Smith, "often depends upon the class of forms with which we identify it" (1968: 26). The formal tension that needs to be reconciled, then, is that many television narratives belong to a "class of forms" in which "completeness" is an anomaly.

Termination seems unnatural for a form that strives for continuation and proliferation – of characters, of plots. Indeed, this observation has been frequently made with regards to a variety of television narratives. Writing of soap operas, Modleski notes they "cannot end," that their instinct for "preservation" has "virtually triumphed over authorial control" (1979: 12). Geraghty similarly remarks that soaps do not encourage the expectation of resolution and that "the longer they run the more impossible it seems to imagine them ending" (1991: 11). While soap operas are undoubtedly the extreme example, in many ongoing television narratives a similar force of indefinite expansion seems incompatible with endings and resolution. "A series is deemed a success only as long as it keeps going," writes Mittell, and notes that "This becomes a significant issue for storytellers, who must design narrative worlds that are able to sustain themselves for years rather than closed narratives plans [*sic*] created for a specific run" (2015: 34). And writing about what he terms the Third Golden Age of television, Martin likewise comments that in the series of this era "there may be nothing more unnatural than an ending" (2013: 278). For Martin, the shows of this period use this

impulse to their advantage: "No ending came to mean no crappy endings, no cheap catharsis – new kinds of stories free to wend their way through an approximation of real life" (ibid.). Martin's sentiment is in line with my own comment earlier that ongoing television narratives mimic the indefinite duration and contingent nature of our lives. Yet what happens when this onscreen 'life' needs to be "halted and poised for analysis", to return to Torgovnick's phrase (1981: 7)? What happens when a form that is designed for proliferation needs to be wrapped up, be it for economic or creative reasons? Can such a powerful force of expansion be contained within any kind of conclusion appropriate to its form?

The question is not limited to ongoing television narratives. Writing about poetry in *A Reopening of Closure*, Murray Krieger proposes that

> in each case we find the requirement of closure accompanied both by the concern about the difficulty in accomplishing it and, despite such concern, by the desire for the poem to remain open provisionally to the assaults of new experience in the hope of domesticating them as well; though, once that is accomplished, as the dialectic continues, there is yet another assault, still another accommodation, etc., etc. The process goes on and on. Along with the anxiety to find closure, there is a companion anxiety not to yield to an exclusionary act that would end the process. (Krieger, 1989: 40)

Krieger's comment suggests that the tension between closure and continuation (and the 'openness' of the text) is inherent to a variety of narrative forms, even 'traditional' ones that may initially seem to represent unified and closed structures. Following Krieger's argument, we may then view television narratives as particularly potent examples of this process at work, precisely because the balance between closure and continuation is typically skewed in favour of the latter. The difficulty of containing the narrative in any kind of conclusion is also raised by Miller in relation to the novel: "the narratable is stronger than the closure to which it is opposed in an apparent binarity. For the narratable is the very evidence of the narrative text, while closure (as, precisely, the nonnarratable) is only the sign that this text is over" (1981: 226). Writing about mini-series, Geraghty equally allows for the possibility that "the story's pressures" may not "necessarily be contained by its ending" (1991: 11). Thus, the difficulty of delimiting the expansive force of the narrative may not be unique to ongoing television narratives, but rather may be manifested within them in unique ways and to exceptional degrees. And if this is the case, then the endings of television shows need not be

expected to close off all the long-running strands of the series. Rather, a different way of conceptualizing closure in television narratives is required.

In this regard, it is helpful to consider Geraghty's comment that what is important when considering closure is not just the efficacy of the ending – its ability to contain the story's pressures – but more so the "expectation of resolution" that the viewer may have (ibid.). For while each show will cultivate a unique balance between continuation and the promise of resolution throughout its run, our knowledge of an upcoming ending will bring with it an added expectation of some kind of closure. This is why in this chapter I wish to focus specifically on series finales, which Mittell defines partly in terms of the anticipation and expectation that they cultivate among viewers. This is because finales are frequently announced as planned conclusions to a show, unlike cancellations and what Mittell terms cessations or wrap-ups (2015: 319-322). These terms echo Smith's distinction between concluding and ceasing, with 'concluding' being both the product and evidence of "some principle of organization or design" (1968: 2). In other words, for a reader or viewer to perceive that something is concluding rather than just ending, a conclusion needs to demonstrate a relationship between the conclusion and the structural principles of the work thus far. As Smith explains, "Haunted, perhaps, by the specter of that ultimate arbitrary conclusion, we take particular delight, not in all endings, but in those that are designed. Our most gratifying experiences tend to be not the interminable ones but rather those that conclude" (1968: 1). Of course, viewers often *do* take delight in the seemingly interminable experiences of ongoing series. Simultaneously, however, when such experiences must end, there is also a desire for the ending to be "designed" rather than arbitrary. Series finales are sites where these dual desires are especially foregrounded. And as such, these final episodes become marked examples of the productive tension between closure and continuation, in Krieger's terms, and between coherence and expansion in mine.

Having explored the significance of endings to an understanding of television form in general, the question that still remains to be answered is *how* any closure may be achieved within such a form. Smith's analysis of poetic structures designed to go on indefinitely offers a useful starting point. Smith states that in such cases the principles of generation do not guarantee a predetermined concluding point:

> Thus, although an indefinitely extendable series (such as first-second-third ... , etc.) will determine the sequence of lines or stanzas, the conclusion will be determined by

> some other structural principle or, lacking any other principle, will be given stability and finality by special terminal features. (Smith, 1968: 110)

As one example of such a special terminal feature, Smith cites the coda, referencing a definition of the musical coda as an initial illustration of its function:

> When a number of parts or voices were made to imitate or follow one another according to rigorous rules, it would often occur that as long as the rules were observed a musical conclusion could not be arrived at. Indeed sometimes such things were constructed in a manner which enabled the piece to go on forever if the singers were so minded. … In order to come to a conclusion a few chords would be constructed apart from the rigorous rules and so the coda was arrived at. (Parry quoted in Smith, 1968: 188)

The description resonates with the way many television series are constructed: characters are brought together into a community, and their interactions, guided by the 'rules' or serial narrative dynamics of the show, have the potential to allow the narrative to go on forever (or at least seemingly so). What is significant about both this definition and Smith's remarks about indefinitely extendable series is that they locate the force of closure as somehow 'outside' or 'apart' from the structure itself. In his discussion of the narratable in the novel, Miller makes a similar observation: "The *otherness* of closure suggests one of the unwelcome implications of the narratable – that it can never generate the terms for its own arrest" (1981: 226; emphasis added). These comments, taken together, provide a useful way for conceptualising closure in ongoing television narratives. The long runs of episodic sitcoms, like *Modern Family*, or serialised dramas, like *Grey's Anatomy*, demonstrate that their recurring characters and settings, and the structural principles that govern them, can produce narratives that extend for an indefinite amount of time. Thus, to bring closure to such ongoing series, a finale needs to be constructed "apart from the rigorous rules" that have governed the narrative thus far.

While some series may contain an apparent end-point that would help generate a sense of closure, such as a plotline or character arc that has extended across the series from its beginning, others may not. But even structures such as an overarching plotline are ultimately the product of broader serial narrative dynamics. As I stated in my initial definition of this term, the dynamics of a show are not the *only* structural principles in a show, but they are the

foundational ones. Others – such as an ongoing plotline or a pervasive theme – often emerge *from* the functions of the dynamic. And if the dynamics of a show are what generate narrative, then closure may indeed be seen as something *other* than the dynamics themselves. It is a general negation of this productive force, rather than necessarily a closing off of individual narrative strands. Thinking about closure in this way makes the goal of comparing episodic and serialised narratives more attainable. For while we can acknowledge the closural force of a particular plotline, we can also begin to understand that such a resolution is the product of a broader closural act – the disruption of serial narrative dynamics. It also acknowledges that the role of any individual plotline is not the same in an ongoing series as it is in a stand-alone narrative – neither in its generative powers, nor its closural ones. Thus, while series finales do tend to resolve important plotlines, they typically do more than this – they provide a justification for why this particular diegesis can no longer continue to expand, at least not coherently.

This conceptualisation of finales moves away from any notion of them as a necessary culmination of a show's existence. Rather than revealing the geometry of a work by providing it with its final piece, finales illuminate the geometry of a series by exposing the dynamics that have generated it over time. Finales are less 'unifying' in the traditional sense than they are destructive – they do not turn an 'open' narrative into a 'closed' one; rather, they terminate the trajectory of the narrative as we have come to understand it. "Only on rare and red-letter occasions will a series resolve its central premises: the last episode of M*A*S*H created such a stir not only because it was the last episode of a popular series but because the show actually created a new state of affairs – the Korean war ended and everyone got to go home," states Kozloff (1987: 69). Although such 'resolutions' are less uncommon today, Kozloff's observation still aptly points to their chief attribute – a kind of 'undoing' of the premise that has generated story material up until this point. But just as I argued that the concept of the premise needed to be more specifically theorised in order to fully explain how television series expand, so too with the 'resolution' of this premise. By thinking of finales not just as resolutions, but as dissolutions of serial narrative dynamics, we can move toward a more detailed formal conception of what such episodes entail.

Deconstructing DNA: The Disruption of a Show's Dynamics

Early in this thesis, I drew on the metaphor of DNA in order to describe the way the serial narrative dynamics of a show help to keep it 'alive'. I would now like to return to this metaphor in order to explore how a show's run is terminated. For as Smith notes in her definition of a poem's structure, by thinking of structure as the answer to the question "What keeps it going", this inquiry also "allows the possibility of a corollary question, namely, 'What stops it from going?'" (1968: 4). We may similarly ask what might make a certain stopping-point appropriate in television narratives, something that will allow the viewer, in Smith's words, "to be satisfied by the failure of continuation" (1968: 34). From an analytical perspective a series finale, as a "privileged space" (Holdsworth, 2011: 36), allows one to not only look *back* on the narrative that has unfolded over a long period of time but also to look *in* at its core – its 'DNA', often at the very instant that this DNA is taken apart.

Television finales are denouements in both senses of the word: while they may tie up loose ends by completing particular plotlines and character arcs, they also embody the literal translation of the word – an 'untying'. For finales frequently seek to deconstruct the very DNA that has been the life-force of the series – the unique dynamics it had established between individual characters and the communities they form. We can thus imagine two alternatives for how a series can end: it can keep the DNA intact, or it can disassemble it. In the case of disassembly, this means separating the two components of the show's dynamics – characters and the community. The specific nature of this 'separation' can of course vary. I would thus like to begin by looking at a relatively typical example of how the dynamics of a series can be disassembled in *Desperate Housewives*, and then examine a show that choses to end with its 'DNA' intact – *The Newsroom* (HBO; 2012-2014).

Desperate Housewives uses its final scenes to achieve a sense of closure by separating its main characters from the centripetal setting that has bound them together as a community. One by one we see each of the main characters leave Wisteria Lane: a montage shows first Lynette, then Gaby, then Bree leave their homes, also giving us a glimpse of how their lives would unfold in the future. And if the departure of these women from Wisteria Lane was not enough to emphasize the separation between character and community, then the leave-taking of the last of the four protagonists, Susan, emphasises the point even further. As she drives down Wisteria Lane for the last time, we see the ghosts of all those who have died over the course of the show's eight seasons as they stand outside their homes and look upon Susan

driving away. In this moment we are saying goodbye to not only the place, but to the characters that have lived there and the traits they have come to represent. Yet as life continues in this neighbourhood after the departure of the narrative's main characters, so too will one of its key traits persist in their absence – secrecy. The final scene of the series shows Jennifer, the woman moving into Susan's house, anxiously open a jewellery box, close it again, and lock it away in a cabinet as Mary Alice's voice-over reminds us that most people will continue to try and keep secrets that "will never stay hidden". Here is a new plot, set in the same (geographic) community and defined by the same themes that have defined the show; but the dominant characters whose lives we have been following have left this community and liberated themselves from the tensions that define it – the tension between surface appearance and hidden secrets. Thus the dynamics of *Desperate Housewives* are brought to a halt, giving closure to the narrative by providing a structural reason for why the series cannot go on.

This kind of separation of one or more main characters from the community is a fairly common strategy employed by finales. Other notable examples include *Frasier, Friends, Glee* and *Six Feet Under*. In other, rarer, instances the 'separation' portrayed in the finale is an altogether more permanent one and involves the death of a main character, as was the case with *Breaking Bad*. In *Mary Tyler Moore,* not only do the main characters go their separate ways, but the place where they have worked together for all these year, the WJM news station, is disbanded, thereby dismantling wholesale the very community of the show. This strategy is sometimes also employed at other end-points in the narrative, such as season finales. In some cases the threat of separating characters and communities is used to create suspense at critical moments in the story. In *Orange is the New Black,* both the start and end of the second season tease viewers with the possibility of separating Piper from Litchfield prison. The second season begins with Piper being transported to another facility; like the viewer, she has no idea what is going on and is terrified that she is being permanently transferred. The end of the season then echoes this fear of relocation as Piper yet again faces the threat of transfer, this time because she has been working with a journalist to uncover corruption within the prison. The possible departure created anxiety for Piper within the diegesis, and suspense for the viewers, highlighting the importance of the dynamics between Piper and the community for the show's continuation. In other instances the uncertainty about a show's future may result in a 'tentative finale' at the end of a season. Martin relates how the fourth season of *The Sopranos,* in which Tony moves out of his family home, could have been a potential conclusion for the series as David Chase was unsure about committing to

HBO's requests for two more seasons (2013: 168). *Breaking Bad*'s fourth season is another example of such uncertainty at work, one I will return to below.

The finale of *The Newsroom* is, in many ways, very different to that of *Desperate Housewives* and the other examples I have cited thus far, in that it elects not to disassemble the dynamics of the show. Unlike them, it leaves almost all of the major characters in the community where we found them: the newsroom of the cable program 'News Night'. The team does sustain two losses as the penultimate episode sees the death of news director Charlie Skinner, while in the final episode associate producer Maggie Jordan decides to interview for a job in DC. But, for the most part, the characters that we met in the pilot are still in the same place, still part of the same community, still doing the same job in the finale. *The Newsroom*, however, has an ideological reason for choosing this somewhat atypical ending.

In the first episode of the show's final season, Will and Mac have a conversation about recovering from the catastrophic blunder the News Night team made in the previous season. MacKenzie turns to art to interpret the situation. Asking Will if he has ever read Euripides, she explains: "In the first act of his stories you chase a hero up a tree, in the second act you throw rocks at them and in the third act they get themselves down. I think we're getting ourselves down from the tree." At the end of the episode, however, Will is roused into giving a speech by the slew of new problems facing their news community. Turning to Mac, he says: "You were wrong. We're not in the middle of a third act. We just got to the end of the first." The statement is, of course, slightly ironic – the series is very much in its final act, but the characters and their problems are not. During the course of the season they will have to fight new problems, including tensions between the way old media and new (social) media cover the news. But this battle, and many more to come, will not be neatly resolved by the series. "The fight is just getting started," Will says in a speech at Charlie's funeral (3.6). The show has, often very didactically, addressed some of the problems plaguing news broadcasts in America. The finale is another clear message: the problems will continue to proliferate, and there must always be someone there to face them and keep alive the integrity of the institution. So the community of News Night stays intact and the war wages on. By keeping the serial dynamics of the show intact, the show is reinforcing – in formal terms – the fact that characters' situations will

However, it is also worth noting that although *The Newsroom* doesn't separate its characters from its community, it does provide closure in another way. Instead of disassembling the narrative dynamics altogether, it *reveals* the narrative dynamics to the

viewer – foregrounding the structural principles of the show so as to encourage a reflection upon them at the series' end. While *Desperate Housewives* ends with flash-forwards to show us the characters' future, *The Newsroom* uses flashbacks to show us their past. The finale, which opens with Charlie's funeral, continues to flash back to just before the events of the pilot, showing us how Charlie played a hand in putting together the team that, for the last three seasons, has produced News Night. So although we do not see the series' DNA disassembled in the finale, through these flashbacks we see the opposite but analogous action takes place: the assembly of the characters into a community (something we only partially witnessed in the pilot). Thus although the finale may not disassemble the dynamics of the show in a literal sense, like the *Desperate Housewives* ending did, it nonetheless deconstructs them on a formal level, thereby encouraging the viewer to reflect on what has kept the show going and what has defined its identity as a 'whole'. This return to the beginning, both structurally and emotionally, provides the audience with a sense of closure even though we leave the characters with their lives going on very much as per usual. Another example of such an ending is the *Cheers* finale. As in *The Newsroom*, the bar's community sustains few losses in the finale, with only Rebecca leaving its fold to start a new life as a married woman. This finale also ends by circling back to the show's beginning: Sam alone in his bar, leaving viewers with the feeling that the bar will re-open as per usual the next day. Yet here, too, even though the dynamics are kept intact, they are still foregrounded for the viewer. Specifically, the symbiotic relationship between Sam and Cheers is emphasised, with Sam realising that the bar is in fact the 'love of his life'.[i]

We can therefore summarise some of the different strategies that finales can take in relation to the show's serial narrative dynamics thus: they can keep the dynamics intact, or they can separate them. In some cases this separation may simply involve a parting, as one or more characters leave the core community of the show. In other instances the sense of finality may be heightened by employing a more terminal separation, such as the destruction of the community or the death of a particularly dominant character. Yet even when a series opts for an ending that keeps the dynamics largely intact, it nonetheless often takes a self-reflexive approach that similarly serves to 'uncover' the dynamics by foregrounding its components and how they fit together. In all these alternatives we can thus see a parallel with the way in which series begin, as I discussed in chapter one. Whereas pilots introduce us to the diegetic world by either forming a new community or aligning viewers with a new character entering an existing community, finales often reverse this process by deconstructing the diegesis as we have come to know it. Indeed, a finale like that of *The Newsroom* functions structurally very

much like a pilot episode might, and a large part of the episode's closural force relies on this circling back to the beginning.

I do not intend these alternatives to be a strict taxonomy with which every series must perfectly align. Rather, I present them as a framework that can be used to analyse a variety of series. And crucially, this framework facilitates a comparison of different types of television series, as both episodic and serial narratives employ variants of these closural strategies. But the particular intricacies of a show's dynamics will certainly impact on the precise way it navigates these possibilities for closure. In addition, series may combine different closural strategies or play with their possibilities. The *Glee* finale, for example, combines the strategies employed by *Desperate Housewives* and *The Newsroom*. The first part of the double-episode finale flashes back to events surrounding the pilot, recreating some of its moments while also filling out others, reminding viewers of how and why the characters came together to form the glee club. The second part of the finale then moves back to the present, allowing the characters to go their separate ways. The episode then flashes forward several years in order to give viewers a glimpse of how the characters' lives would unfold after this parting. Other finales may move toward dismantling their dynamics only to suspend total (and final) separations. The *Hill Street Blues* finale threatens its community with total destruction as a fire ravages the Hill Street Station. But even after the damage, the station still stands and will surely reopen again. As viewers, we thus get to see this centripetal setting of the show vacant, saying goodbye to it in this bare form that simultaneously reminds us of its importance. *Highlander*'s (Syndication; 1992-1998) finale takes its protagonist to the brink of death and, in the manner of *It's a Wonderful Life* (Frank Capra; 1946), shows him (and us) what the lives of those around him would have been like had he not lived. The episode thus becomes an opportunity for viewers to take leave of the community of characters that has formed around Duncan, even those that have died and departed the show seasons prior. And then there is the infamously ambiguous finale of *The Sopranos*, which leaves viewers questioning whether the Soprano family will remain intact after the cut to black or whether its patriarch, Tony, has been murdered.

One factor that will significantly impact upon a series' particular closural strategy is the hierarchies within its narrative dynamics. The more dominant a narrative element is – be it a character, a shared setting or another shared trait – the more likely it is that its departure or destruction will have a strong closural force. Frequently, finales target the redundancy that dominant elements tend to possess in television narratives. As I noted in chapter two, series will often have more than one dominant element perform the same function in order to ensure

that coherent expansion can continue, even in the face of change. But when a completely new "state of affairs" (Kozloff, 1987: 69) is required, the level of redundancy can be weakened or removed entirely. Let us return to the example of the US version of *The Office*, cited in chapter two as an instance where a show could continue even after the exit of a dominant character, precisely because a dominant setting still bound the community together. When it came time for the show to conclude two seasons later, the closural force was amplified by having not just one but many characters depart the community of Dunder Mifflin and its associated setting. Indeed, more characters left the Dunder Mifflin office (and the town of Scranton) than were left behind, drastically changing the make-up of this community as we have come to know it. A similar strategy can be seen in a show very different in both form and tone – *Breaking Bad*. Due to negotiations with AMC during the production of the show's fourth season, its final episode was provisionally intended as the series' conclusion (Logan, 2016: 110). Thus the episode sees Walter and Jesse parting ways after reaching a tentative reconciliation and destroying the lab where they have been cooking meth together. As Logan puts it, they "undo what they helped build" (2016: 139). The show's ultimate finale, at the end of the fifth season, then works to amplify the sense of closure. The primary way of achieving this is through Walter's death – unquestionably the show's most dominant character. But other 'partings' are also enacted over the course of the final three episodes. This includes the deaths of DEA agents Hank Schrader and Steven Gomez in episode fourteen, the departure of attorney Saul Goodman from Albuquerque in the fifteenth and penultimate episode, and the opportunities granted to Jesse and Skyler White to pursue their lives away from the drug trade at the end of the finale. As such, the show's community that has been built up around both Walter and the production of crystal meth is virtually dissolved.

In both of these instances, a sense of closure is achieved by disrupting the narrative dynamics of the show. However, other closural devices are also used to increase the conclusiveness of these finales – something that is common to many television series. In *The Office*, the wedding of Dwight and Angela ensures that the finale depicts a transformative life-event – an event that harkens back to the romantic comedy formula of using romantic coupling to resolve narrative tension. Importantly, the event also provides a reason for the characters to reunite after having left Dunder Mifflin, thus providing viewers with an opportunity to see the community together one last time. *Breaking Bad*, meanwhile, uses a cyclical pattern to enhance a sense of closure, as the finale takes place on Walter's 52nd birthday whereas the pilot began with his 50th. And, as I have already mentioned on several

occasions, the conclusion of long-running plotlines and character arcs can also contribute to the process of closure. It is important to note, however, that such resolutions are often made possible because of and through the simultaneous disruption of the show's dynamics. Let us, for example, return to the question of character change discussed in the previous chapter. While I argued that such change is possible within the form of ongoing television narratives, its precise nature will be delimited by the dynamics of the series and its uncertain duration. But as the narrative moves toward a conclusion, these limitations need not apply any longer. As Pearson notes, "The core psychological traits and behaviours of film characters can alter as they experience the narrative trajectories that bring them to the denouement" (2007: 50). And as television characters move toward their own denouements, they can exhibit change that would otherwise undermine the cohesive expansion of the series – the loss of individuating traits as well as those traits that bind the characters to the community. For example, although Walter became increasingly selfish and ruthless over the course of *Breaking Bad*'s five seasons, his unfailing individuating trait had been his ability to deliver a meth product of unrivalled purity. It is this trait that often grants Walter authority and salvation within the drug trade community of the show. In the same way that a series like *Orange is the New Black* can create anxiety about Piper's link to the dominant setting of the show, *Breaking Bad* creates suspense around whether Walter's cooking abilities will continue to remain unsurpassed. And the closer the series moved towards the end, the closer this dominant trait came to being jeopardised. In season four both Jesse and another chemist and 'cook', Gale Boetticher, come close, while by the end of season five Jesse is indeed able to match Walter's (in)famously pure product. This dominant individuating trait, which has been key to both Walter's diegetic survival and the show's coherent expansion, is only relinquished when the series moves towards closure. Thus, while I do not want to diminish or dismiss the role a variety of factors play in bringing an ongoing narrative to a point of closure, my aim in this chapter is to situate these devices within the broader framework of the show's narrative dynamics, from which they often emerge.

While on the one hand the process of disrupting the show's narrative dynamics may be 'destructive', taking apart what has been built over long periods of time, on the other hand it also allows the conclusion to be productive. Specifically, it allows the finale to achieve two, somewhat contradictory, goals – it provides closure while also giving viewers the sense that life goes on. While stressing the importance of endings to both our lives and our fictions, Kermode also observes that "the truly imaginative novelist has an unshakable 'respect for the contingent'" (1967: 130). "Without it," states Kermode, "he sinks into fantasy, which is a

way of deforming reality. […] We must not falsify it with patterns too neat, too inclusive" (ibid.). Torgovnick makes a similar observation about novels. She cites George Eliot's concern that "Conclusions are the weak point of most authors, but some of the fault lies in the very nature of a conclusion, which is at best a negation" (Eliot quoted in Torgovnick, 1981: 22). Here again the "otherness" of closure is proposed, creating a tension between the need to find a "satisfying note on which to end" and still "preserving the sense of "new beginnings"" in the lives of the characters (Torgovnick, 1981: 22). The problem, posits Torgovick, is especially prevalent in the multi-plot novel: "The end of a novel like *Middlemarch*, to avoid being a negation, must round off the novel without closing off the lives of characters" (1981: 23). What emerges in these statements is a tension between formal harmony and the fragmented lived reality it seeks to represent. Geraghty likewise notes a comparable process at work in soap operas, where endings are all the more rare and even more challenging:

> In soaps, stories are never finally resolved and even soaps which cease to be made project themselves into a non-existent future. The final scene of *Crossroads*, when, after nearly 24 years, it came to an end in April 1988, showed Jill Chance with her new lover, John, driving away to seek another motel, another 'Crossroads' (Geraghty, 1991: 11).

The dismantling of a show's dynamics provides a justification for why the narrative must end, while allowing for the illusion that the characters' lives will continue to remain open to new events, albeit beyond the borders of the discourse. This may be one reason why separating characters from the community, while keeping both alive and intact, is such a popular ending to television series. Such endings attempt to create a balance between the structure of the discourse and the contingency of the characters' lives. By separating characters from their community, a series can give the impression that life goes on while also providing a reason for why the story must end. The previously mentioned montage at the end of *Desperate Housewives*, for example, attains closure while retaining the illusion that the characters continued to live their lives, thereby functioning somewhat like the 'after-histories' of 19th century novels. A similar role is performed by the wedding in the finale of *The Office*, in which viewers (like the characters themselves) can 'catch up' on what the old community members have been doing since leaving Dunder Mifflin.

As Smith states, "what presumably follows or could follow in time will not concern the reader – will not, to be precise, concern his experience of the work in question" (1968:

120). This relates directly to the concept of a series' *coherent* expansion. The specific dynamics of a given show create not just *a* narrative, but a narrative that we can identify as particular to that series. This does not mean that individual characters separated from the community and thus the dynamics of the series have no capacity to generate narrative on their own – it would simply be a *different* narrative. This is, indeed, the very logic underpinning a spin-off. Writing about the work of Balzac, Miller states that his novels exemplify "a closure at once enforced and effaced", with the "double vision" of closure "displaced into the structure of the novel series" (1981: 273). For Miller, the recurring characters of these series represent the return of the "narratable desires they have sponsored" (ibid.). In other words, the capacity of the characters to generate narrative survives the ending of any one novel and its plotlines, and is carried over into the next instalment of the series. Not only is this statement obviously applicable to television series in general, where recurring characters return even after a given plotline has been concluded, but it aptly describes the motivation for the spin-off – where the narrative potential of a character is explored in a new narrative context. What is also useful about Miller's concepts of the narratable and nonnarratable, as touched on in chapter one, is that they leave room for these elements to vary from text to text:

> What I am calling the nonnarratable elements of a text are precisely those that […] serve to supply the specified narrative lack, or to answer the specified narrative question. It is not the case that such elements cannot be designated by the text's language, or that they literally cannot be mentioned. The nonnarratable is not the unspeakable. What defines a nonnarratable element is its incapacity to generate a story. (Miller, 1981: 5)[ii]

Thus, what is capable or incapable of generating story can differ from one narrative to another. For example, *Friends* ends with five out of the six main characters in long-term relationships and either already parents or envisioning parenthood in their near future. Furthermore, two of the characters, Monica and Chandler, are moving out of the urban centre of New York and into the suburbs. That this is the stopping-point of the series does not mean that suburban family life is incapable of generating narrative. Indeed, many sitcoms are founded on this exact premise. But the particular dynamics of *Friends* relied on the six characters sharing certain traits – being single New Yorkers key among them. Indeed, the show was a response to the suburban sitcoms popular in the 1980s. Thus, by the time of the finale, these communal traits have begun to disappear and Monica and Chandler's move is a

final marker of this change. It also allows for the leave-taking of a setting that has bound the characters together for ten seasons – Monica's apartment. In this way the dynamics of the series are dismantled and their capacity to generate more narrative is terminated. What may follow after this point – and did follow, in the form of the *Joey* (NBC; 2004-2006) spin-off – is another story, something other than the coherent expansion of the narrative we knew as *Friends*.

With all these general concepts and brief examples in place, I would like to turn my attention to a detailed case study of how narrative dynamics can be disassembled in a series finale. My choice of series here is *Mad Men* – a show that makes the tension between contingency and structure, and specifically between the contingent nature of life and our desire to make sense of it, a fundamental thematic concern of its narrative. It is a series that has repeatedly questioned the teleology of life's events, thus making its own stopping-point a complex site of endings, beginnings and returns. Because of *Mad Men*'s multi-layered preoccupation with the relationship between past and present, its finale is an especially interesting vantage point from which to examine the show's dynamics. For as these dynamics are disrupted for the purpose of closure, their hierarchies, redundancies, and their impact on character change are simultaneously underscored.

CASE STUDY: *MAD MEN*

Speaking in an interview about the final season of the series, *Mad Men*'s show-runner Matthew Weiner (2015a) remarked on the fact that the "machinery" of the show had become worn out. The comment serves as an apt metaphor – just like James Manos Jr's remark about 'DNA' – for the structural principles that serve to keep a television series 'running'. And, in line with Smith's comments about structure, the metaphor allows for the corollary examination of how amendments to these structural principles can bring about closure (1968: 4). Set in New York's advertising world, *Mad Men*'s narrative began in the year 1960 and came to a close in 1970. As such, the temporal trajectory of the narrative immediately presents itself as a key structural principle of the show, and the completion of a decade in story-time an important closural force. However, I would speculate that few viewers would have been entirely satisfied had *Mad Men*'s ending been justified solely by the neatness of a round number. Writing about using the passage of time as a structural principle, Smith writes:

> The passage of time, however, is continuous; and although temporal sequence provides the poet with an excellent principle of generation, it does not provide him with a termination point. He – his story, his poem – must, at some point, stop; but the conclusion, with respect to time alone, will always be an arbitrary one. (Smith, 1968: 117)

Although *Mad Men* coming to a halt in 1970 may not feel entirely arbitrary, since one of its thematic concerns had been to chronicle the decade of change that was the 1960s, there are indeed other structural principles – and thus other closural forces – at work in its finale. In this case study I would therefore like to examine how the dissolution of the show's community (and hence its dynamics) contribute to the sense of closure achieved by *Mad Men*'s ending. I will then discuss how this dissolution works together with the show's treatment of temporality in order to amplify this closural force.

The Dissolution of the Community

Mad Men, like many other television series, ends by having its characters go their separate ways. But more than simply separating them from the show's dominant community, the series goes one step further and dissolves this community entirely, in the fashion of *The Mary Tyler Moore* finale mentioned earlier. And like in *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*, this dissolution comes in the form of a shared work environment being disbanded. Sterling Cooper – the advertising agency that has been a powerful centripetal force in *Mad Men* – finally has to face its end as it is absorbed into the much larger agency McCann Erickson (7.11). In the tradition of conclusions that point to the characters' lives beyond closure, the *Mad Men* finale sets up a host of new beginnings after 'the end' – of both Sterling Cooper and the discourse itself. The show's final montage shows Pete relocating his family to start a new job in Wichita, Joan founding her own company, while Roger is creating a new life with Marie. Peggy is starting both a new job at McCann and a new relationship with Stan, and even Betty, though terminally ill, continues with a recent undertaking – a Master's degree in psychology. And then there is Don, whose future is less clearly spelt out for us, as he sits meditating at a retreat in California. Having finalised his divorce, sold off his apartment and walked out of his new job at McCann in the episodes prior, Don's future remains uncertain until the final moments of the series (and, perhaps, beyond, depending on one's reading of the final scene). And although the closure of Sterling Cooper's offices are fundamental to dissolving *Mad Men*'s dominant community, the process is also aided by eliminating other communal traits, thereby increasing the sense of finality.

Mad Men's final episodes work to disband its community by eliminating its shared traits on three levels of generality. The first is Sterling Cooper itself; employment at this agency has arguably been the most dominant communal trait throughout *Mad Men*'s run. The second is the advertising business more broadly, in which Sterling Cooper is only one participant; working in this industry, or being related to someone who does, has also been instrumental in binding the show's community together. And the third, most general, shared trait is a residency in New York. After all, as the show's very first opening title reminds us, the series began rooted to a very specific location: "Mad Men: A term coined in the late 1950's [*sic*] to describe the executives of Madison Avenue" (1.1). Thus, not only is Sterling Cooper no more, but several of the characters have opted to pursue opportunities outside of advertising. Joan has decided to start a film production company, Pete has taken a lucrative job offer at Learjet, and Roger, although still nominally employed at McCann, envisions his

life more akin to retirement. And Don's future in the advertising business, if indeed he has any, is uncertain until the last moments of the series. Additionally, while half of the main characters remain in New York – namely, Peggy, Joan and Betty – the others are pictured elsewhere in the show's final moments. Pete is on his way to start his job in Wichita, Roger is on his honeymoon in France, and Don is at a retreat in California. By addressing all three levels of these communal traits, *Mad Men* ensures that there is no centripetal force binding the characters together any more. In addition, this final dissolution reveals the way in which the characters have been united into a community by the discourse thus far, and how the redundancy of the communal traits has helped the series navigate a number of changes over the course of its seven seasons.

Sterling Cooper, for example, has been re-invented at least four different times as a company, with the first of these transformations, at the end of season three, accompanied by a change of setting as the newly (re)formed Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce moved out of the offices that have been the agency's home up until that point. Individual characters have also temporarily left both the company and the advertising business. Joan, for example, left Sterling Cooper for married life midway through season three. Her appearances in the subsequent episodes were very limited, until she re-joined the Sterling Cooper community in the season's finale. Peggy also left Sterling Cooper at the end of season five, but because she joined rival agency CGC, she remained within the narrative, still tentatively bound to the core community through her work in advertising. By midway through season six, CGC merges with Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce and Peggy re-joins the (now expanded) core community. (This is an example of a character's individual centripetal pull expanding the narrative of the series, similarly to how Rachel's move to New York did in *Glee*, only to eventually reconcile its bifurcated focus once more.) And at the end of season six Don is 'exiled' from Sterling Cooper as he is forced to take a leave of absence after a disastrous pitch. The first two episodes see Don continuing to participate in the company's activities through covert means, until he is allowed to return in the season's third episode.

In terms of the New York setting, its centripetal force has been gradually weakening as *Mad Men* continued its run. Matthew Weiner once commented that in 1960 New York City was "the world centre" for everything from finance, to drama, to advertising, but that "by 1977 the city's actually bankrupt" (2015b). Over the course of its seven seasons, *Mad Men* mapped this slow decline through both mise-en-scene and dialogue. The early seasons saw New York valorised by many characters, from Bert calling it a "marvellous machine" (1.4), to Joan exclaiming that "the city's everything" (1.10), to Pete proclaiming that "If I'm

going to die, I want to die in Manhattan" (2.13). But by season three a shift had begun to occur, and the season's second episode, 'Love Among the Ruins', emphasized the transformation. Beginning with small details, such as a shot of garbage at Peggy's feet as she exits the subway and Betty chastising Don for not leaving his dirty coat downstairs, the episode underscores the effect that the passage of time was having on the city. Part of this was a plotline dealing with the demolition of Penn Station so that Madison Square Garden may be erected in its place. While Paul Kinsey laments the event, reproachfully proclaiming that "this city has no memory", Don attempts to win the arena's business by asserting that "New York City is in decay. But Madison Square Garden is the beginning of a new city on a hill". To complete the pitch, Don juxtaposes New York with California, where "everything is new, and it's clean. The people are filled with hope" (3.2). Indeed, as New York followed the trajectory of "decay", California became its narrative 'other', a symbol of new beginnings. Referenced almost from the start of *Mad Men*, its presence only increased as the narrative moved towards the finale. Specifically, California became representative of a fresh start for several characters: Paul Kinsey, Ted Shaw and Pete Campbell among them. And although we are not told about Paul's eventual fate, we do know that both Pete and Ted's attempts to improve their lives through a move to California are ultimately unsuccessful and they end up moving back to New York. This move back is both symbolic of the impossibility of clean slates (a point I return to again below) and an indication that the gradual expansion of the diegesis has perhaps reached its structural limit. Again, as was the case with *Glee*, the narrative of *Mad Men* begins to split its community between two distinct locations, expanding beyond the originally tight community of the early seasons, only to reunite them toward the show's end. This consolidation in turn – ironically – allows the series to disassemble its narrative dynamics from a position of increased and renewed coherence.

Mad Men's narrative, therefore, is filled with endings and new beginnings, both professional and also personal. As Frank Kermode puts it, "When we survive, we make little images of moments which have seemed like ends; we thrive on epochs" (1967: 7). A prime example is *Mad Men*'s season three finale, an episode that marked the end of many of the series' givens including Don and Betty's marriage, the offices of Sterling Cooper and, indeed, Sterling Cooper itself. A consequence of all this change – and the ability of the narrative dynamics to accommodate it – is that the closural force of any one trait or relationship being terminated may not be the same as it would be in a series defined by a comparatively stable diegesis. In other words, the functional redundancies in the show's dynamics have allowed its community to survive a multitude of changes that in another series may have been used to

conclude the show – such as the loss of a dominant setting. This ability to adjust to change is indeed an important reason why series often have more than one narrative element performing the centripetal function of tethering the community together, as was discussed in chapter two. Thus, when these other diegetic endings in *Mad Men* need to give way to *the* end, the final episodes of the show target the very interconnectedness – the redundancy – of the community's shared traits as described above. This redundancy, which in the past has worked to permit change within the narrative, is eliminated in order to accommodate one final change in the discourse – a move towards closure.

The dissolution of *Mad Men*'s community not only helps to reveal the redundancies in its trait-paradigm, but it also encourages a reflection on some of the individual characters' key traits. Interestingly, this is done by making those traits highly incompatible with the characters' new 'community'. When Sterling Cooper & Partners is absorbed by McCann, many of the characters struggle to integrate into its fold. Roger, whose contribution to Sterling Cooper has been periodically questioned by his co-workers, finds that his position at McCann is defined by an even greater level of redundancy. For Joan, who has struggled throughout the show's latter seasons to be taken seriously as a career woman, not only because of her gender but also because of her particular style of 'ultra-femininity', McCann becomes an untenably misogynistic work environment. And Don, who hates confinement in any form – from relationships to employment contracts to constraints on his way of working – had already dismissed McCann as a "sausage factory" seasons prior (3.13). Only Peggy's particular ambitions and attitude manage to find a new 'home' at this agency: she defiantly strides into McCann hungover, a cigarette dangling from her mouth, wearing dark sunglasses and carrying Bert Cooper's print of 'The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife' (7.12).This is not to say that these individuating traits had never been a source of conflict when the community was bound together under the banner of Sterling Cooper. Quite the contrary – they provided important tensions within the show's dynamics and thus helped to generate narrative. But at McCann, the delicate balance between the individual and the group proves more difficult to strike. The corporate, uniform environment of this agency makes it a challenging space in which to single out the 'one' from the 'many', to give characters an identity that makes them more than just a number, as was discussed in chapter two. As such, McCann proves not only an inhospitable environment for the characters, but may be incompatible with the norms of television narrative itself, which thrive on the similarities *and* differences between the individual and the group. As such, McCann proves a structurally and thematically appropriate setting for the narrative of *Mad Men* to begin drawing to a close.

The Re-evaluation of Identity

While some of the characters' individuating traits remain the same in the finale, and are indeed accentuated by the move to McCann, the narrative also signals the characters' capacity for change. Specifically, it suggests that the disbanding of Sterling Cooper has forced the characters' to re-evaluate their own goals and desires. Diegetically, this is certainly motivated by the way in which big life changes – such as the closure of a company – can incite reflections on the future. But this process also mirrors the way in which the disassembly of narrative dynamics can allow for character arcs to be incited or completed that would not have been possible before because the characters' identities where tethered to the identity of the community as a whole. No longer delimited by this connection to the community's trait-paradigm, the narrative can depict character change that otherwise may have jeopardised the series' coherent expansion. It is not surprising, then, that *Mad Men*'s characters find themselves reflecting upon their identities, or having an outright identity crisis, as the series nears its conclusion.

But in the case of *Mad Men*, the relationship between character change and the community is a complex one. The show's 1960s setting means that the male and female characters began in very different positions within this community. While the men were more assured of their place within it, the women had to fight for inclusion and for the right to possess some of its characteristic traits – ambition, independence. Thus, for the women, the narrative dynamics of *Mad Men* encouraged more 'traditional' trajectories of character development right from the start. Peggy, Joan and Betty have all gradually (at different paces and in different ways) had to learn to step outside of roles defined in relation to men – secretaries, wives, mothers – and interrogate their identities beyond these delimitations. And for them, the finale is an affirmation of this development – Peggy is pursuing her career as a copywriter, no longer in Don's shadow; Joan is starting her own business, independent of the men of Sterling Cooper; and even Betty, though terminally ill, is continuing her studies and refusing to subject her final months to the brutal side-effects of chemotherapy, in opposition to the advice of her doctors and her husband. For the men, on the other hand, the notion of 'progress' and 'development' has been more difficult to define. When Don's neighbour Carlton tells him that "We got it all" (1.3), his words are an echo of dozens of similar proclamations that will be made throughout the series. But where do you go from a position of allegedly having it all? One answer might be toward an appreciation of what you have.

Thus, in the finale, both Roger and Pete's futures are defined by a new – or renewed – appreciation of meaningful personal relationships, of family.

When Joan presents Peggy with the opportunity of a partnership in her new business, Peggy is torn between having her name on the door and continuing her work at McCann. Her friend Stan advises her to stay: "You have such a rare talent. Stop looking over your shoulder at what other people have" (7.14). Stan's words are an affirmation of the need to define one's individual identity outside of the pressures of the communal. In *Mad Men*, this relates not only to the characters' scrutiny of their ambitions after the dissolution of Sterling Cooper, but also speaks to the more general difficulty of defining one's identity in the face of social pressures and norms. Early on in the show, Betty grappled with just such a question. Speaking to her therapist, Betty recalled her mother's aspiration for her to be beautiful in order to find a man. Having now achieved this 'goal', she asks Dr Wayne, "But then what? Just sit and smoke and let it go till you're in a box?" (1.9). Betty's question acts as a thematic foreshadowing of her eventual fate. But her question – and the characters' questioning of their identities in general – also intersects with another important structural principle in *Mad Men* – the passage of time. For while my primary focus in this case study is the disassembly of *Mad Men*'s narrative dynamics, it is useful to note how this process intersects with another structural principle of the show, the passage of time and characters' relationship to it.

Closure, and the Indefinite Passage of Time

Ambition is certainly a trait that most characters in *Mad Men*'s core community share. But exactly what this ambition may look like is influenced not only by the social norms of 1960s America, but also by the characters' fraught relationship with the temporalities of their existence in general. Thus, the communal trait of ambition becomes intertwined with key themes within the show – an examination of both American society and of our personal experiences of time. The characters of *Mad Men* share an unrelenting desire for forward progress while simultaneously retaining a suspicion of what that might mean. "I have a life. And it only goes in one direction – forward," Don tells his half-brother, Adam, early on in the series (1.5). This will be a maxim that he, and many other characters, will repeat over the course of the show's seven seasons. And, of course, Don is not entirely wrong. The chronology of the series reminds us, as viewers, that historical time continues to move forward. We know that 1964 will follow 1963 and we also know, although the characters don't, some of the events that they will have to live through. But the question of what exactly

moving forward might mean on a personal level is less easy to define. As Don himself says to Roger, "It's your life. You don't know how long it's gonna be but you know it's got a bad ending. You have to move forward. As soon as you can figure out what that is" (2.9). For Don, moving forward usually becomes equated with erasing the past. In season one, Don ends his reunion with Adam with these words: "I'm gonna walk out that door, that's it. I'm not buying your lunch because this never happened" (1.5). Exactly one season later, Don shares this philosophy with Peggy after she has had a baby. "Get out of here and move forward," he tells her while visiting her in the hospital, "This never happened. It will shock you how much it never happened" (2.5).

But despite of – and often because of – the characters' desires to move forward, their new beginnings continue to be informed by the past. Indeed, the past has a tendency to repeat itself as characters fail to learn from what has come before. Consequently, second marriages become second divorces, new homes are sold off just like the old ones, and reorganized companies meet the familiar fate of being bought out by larger ones. The narrative of *Mad Men* continually emphasizes that progress cannot be defined through an obliteration of the past – appropriate for a medium in which serial accumulation is key for coherent expansion. Ambition is recurrently juxtaposed with inadequacy. But as *Mad Men* nears its conclusion, and the characters yet again face the need for a fresh start after the dissolution of the community and the disassembly of the show's dynamics, they also start to re-evaluate the very notion of progress. 'Ambition' begins to look a little different beyond the borders of the discourse. It is precisely these two processes working together that give the finale its full sense of closure. Not only do we leave the characters on the threshold of new beginnings – new jobs, new locales, new relationships – but we have reason to believe that these beginnings will be 'new' because of the characters' developed understanding of the 'old'. The reconciliation of this temporal tension between past and future in the finale manifests itself in a variety of ways for each of the main characters. And while there is unfortunately not enough room in this case study to examine each instance of this in detail, I would like to conclude by examining how Don's narrative is brought to a point of closure in the last episodes of the show.

For Don, *Mad Men*'s most narratively dominant character, the tension between the pull of the past and that of the future has been the greatest and his struggles with it have been emblematic of *Mad Men*'s themes as a whole. Thus, as the show moves toward its end, the trajectory of Don's plotline becomes a dramatic example of how this tension can be resolved, and how this resolution intersects with a need to define one's identity outside of the core

community of the series. Finding his new work environment at McCann incompatible with his often uncompromising independence, Don walks out of the agency mid-meeting and embarks on a road trip that will take him from New York to California (7.12). This road trip is thus a condensed representation of the manner in which the dynamics of *Mad Men* have been gradually pulled in two different directions – both geographic and temporal, as California has come to symbolize the new while New York stands as a symbol of the old. The road trip can also be interpreted in two ways with regards to one's individual experience of time and space. On the one hand, it can be seen as a personal journey, a process of self-discovery emphasized by associations with road-movie genre conventions. On the other hand, we question to what extent Don is using his road-trip as a process of self-discovery and to what extent he is simply trying to run away from himself, as he has done several times before. For the same image – a car in motion – can be a symbol of both moving forward and running away. Preparing for a pitch to American Airlines in season two, Don links forward motion with American culture. "There is no such thing as American history. Only a frontier," he declares (2.4). And so, through the road trip, we watch Don attempt to live out this slogan, driving cross-country until there is nowhere left to go and no more highway left to follow. He finds himself at the Californian retreat with Stephanie, a truly unplanned destination, stuck somewhere between history and a frontier.

At the retreat, Stephanie tries to deal with the emotions of giving up her child to his father. When she breaks down crying during a seminar, Don attempts to comfort her with words very similar to the ones he spoke to Peggy after she gave birth: "I just know how people work. You can put this behind you. It will get easier as you move forward." (7.14). But unlike Peggy, who embraced Don's philosophy, Stephanie calls him out on it. "Oh Dick, I don't think you're right about that," she tells him (7.14). The very act of Stephanie calling Don by his real name only emphasizes the fact that his past identity as Dick Whitman is still a part of his present and will continue to be a part of his future. And on some level, Don understands this himself. As he said to a flight attendant at the start of season three: "I keep going to a lot of places and ending up somewhere I've already been" (3.1).

After Stephanie leaves the retreat, Don finds himself in another seminar, listening to a stranger named Leonard talk about his loneliness. Leonard's speech triggers Don's own confrontation of his old wounds as he breaks down crying and stands up to embrace the stranger. It is perhaps significant that Leonard's speech is about being both in the company of others and simultaneously isolated from them. For Don, whose identity has always been founded on hiding his past, the process of aligning his traits with that of a community has

been a problematic one. But now, in the final moments of the series, he becomes a person who 'owns himself', to quote Weiner (Hamm & Weiner, 2015). And as Don achieves closure by reconciling past and future, his continual physical movement emphasized in the final episodes culminates in a moment of repose, as he sits meditating at dawn.

But to achieve this 'ownership' of self, Don first had to strip himself of all traces of a connection to others. Midway through the final season, Peggy asks Don to explain what he does when he's unsure about an idea for an ad. "Show me how you think," she tells him. "I start at the beginning again," Don explains, "See if I end up in the same place" (7.6). There is perhaps no better way to describe Don's actions in the final episodes of the series. Stripping his life of everything that defines it, from relationships to possessions, Don attempts to "start at the beginning again" and finds that in one crucial way, he does indeed end up in the same place. As Don sits meditating, more at peace than we have even seen him before, the camera moves in to a close-up of his face. Don smiles. The scene suddenly cuts to the famous Coca-Cola 'Hilltop' ad of 1971 – an advert that in reality was produced by McCann Erickson and in the diegesis is suggestively attributed to Don. Thus, the finale, prompted by the dissolution of the show's community, seeks to dismantle Don's trait-paradigm only to arrive back at what is perhaps Don's most dominant trait – he is an excellent ad man. Furthermore, it is rather thematically resonant that the Coke ad – which Don has potentially authored – is an advertisement centred on the ideal of unity as it depicts a diverse group of people coming together into a community, sharing a coke. It is thus a television advert with evocative parallels to the structures of television narratives.

"The new day brings new hope. The lives we've led, the lives we've yet to lead. A new day, new ideas, a new you" (7.14). These last words of dialogue in *Mad Men,* spoken by meditation instructor Vince, encapsulate a philosophy that has been at the core of the series' narrative from the very beginning. The mantra promises the possibility of a fresh start, of redefining oneself with each new day. But seven seasons of viewing have repeatedly demonstrated that new beginnings are not that simple. And the closing images of the series remind us of this once again. Interestingly, the final image of Don is an inverse of the one that opened the show: while season one began with a shot of the back of Don's head, season seven ends with a full-frontal close-up. Not only does this bring with it connotations of knowing Don better as a character, it also summarizes the narrative trajectory of the series. We end in a place that is both different and the same. Different because Don, along with the other characters, has resolved inner tensions rooted in an experience of time, but also the same in that Don is doing the same thing he was in the pilot – thinking up an ad campaign.

Indeed, the shot bears a close resemblance to the one in which Don had his big idea for the Lucky Strike campaign, half an hour into *Mad Men*'s first episode. Both shots begin at a medium distance and move in to a tighter close-up, while the soundtrack gives way to a background melody (non-diegetic score in the pilot, diegetic humming in the finale). These parallels suggest that Don has found a way to move forward by going back to what he knows, but this time with a new self-acceptance. In this way, Don's structural separation from the community enables and works together with other forms of closure – both the development of Don as a character, and a thematic harkening back to the start of the series. Thus, while the dissolution of the show's dynamics provides a structural justification for why the narrative must cease its serial proliferation, thematically the show ends by having characters finally accept their "serial condition", as O'Sullivan puts it – a condition in which the self is "both line and curve" (O'Sullivan, 2011: 126).

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Just as the serial narrative dynamics of a show are not the only structural principles that determine the process of a series' coherent expansion, so too are they not the sole structural principles that play a role in that series process of closure. Nonetheless, their dominant role in both processes needs to be acknowledged. The dismantling of a show's dynamics – achievable in a variety of ways – facilitates closure and justifies a conclusion by removing a key source of that show's regenerative capabilities. This sense of closure may then be amplified through other devices – the resolution of a particular plotline, the completion of a character arc, or thematic resonance. But it is helpful to consider these other closural devices within the broader context of serial narrative dynamics, from which they often emerge. The dissolution of the dynamics facilitates certain resolutions of plot and character change, just as the continual 'kinesis' of the dynamics facilitates the generation of plot and character change. *Mad Men* is a complex example of this – its final episodes move toward closure by resolving an intricately interconnected web of ongoing plotlines, character arcs and thematic tensions. But at the core of all of these processes, as with many television finales, is the dismantling of the show's dynamics, in this instance through a dissolution of its community. Without this relational entity to drive the narrative forward, it instead comes to a resting point. The DNA of the series, its machinery, are effectively put to rest.

Notes

[i] See also Dias Branco (2013: 101). There is an interesting parallel here with *Breaking Bad*'s final moments, as Walter White also ends the series by lovingly touching the objects of his 'craft' and work, reaffirming that the series has been founded on the increasingly strong bond between Walter and the drug trade, and specifically the process of cooking meth.

[ii] Miller's concept of the narratable and non-narratable relates in an interesting way to Wilson's observation that in television, a viewer's attention "is usually directed not at the web of presuppositions but at that which the terms of the life-world is 'unusual'" (1993: 25). In both analyses, then, choices are made regarding what is to be deemed 'ordinary' in the diegesis, and therefore not demanding attention or capable of generating story, and what is unusual and narratable. As I mention elsewhere, such choices have both formal and ideological implications.

CONCLUSION:
EMBRACING CONTINGENCY WHILE SEARCHING FOR STRUCTURE

"This collection represents a snapshot of the kind of serious and productive work being done on the serial form by scholars around the world. It is work that, like the form it analyzes, is necessarily 'to be continued'."

- Robert C. Allen (1995: 24)

"And thus I end my book with the three sweetest words for a scholar of seriality: to be continued."

- Jason Mittell (2015: 353)

I am by no means the first or only television scholar to use the open-ended quality of the medium I am studying to reflect on the nature of serial criticism. In the introduction, I argued that the questions around unity and fragmentation, of wholes and parts, that emerge when studying ongoing series are not necessarily unique to television narratives. These questions do, however, manifest themselves in television in unique and uniquely prominent ways. And so too with television scholarship: analysts in a range of fields will likely admit that there is more to be said about their subject of study. But with television the point becomes much more pronounced, inescapable. One of the biggest challenges I faced was reconciling this fact with the nature of my research – a detailed formal analysis of the structures of ongoing television narratives.

This is a problem that other scholars have foregrounded. In *Media of Serial Narrative*, Frank Kelleter writes: "describing commercial series from an immobile perspective – registering and comparing merely formal features, for example – captures only a modest part of their cultural productivity" (2017: 19-20). In a sense, the outlook I have taken is to accept the 'modesty' – the partial nature – of my theoretical approach. In some ways, formal analysis does indeed require an "immobile perspective". As Smith's notion of retrospective patterning suggests, formal analysis involves the process of *looking* back at the form being analysed (1968: 10). In addition, formal analysis also suggests a process of *stepping* back in order to see the form against a background, a context, that is not the form itself. However,

looking at narrative from a formalist perspective does not necessarily mean conceptualising the form itself as immobile. Instead, one can search for definitions – of form, of structure, of narrative, of character – that are able to accommodate contingency. Indeed, this was one of the main concerns of my introduction, in which I drew from discussions of form in poetry, literature, film as well as television, in order to find and develop definitions of structure that are suitable to the analysis of television. For, from the outset of this thesis, I have stated that my aim is not just to understand how television narratives are structured, but to understand how they are structured *to be ongoing*. This means admitting, first and foremost, that the form which is the object of study is subject to the effects of time. It also means acknowledging that the form is being continually shaped (and reshaped) by cultural practices. Thus, the narrative being analysed is not only mobile, but porous as well. As such, a formal analysis of it (perhaps, even any analysis of it) can only be incomplete, partial.

For Kelleter, it is important to "encourage an understanding of seriality as a practice *of* popular culture, not a narrative formalism *within* it" (2017: 19). Without denying the importance of Kelleter's approach, I hope that this thesis has also demonstrated the insights that a formalist perspective can contribute to our understanding of seriality. It is certainly true that the practices of commercial storytelling in a range of media inextricably influence a popular culture of serial reproduction. In addition, however, the specific storytelling practices of ongoing television series have honed a range of structural principles that have allowed series to thrive in this cultural environment. Kelleter describes serial narratives as "evolving narratives" (2017: 18) and "moving targets" (2017: 19). I certainly agree. And to understand our moving targets better, it can help to understand *how* they move, *how* they adapt. That is why I have found metaphors such as 'DNA' and 'machinery' appealing when discussing how ongoing series are structured.

When I initially began to develop the concepts explored in this thesis, I considered using diagrams to help visualise the structural principles that I was examining. However, I found that two-dimensional illustrations were largely insufficient to adequately map the concepts under discussion. Because if series have any sense of coherent formal identity, as I have argued they do, then this coherence does not emerge from an immovable arrangement of parts, but rather from a systematic ability to rearrange parts. Thus, not only is the structure of an ongoing series spatially complex – an intricate network of mutually defining, interconnected and overlapping elements – but it is also a structure that is continually being shaped over time. As such, those same interconnected elements are also always in the process of expanding or contracting, of shifting, of flowing. This, then, is the structure of ongoing

television narratives: more of an organic chemistry rather than a fixed architecture. So instead of continually using diagrams, I have called upon multiple metaphors to help visualise the structural principles I am analysing: DNA, Russian nesting dolls, machinery.

What all of these metaphors have in common is that they evoke things that can be taken apart, disassembled for the purposes of examination. In this way, my research follows a broadly structuralist bent, interested as it is in the relationship between parts and how they constitute a 'whole' that is greater than the sum of these parts. I wanted to break down a television series into its narrative components in order to examine how these components are formed – and re-formed – over time. Perhaps from some perspectives, the approach I have taken may appear too atomistic, too concerned with subdividing narrative components into ever smaller fragments. However, I would like to suggest that in this atomism lies a strength. For by better understanding the components of television narratives, we can also better understand the myriad of formulations and reformulations they can take. I was, however, very wary of the structuralist penchant for creating taxonomies, for which structuralism has been criticised (e.g. Bordwell, 2004). Thus, the primary task for me was less about classifying the varying formations that the narrative components can take, and more about understanding what properties of the narrative make such (re)formation possible. As such, my aim was to develop concepts that would enable an analysis of a range of television narratives, from episodic series, to serials, to complex narratives – narratives that often are analysed in relation to each other only so far as to be contrasted with one another. This required the development of concepts that are broad, in the sense of being foundational to a great variety of television narratives, as well as being flexible.

Although in this thesis I have borrowed from work done on narrative and form in other media, I have also sought to build on these pre-existing ideas in order to develop two concepts tailored for the analysis of ongoing television narratives specifically: 'coherent expansion' and 'serial narrative dynamics'. The term 'coherent expansion' describes the core tension that, I have argued, television narratives navigate: the need to retain a coherent formal identity while simultaneously multiplying episodes, plotlines, characters and settings in the pursuit of longevity. As in Krieger's notion of unity, the move toward coherence is conceptualised as a dynamic process, not a static formulation of parts: the "would-be autonomous part" is always in productive conflict with the "would-be totalising whole" (1989: 40). Describing the relationship between ongoing series and unity in this way allows for an analysis of a series' structure in a way that does not intrinsically deny the narrative's responsiveness to the effects of time and culture. Although the form itself remains the

primary subject of study, its borders are acknowledged to be shifting – in a constant state of negotiation, rather than stationary and impermeable. The challenge of analysing narrative from this perspective is finding concepts that explain how the narrative remains open, while simultaneously acknowledging that this openness is still qualified in some ways – the borders of the narrative may be fluid, but they are not absent altogether. It is this challenge that the concept of serial narrative dynamics was designed to help address.

In chapter one, I defined serial narrative dynamics as the formal interrelationships between individual characters and the collective communities they form. I argued that the various configurations these two narrative components can take help to produce the host of plotlines an ongoing series may cover in its lifespan. At the crux of this approach is an understanding of character as a source of both coherence *and* narrative potential (and thus expansion) in a series. This is achieved, first and foremost, by conceptualising characters as open constructs. Following Chatman, I thus defined characters as a paradigm of traits and not by their function in a given plotline (1978: 126). Rather, a character's traits can be called upon indefinitely in order to generate a range of plotlines, be they episodic or ongoing.

However, in any discourse a character can only be truly 'open' on an abstract, theoretical level. For as Woloch reminds us, a character's total personality is always delimited by the discourse that represents it (2003: 13). And although the discourse of a television series is much more vast than that of most stand-alone narratives, it is not infinite. However, because the discourse of a series is *indeterminate* for much of its run, television characters are delimited by their placement within it in a very specific way. That is, their recurring presence in the discourse is secured by their place within the show's community of characters. It is upon this dynamic that the coherent expansion of a series relies – it is not just that the narrative follows the action of a given character, but that it follows a *recurring set* of characters. Although the observation may seem simple, obvious even, it has extensive implications for how ongoing television narratives are structured. For it is through this dynamic that theoretically boundless potential is shaped into a bounded spectrum of possibilities for narrative generation. A show's serial narrative dynamics become the core structural principles that manage its attempts at coherent expansion.

In both chapters one and two, I argued that communities are the linchpin in an ongoing television narrative – the key to its coherent expansion. That is because communities are both the product of and justification for television's economic predilection for returning to a recurring group of characters, often in a recurring setting. Consequently, communities structure television narratives by structuring characters' serial presence within it; they

provide a reason for why a potentially diverse set of characters 'belong' together in one coherent narrative. This is why I have found 'community' to be an apt term for describing such recurring groups of characters, and especially Geraghty's definition of it: for in her writing on soap opera, Geraghty emphasises that communities are not constructed at the expense of the individual character (1991: 89). In this way, communities come to function much like microcosms of the narrative they help structure. As Geraghty argues, the unity of a community is a "chimera" that is "rarely pinned down. […] It becomes an ideal which has to be worked for" (1991: 85). Thus, much like the unity of the ongoing narrative, the unity of the community is never absolute but always in the process of being negotiated.

In defining a show's *serial* narrative dynamics in the way that I have – as the recurring and systematic interrelationships between characters and communities – I have opted to use a more inclusive understanding of seriality. That is, I have discussed seriality not just in terms of ongoing plotlines, but in terms of serialised characters and worlds. By doing so, I do not wish to imply that plot is intrinsically or theoretically less important in television series. Plot becomes the distinctly temporal manifestation of character traits and their configurations; and the dynamic shifts in these configurations over time can tell us a great deal about the trajectories a series is likely to take. I simply want to stress that plot is not the only – and often not the primary – *source* of seriality in a television narrative. Similarly, plot cannot be viewed as the only source of unity in an ongoing series. From this perspective, seriality becomes not just the continual deferment of closure, but the continual fostering of narrative possibility. Although the two statements may appear very similar, teasing out the distinction can be productive. For one, it can soften the teleological connotations that may be associated with the concept of unity. For unity becomes less about the state of completion, and more about the ongoing management of a coherent narrative form that is both regenerative and capable of generating multiplicity. This perspective on seriality (and unity) can produce reverberations across a range of aesthetic inquiries into television narratives. As the subsequent chapters in this thesis have demonstrated, it impacts on definitions of character function, on approaches to character change, and on discussions of closure in the context of ongoing series.

While chapter one sketched an outline of how serial narrative dynamics and their components may be defined, chapters two and three 'zoomed in' on these components in order to examine them more closely. In chapter two, I discussed how communities are structured and how they, in turn, structure the diegesis of a series. And in chapter three I traced the implications that a series' dynamics have on character change. In both chapters a

chief aim was to demonstrate that while television narratives are often associated with stability, their structural principles do not preclude the possibility of change – either in individual characters or in the diegesis as a whole. Rather, as I stated earlier, they create bounded alternatives for how change is likely to occur.

In chapter two I suggested that communities are intrinsically elastic entities – for like an elastic band, they possess a certain degree of 'tolerance', and within these parameters they may expand, contract, or change shape depending on how many entities are pulling at them. This elasticity is a product of the way communities are structured – of the way they are held together. In chapter one, I supplemented a literal, diegetic, notion of community as a collection of individuals with a more formal and abstract definition of it. Borrowing from Chatman's terminology, I defined the community as another paradigm of traits in the series' narrative – namely, an aggregate of the characters' shared traits. Taking both conceptions of community into account, in chapter two I then examined how some traits, and some characters, rise to greater dominance in the community than others – dominance that is expressed as centripetal force. In many series, the dominant characters and traits often work so symbiotically together in order to achieve structural stability that we may pay less attention to how these same elements can accommodate change. For when centripetal forces are separated from their usual state of redundancy, they can allow the community to expand or otherwise change shape. Thus, like the ongoing series itself, a community becomes greater than the sum of its parts – individual characters may enter and leave its borders without necessarily destroying the community identity wholesale. And because the community is the collective centre of the diegesis, its linchpin as I described it above, the shape of the community in turn affects the form of the entire ongoing narrative.

But because communities are more dominant than any one character in a series, this in turn affects how character identity is structured in an ongoing television narrative. In chapter three, I traced the implications this has on analysing character change. As in chapter two, I wanted to explore the spectrum of possibilities for change that a show's dynamics enable, rather than dividing that spectrum into specific categories. For although, historically, television characters have been inclined toward stability, this is not because the structural principles of ongoing narratives inherently preclude change. This becomes apparent when the 'functions' characters play in a show's dynamics are carefully analysed. It is true that characters are delimited in an ongoing series – their personalities are bounded, on the one hand, by the need to retain traits that tether them to community, and on the other hand, by the need to be individuated from them. But within these parameters, change, and development

more strictly defined (Pearson, 2007: 55), is possible. Sometimes such development may be less conspicuous because serial character development can occur through episodic plotlines spread over many seasons. And if seriality is not simply defined as a deferral of closure, then television narratives are well suited to questioning the very concept of change and development itself – revising its linear connotations and understanding change as more temporally complex, an instance of television's "ebb and flow" (Holdsworth, 2011: 34).

Perhaps more than any other chapter, the fourth and final chapter demonstrated the importance of defining ongoing television narratives not as incomplete structures in search of a final 'part', but rather as a set of structural principles that sustain a regenerating narrative form. Analysing series finales demonstrates that coherence and unity are states that an ongoing series is constantly 'managing', not an end-goal it is moving toward. Thus, closure in a series becomes less about completion and more about taking apart a series' source of seriality – its serial narrative dynamics. In this chapter I discussed the various ways in which serial narrative dynamics may be 'arrested' for the purposes of closure, either through formal deconstruction or diegetic separation. In line with the aims I have stated above, the ultimate goal of this chapter was not to create taxonomies of series finales. Rather, it was to show that, because the source of a series' generative capacities is the interconnected and complex relationships between characters and communities, most series typically achieve closure not simply through resolution, but through a dissolution of these relationships. Even when series do end with the resolution of important plotlines, this alone is not enough to provide closure, to provide a reason for why the story cannot go on – just as plot alone is not sufficient in explaining how serial narratives continue.

Throughout this thesis, I have stressed the 'flexibility' of serial narrative dynamics as an analytical tool – their ability to accommodate not only a range of television series, but also to trace any one series through cast changes and variations in plot. The structural dynamics of televisions series are able to be flexible in this way because they are not based on any set arrangement of narrative elements, but on the fluctuating interactions between two narrative components – characters and communities – that, in and of themselves, I have defined as open and elastic. While these interactions delimit characters and communities in certain ways, they also provide a television series with a range of narrative possibilities to pursue, not necessarily locking the series into a predetermined trajectory. Consequently, one thing that I have repeatedly tried to demonstrate in the detailed case studies at the end of each chapter is how the concepts I have been developing can be used to analyse series undergoing change. For despite the diversity of the series under analysis, that is something they all have

in common – as narratives that aired for a long time, they have all had to navigate relatively significant changes during this time. Sometimes these were unforeseen production circumstances, as with the cast changes in *Cheers*, or the aborted spin-off plans in *Glee*. And sometimes they were changes motivated by more premeditated production decisions, such as Piper's changing role in *Orange is the New Black*, or the diverging life-paths of the *Mad Men* characters that were used to bring the series to a point of closure.

In writing the case studies, I did have to make certain decisions about the approach I would take. I wanted to illustrate how the theoretical concepts being developed in the thesis could be used to take the "long view" (Thompson, 2003: X) in analysing ongoing series – taking in broad shifts in the narrative's form, but also able to relate these back to small details like specific scenes and lines of dialogue within individual episodes. In taking this approach, and going into as much detail as I did, I was unable to include other potential facets of this analysis. Chief among these is the detailed comparison of television series. Although I tried to draw examples from a range of series in the theoretical sections of each chapter, in the case studies I opted for in-depth analyses of individual series. However, as one advantage of the serial narrative dynamics is their applicability to a comparatively wide range of television narratives, an avenue for further research would certainly be to undertake detailed comparisons of various series. Especially interesting and insightful would be comparisons of series that are unlikely to be grouped together by other approaches. Because serial narrative dynamics were not developed in order to define any group style within the broader category of ongoing television narrative, they can be used to draw similarities between series that may initially appear different. In addition, the case studies were, of course, undertaken from the perspective of formal analysis. There is, therefore, a great deal of scope for investigating if and how the concepts I have been developing can be useful for other theoretical approaches also.

Perhaps the primary area where the utility of serial narrative dynamics may be tested is in the discussion of the relationship between form and meaning.[i] Although in the case studies some of the meanings being conveyed by the series were implicit in the analysis, there is definitely a need to explore more directly how serial narrative dynamics can be used to analyse the meanings and ideologies of a show. I believe that a flexible approach to television form can help improve our abilities to track how meaning can, also, shift in a series over time. Building on the analyses I have already done, for example, we might ask what it says about the gender politics of *Cheers* that Frasier can successfully integrate into the bar's community when Diane cannot. Or we might question how successful *Orange is the New*

Black is in using its form to portray the perspectives of minorities. Does *Glee*'s emphasis on hierarchies undermine the inclusivity of representation the series seems to strive for? And when *Mad Men*'s community is separated in the finale, what is the full significance of the women staying behind in New York while the men are depicted elsewhere? Because the concept of serial narrative dynamics is constructed around character interrelationships, it is an approach to serial form that can be especially useful for the analysis of identity politics on television. Thus, while I have used this concept to examine how characters are used by the series' form for the purposes of coherent expansion, we can also analyse how this delimitation of character – their configurations of alignment with, and difference from, a collective group – impacts upon how their identity is presented, how their traits are assigned meaning in a series.

Another approach that I have not been able to foreground is the evaluative one. I have focused on asking how serial narrative dynamics and their components function to ensure coherent expansion, not asking what it means for them to function *well*. However, even the term 'coherent expansion' comes with potentially evaluative connotations. As I discussed in the introduction, the general concept of unity comes with potentially honorific values attached, and these certainly migrate into both scholarly and viewer evaluations of some television series too. Discussing exactly how unity may be defined in the context of television narrative may help address the problem of evaluating one medium by the aesthetic norms of another. That is why I have opted to use the more specific term 'coherent expansion'. Even so, certain viewers may regard the two aspects of this process differently: some may prefer stable dynamics in the series that they watch, while others may value the vast and expansive qualities a series is capable of. For example, at the end of the *Glee* case study, I briefly raised the question of whether the series pushed its coherent expansion too far: since coherent expansion relies on maintaining a productive tension between coherence *and* expansion, did *Glee* progress in such a way that moved the series too far away from its formal identity? As Blanchet and Vaage write: "After several seasons […] even a so-called quality television series may eventually have to overstretch its established narrative scenarios in order to keep telling stories about familiar characters" (2012: 25).

To be sure, then, I do not think that the term 'coherent expansion' will eliminate evaluative debates, but I do hope it will provide medium-specific terminology with which to have them. Similarly, we may ask whether some series employ their dynamics better than others – that is, do they use the structural capabilities of their form in ways that are more or less effective than others? Because serial narrative dynamics can produce a variety of

narrative formations – both episodic series that revert to a 'status quo' and serialised narratives such as the complex narratives discussed by Mittell – we should still be wary of immediately evaluating one genre by the standards of another, as Geraghty rightly notes (2003: 62). That said, there may be areas where the cross-text comparison I suggested above can be productively paired with cross-text evaluation. We may ask, for example, why one sitcom was more successful, structurally, in replacing a lead actor than another. We may also make the same comparison between a sitcom and a drama, not necessarily ignoring the specifics of each genre (structural or otherwise) but rather *beginning* the analysis by acknowledging the structural principles that they share *and then* noting how they diverge. This approach, I hope, can lead to a better understanding of how a variety of series use structural principles typical to television narrative form, *and* an understanding of how they use them differently.

Finally, it is necessary to note one other important limitation of this thesis, and that is the focus on US prime-time and premium programming. As such, there is opportunity to explore how different production circumstances in different parts of the world may impact on the dynamics of the narratives they produce. I have chosen to focus on US content because of the pervasive influence it has had on television storytelling across the globe. However, there is a great deal of research to be done on how other national contexts adapt and depart from the formal strategies of US television series. As a South African scholar, that is certainly one avenue of further research that I hope to pursue. And, as with the point on evaluation above, I believe that the concepts developed here may be of use as terminology with which to conduct this research. In addition, the sample field may be widened in other ways – taking in not only television narratives from other national contexts, but other economic models of producing series as well, such as webisodes. Because serial narrative dynamics are partly a product of production norms such as recurring casts, it is interesting to examine if and how the concept can be adapted to narratives created through different economic and technological means. This may apply not only to smaller-scale, more independent productions like web series, but larger-scale big-budget storytelling as well.[ii] For example, another area of research that I would like to investigate is the Marvel cinematic universe, which functions in many ways – formally – as a television series rather than a series of films (and this, in turn, signals the influence of other serialised media on television, such as the norms of comic book storytelling). In this way, further research may also overlap with studies of transmedia storytelling – another theoretical perspective that I was unable to include in this thesis.

With all of these areas for further research noted, I would thus like to end my thesis in the tradition of scholars such as Allen and Mittell: not with a full stop, but with an ellipsis. For if there is a way for formal analysis to be less "immobile", then this seems an important step in that direction: admitting that after any iteration of the analysis, there can always be another. Movement is created through multiplication. And such ellipses can also provide bridges to other theoretical perspectives on television series – vast narratives that, rather unsurprisingly, encourage vast scholarly outputs. Let me then conclude by returning to one of Frank Kermode's observations about endings: "But the truly imaginative novelist has an unshakable 'respect for the contingent'; without it he sinks into fantasy, which is a way of deforming reality. […] We must not falsify it with patterns too neat, too inclusive; there must be dissonance" (1967: 130). Even though I am writing as a scholar and not a novelist, I am eager to accept Kermode's advice. Looking back and looking over the series I have studied, I have, indeed, seen certain tendencies in their structural arrangement of parts, certain patterns. But I acknowledge that this is what they are – tendencies, patterns that are subject to change over time and due to the influence of culture. Thus, I hope that as the DNA of television narratives evolves, the concepts I have been developing here, in part or whole, may evolve with them.

Notes

[i] As Mittell puts it, "having a more robust account of how television storytelling works should give us a deeper understanding of its meanings and cultural power" (2017: 147). Woloch similarly notes that his formal analysis of character distribution in the novel can be "productively integrated *back into* psychological, aesthetic, thematic, and ideological readings" (2003: 196). And Bordwell argues that although it "is common to think of the Formalists as advocating a rarefied division of scholarly labour", that this oversimplifies their position (1985: xii).

[ii] For an earlier discussion of how film and television storytelling are moving closer together, see Thompson (2003: 75-105). See also Macdonald's comment about the use of series bibles in other media (2018: 9).

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