MODERN CLASSICISM IN CONTEMPORARY SERIALIZED TELEVISION.

Lost in Vast Dispersed Narration
Master thesis

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The still used on the front page comes from Jimmy Kimmel Live (ABC, May 4th 2010)
Preface

'For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply is what he listens to impressed upon his memory. When the rhythm of work has seized him, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself. This, then, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled. This is how today it is becoming unraveled at all its ends after being woven thousands of years ago in the ambiance of the oldest forms of craftsmanship.'


Writing a preface to a thesis, like oral and contemporary storytelling, demands a degree of craftsmanship and a certain affinity with repetition and clichés for people to remember it for years to come. Like all my predecessors in this activity, I have endured a wide range of emotions and mental states: from pure joy to uncontrollable despair, from fulfillment to loss, and from pride to shame. Most of the negative associations rested mostly in the middle part of my thesis. As Lost’s co-showrunner Carlton Cuse stated in an interview: ‘we knew how to begin and where to end; the middle part was the most horrible part.’ My personal maelstrom, nonetheless, proved to be one of the most rewarding endeavors I have undertaken to date. Reflecting and theorizing on the two visual storytelling media that I hold dearest, film and television, could not be more welcome as one of the final products as a graduate student.

It is fitting to thank some people from the university ranks whom where both formative and inspirational in my (perhaps slightly too long) journey through the waving fields of film and television studies. First of all, I would like to thank Annie van der Oever for sparking my interest in film studies, through her insightful, sophisticated, and every now and then impenetrable and dizzying seminars. I also would like thank Susan Aasman for being the ideal bridge between my past life as a history major and my current ‘performance’ as a graduate film and television student. But I also appreciate her patience with me and her non-intrusive tips and tricks to write a (hopefully) acceptable thesis. Miklós Kiss was pivotal in ‘streamlining’ my somewhat chaotic thoughts and proved to be more than a ‘mere’ guide in the writing and thinking process. Through our shared love of certain manifestations of high and low culture (the opening fanfare ‘Sonnenaufgang’ of Strauss’ Also sprach Zarathustra will never be the same again), and my privileged position as his assistant for two semesters we occasionally transcended the traditional (implied) hierarchy of the pupil-teacher, worker-boss, slave-master dichotomic string.

Finally, I should not forget to mention my parents – for their love, patience, trust, and support – and my favorite ‘amateur narratologist’ Svenja, with whom I over the years speculated and theorized on how (and if) those silly Abrams, Lindelof, Cuse, Orci et. al. will be capable of bringing this unique serial narrative named Lost to a gratifying end. We are still not sure if we are happy or sad...
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1. Introduction

‘Television series are not only better than blockbusters. The artistic film is also out-winged by television. Even the novel is at stake’. Peter de Bruijn NRC-Handelsblad, November 5th 2010

With this provocative statement the Dutch quality paper NRC-Handelsblad’s chief film editor made an interesting essayist analysis of contemporary American fiction television. In terms of production value, acting merits and storytelling techniques contemporary television drama is heralded as the most interesting and accessible, yet challenging provider of fictional amusement. Ranging from series as diverse as The Sopranos (HBO, 1999-2007), Madmen (AMC, 2007-...), Lost (ABC, 2004-2010), The Wire (HBO, 2002-2008), and True Blood (HBO, 2008-...) De Bruijn states that television fiction surpasses the awe for the traditional cinematic experience of confined more or less self-contained narratives. The implications of the shift in favoring television storytelling also becomes clear in a recent debate between eminent film scholar David Bordwell and pioneering television scholar Jason Mittell. On their respective blogs they argue what the difference between cinematic and televisual storytelling encompasses. For Bordwell, a well-known movie buff, the sheer effort to invest time and emotional involvement in stretched story and character development of television serials is, for him, not worth the wile: ‘I see the difference between films and TV shows this way. A movie demands little of you, a TV series demands a lot. Film asks only for casual interest, TV demands commitment. (...) With film you’re in and you’re out and you go on with your life. TV is like a long relationship that ends abruptly or wistfully. One way or another, TV will break your heart.’

Mittell, not intent on antagonizing his former grad student professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, claims that Bordwell’s argument has a more personal than scholarly tone: ‘I’ve never seen a condemnation of another medium for being comparatively too involving, too much of a commitment, and involving characters that are too deeply drawn – usually television is dismissed for being too trivial, shallow, and ephemeral. And that’s because Bordwell is not condemning or even critiquing television – he’s telling us why it doesn’t work for him.’ The personal argument provided by Bordwell on disliking the appropriate amount of effort involved with consuming television drama narratives, stands in stark contrast with the initial resistance against television in the academic world and cultural critics. Stemming from the tradition of the neo-Marxist Frankfurter Schuhle, cultural criticism in Western Europe and the United States analyzed the new medium with great hesitation. Especially within the context of the dominance of capitalism and the ‘Culture Industry’ Theodor W. Adorno were not too charmed with the idea that this new medium could severely shallow and indoctrinate the mind of ordinary culture consumers. In 1953 Adorno wrote an essay on television: ‘How to Look to Television’. Although the medium was still in its juvenile years, its prospects as a medium with a great influence on its audience was already signaled by Adorno. His opening words seem to suggest an open and unbiased approach:


‘The effect of television cannot be adequately expressed in terms of success or failure, likes or dislikes approval or disapproval. Rather, an attempt should be made, with the aid of depth-psychological categories and previous knowledge of mass-media, to crystallize a number of theoretical concepts by which the potential effect of television – its impact upon various layers of the spectators personality – could be studied.’

His conclusion is nonetheless relentless. Television, as a commodified mass-medium, is by extension bound to produce commodified products for a large receptive, compliant audience. It is of course of the greatest importance to underline that Adorno is essentially a modernist thinker and a cultural pessimist. The extreme commodification of cultural products is one his greatest concerns. Art in his view should always be formally authentic, thus suggesting an avant-garde and autonomous position in relation towards commodities such as the Cultural Industry is providing for the cultural dupes. In the eighties and nineties of the previous century the emergence of Cultural Studies in the US and UK somewhat tipped the negative academic attitude towards popular culture and television to a more favorable position on the scale. ‘First wave’ television scholars like Raymond Williams, Horace Newcombe, John Fiske, Ien Ang, and Jane Feuer tried to point out that popular culture in general, and television in specific, wasn’t necessarily a shallow mass product and could very well be multi-layered and complex in its process of semiosis.

Contemporary popular cognitive science author Steven Johnson even makes a strong case to regard popular culture making the ‘consumer’ smarter. In his often quoted Everything Bad is Good For You (2005) Johnson speaks of the growing complexity of narrative forms in popular media as television. I have to underline that his book is not exactly the most thorough piece of academic reflection, but it makes some interesting remarks about television which should not be ignored. Johnson states that contemporary television invites its consumers to use his cognitive abilities in a complex manner: ‘[p]art of that cognitive work comes from following multiple threads, keeping often densely interwoven plotlines distinct in your head as you watch.’ Especially in relation to serial television drama this statement in his view applies the most. The threads of this dispersed form of narrative become far more complex during the last two decades. From an academic point of view, Johnson sadly does not offer a rigid theoretical or narratological basis for this claim in his book. But let us turn to the academic field of television studies to see if these claims can be defended theoretically.

The last ten years even ushered in an era of approaches that not solely focus on the sociological aspects of television. Studies of television genres, aesthetics and narrative gradually emerged in academic discourse. One of the front men of this 'second wave' of television studies is Jason Mittell. Influenced by Bordwell’s concept of the ‘poetics of cinema’ he tried to lay out a similar path for television; giving equal attention to the different phases and interrelatedness of television’s formal practices, production, distribution and reception. In his view television aesthetics, narration and genres are essential fields of research if you want to make academic analysis of the medium. Mittell also published an article, ‘Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television’ (2006) in which he defends the position that contemporary US fiction in television is undergoing a transformation:


Yet just as 1970s Hollywood is remembered far more for the innovative work of Altman, Scorsese, and Coppola than for the more commonplace (and often more popular) conventional disaster films, romances, and comedy films that filled theatres, I believe that American television of the past twenty years will be remembered as an era of narrative experimentation and innovation, challenging the norms of what the medium can do. Especially the emphasis on narrative innovation and the comparison to New Hollywood is worthy starting point of investigation. Although he doesn’t really offer a thorough analysis in his article, he wants to point out that some television shows like the *Sopranos*, *The Wire* and *Lost* are in dire need of study by the academic community because of their innovative narrative structure, aesthetics and modes of production, distribution, and reception. The latter mentioned show, *Lost*, is one of Mittell’s personal and scholarly darlings. On his blog he participated in the discussions spawned by the avid fans on the narrative developments and enigmas. Popular internet sites like www.lostblog.net, lostpedia.wikia.com, and www.timelooptimewatch.com were all influential examples of how a large number of viewers started theorizing and collecting information on the show’s enigmatic and constantly expanding mystery-driven narrative web. In his *Television and American Culture* (2009) Mittell highlights the rising and unexpected success of *Lost*:

‘[t]he pilot cost[ed] a reported $12 million, one of the most expensive television episodes ever made. Additionally, the story of a plane crash on mysterious island does not fit clearly into any established television genre. Critics anticipating a scripted version of the reality hit *Survivor* were clearly off-base. The cast contains a few television veterans, but no stars guaranteed to draw an audience by name alone. Reportedly there was such apprehension among ABC executives about the potential success of the series that they almost pulled the show from the schedule over the summer, afraid of being saddled with an expensive flop. But within a year, the show regularly placed in the top 20 on Nielsen’s weekly rating charts, performed strongly with youth demographics, released a top selling DVD, spawned a vast number of websites [and books] dedicated to decoding the island’s mysteries, won six Emmy Awards including one for Best Drama, and inspired a number of prime time imitators – the surest sign of television success. Looking closely at the show’s formal practices can help to explain its remarkable and surprising success.’

But how to approach *Lost*’s formal practices? One of the strongest formal elements is its narrative structure. As Mittell states in his ‘Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television’, *Lost*’s intricate mystery-driven, multi-protagonist narrative structure compels large numbers of the audience to become *amateur narratologists*: ‘(...) viewers want to be surprised and thwarted as well as satisfied with the internal logic of the story. In processing such programs [like *Lost*] viewers find themselves both drawn into a compelling diegesis (...) and focused on the discursive processes of storytelling needed to achieve each show’s complexity and mystery.’ This compelling diegesis in *Lost* is procured through several interesting narrative devices like extensive character-centred flashbacks, flashforwards (or foreshadowing), time-travelling and a ‘parallel universe’ (coined flash-sideway) construction. Jason Mittell sees

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evidence in the sort of narrative tactics the show makes – he speaks of *narrative pyrotechnics* and the *narrative special effect* – of a growing tendency to 'push the operational aesthetic to the foreground, calling attention to the constructed nature of narration and asking us to marvel at how the writers pulled it off; often these instances forgo realism in exchange for a formally aware quality in which we watch the process of narration as a machine rather than engaging in its diegesis'.

To cut Mittell's argument short, besides the involvement in storyworld and character background consistency – a fan habit that goes back to Philistine fans of the *Star Trek* television franchise (CBS, 1966-2005), *Doctor Who* (BBC, 1963-...), and numerous soaps – the emphasis is shifting towards complex questions about the 'machinery' of the serial television drama narrative: manipulations in plot and event. This tendency of far-going manipulations in plot and event also became manifest in cinema over the last decades. Bordwell sees an increase in cinematic narratives that employ tactics as time scrambling plots and forking-path narratives to break from classical storytelling principles. But has Mittell's description of the televisual narrative always prevailed? And how is television's relation to film described over the years?

In the tradition of thinking on television John Ellis' *Visible Fictions. Cinema, Television and Cinema* (first published 1982) is one of the first works that gives a thorough attempt to define the difference between cinematic and televisual forms of narration. Ellis states that the narrative form of cinema is sequential, focusing on its internal cohesion: 'the initial equilibrium that is disrupted towards a new harmony'. Television however has a more stretched form of narrative. Its characteristics lie not in the achievement of harmony and final closure, but in 'the continuous refuguration of events'. This refuguration implies that on a basic story level, every event happens again and again, with minor changes. Ellis furthermore he states that there are two different branches of television drama narrative; the series and the serial. The former is composed of several segments that together form a strong cohesion on the episodic level. So, in the series every episode stands alone, with a minimal narratological reference to other episodes. The serial is a narrative that has some fundamental elements that are dispersed and stretched over several episodes. These elements (like love affairs, rivalry, strong antagonistic clashes) perpetuate themselves, never fundamentally change and never come to a conclusion. A perfect example in this regard is a daytime soap opera which, hypothetically, can run for years and years without a definitive conclusion, and is always pushed forward by the same kinds of events. As my discussion of Kirstin Thompson (*Storytelling in Film and Television*, 2003) and Jason Mittell's (*Television and American Culture*, 2008) more recent works on television will show, Ellis' description of the serial and series does not hold ground any more. Thompson and Mittell are also helpful in giving an indication on why this proliferation of the long-term serial television narrative has taken such a flight over the last couple of decades.

But before I can start to begin to treat Ellis' and more contemporary notions of televisual narratology, I will start with its cinematic counterpart. I will approach the narratological aspect of televisual storytelling from the well developed tradition by David Bordwell. In his recent *Poetics of Cinema* (2008), he synthesises his body of work on film

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8 I Mittell, 'Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television', 38.


11 Ibid.
theory from the past decades. In his treatment of the classical Hollywood narrative Bordwell distinguishes three dimensions to approach the subject: (1) the *storyworld* (its agents, circumstances, and surroundings), (2) *plot structure* (the arrangement of the parts of the narrative), and (3) *narration* (the moment-by-moment flow of information about the storyworld). In my first chapter I will retrace Bordwell’s arguments concerning the storyworld and the narration in classical cinema. As his argument will make clear, classical storytelling depends on a strict *narrative economy* that ensures the subordination of time and space to the folk-psychological cause-and-effect-driven narrative logic. The aspect of plot structure will be dealt with according to Thompson’s *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*. She makes an argument that, although classical cinema’s four-part plot structure still proliferates to this day, New Hollywood (or modern classicist, as she prefers to call it) cinema since the 1970s added a relatively short fifth act: the final lesson. Furthermore Thompson states that the plot is character-driven, and the number of plotlines that ensue during the narration, depend on the number of protagonists. Moreover I will explore Bordwell’s elaboration on new narrative developments in cinema, which will also be helpful in analyzing contemporary televsional narratives.

My final chapter will deal with an analysis of the quintessential example of complex early 21st century televsional storytelling: *Lost*. Since the show was first broadcasted on September 22 2004, it spawned public, critical, and academic acclaim. Besides Mittell’s admirable academic attention to television and *Lost*, there are however not so many comprehensive narratological publications on the two subjects. David Lavery, another self-proclaimed admirer of *Lost* is a partial exception. In his article *'Lost and Long-Term Television Narrative’* (2009) Lavery argues that the show owes a great deal to the 19th century (serial) Dickensian narrative. Like Mittell, he focuses on its narrative qualities of ingenious long-term plotting procured by a large ensemble of protagonists, and eccentric (in his term Baroque) use of unusual narrative devices, he nonetheless never makes clear how it exactly works. And this is one of the gaps I want to jump into. By using insights derived from both film and television-oriented narratology, I hope to give headroom for a more thorough analysis of just one exceptional show available on television. I want to show that contemporary serial narratives like *Lost*, despite its far-reaching reliance on narrative core elements of classical cinema, can bend the norms significantly. During my analysis I will make a modest argument that *Lost*’s narration can be seen as a form of *perversion*. Although this may seem rather peculiar – or even a downright accusation of soiled intent on the creators side – I will use the term etymologically; an away-turning of formal norms through overtly self-conscious devices to delay story comprehension. This is in my opinion maybe even a better term than narrative pyrotechnics or ‘Baroque’ narrative devices since these metaphors seem to suggest that these more offbeat narrative tactics procure a spectacular narrative event; just for the sake of awe and astonishment. Although I’m not denying that a sense of ‘marvel’ is part of the experience of these devices, I think they serve a more structural than spectacular purpose in *Lost*’s narrative.

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The comparison Jason Mittell made between contemporary television drama and New Hollywood, on first glance seems a very tempting and promising one. But to fully understand, and to critically examine this assumption, I will have to give an overview of the manner in which theorizing around classical Hollywood and New Hollywood storytelling has taken form. In the two following paragraphs I want to lay out a path towards televisuial drama narrative, by first starting at the thinking about cinematic narration. The paragraph on Bordwell mainly focuses on the most basic notions of classical Hollywood narration; that is, his theoretical grounding of his cognitive formalist approach and the basic characteristics of Hollywood narration, and its relation with cinematic time and space. When treating Bordwell's notions of storyworld en narration I will try to stay close to his earlier publications on classical Hollywood narration, such as *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985) and *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985), since he more than once, reiterates the basic premise of his cognitive inferential take on film narrative in *Poetics of Cinema*.

Kristin Thompson conversely sheds her light on the plot structure of Hollywood narration. She approaches the debate whether Hollywood through its history has changed and therefore, nowadays can be coined as 'New Hollywood' or 'post-classical Hollywood'. As Thompson will try to underline in her *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*, the narration has not much changed if one compares films from different periods in time. She nonetheless proposes a reconsideration of the influential Aristotelian tripartite plot structure which has, by script writer guru's and narrative theorists, been ascribed to the classical Hollywood narrative. She also devotes some of her attention on three clusters of protagonists that also influence the plot structure. After my exposition of Bordwell and Thompson's arguments, I want to place their position in a more contemporary debate concerning the forking-path/multiple-draft narratives. This is important, since especially Bordwell's treatment of this new development in cinematic narration is severely influenced by his notions of classical storytelling. My elaboration on the theorizing on puzzle/forking-path and network narratives is also important because it will play an important role in my arguments concerning the growing complexity in televisuial storytelling.

2.1 David Bordwell on Classical Hollywood Narration.

David Bordwell can be seen as one of the godfathers of narrative film theory. Although he is well-known for his academic distaste of, mostly, French (post-)structuralist film analysis which was in vogue in the 70s and 80s academic discourse on film narration, he also tried to give a systematic account on how narration functions in film. Bordwell's academic inspirations stem more from the Russian Formalist tradition, which had a profound influence on his ground breaking *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Different from the structuralist position, Bordwell does not consider film to be a syntagmatic 'text', as another godfather of narrative film theory, Christian Metz, proposed via a semiotics of cinema: the 'Grande Syntagmatique'. With the concept of the 'Grand Syntagmatique' which Bazin developed over the 60s

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and 70s of the previous century, he tries to argue that film more or less functions as language. So when one uses the structuralist paradigm, film can be, like a language, segmented into constitutive interrelated elements. If these elements or building blocks are discerned one can try to analyse the relationship between these elements, and their ensuing meaningful properties. The main question that drives Metz in his analysis of the semiotics of film is; 'how does film constitute itself as a narrative discourse?' To answer this question, Metz uses two important concepts which are the basis of his theory. The concept diegesis, concerns itself with the complete denotative quality of cinema. To put it short; the diegesis in Metz’s view encompasses the narration, the implied fictional space and time continuum by the narration, and the implications (perceptual, and sensual) the cinematic text has at the level of the recipient.

The second concept, the notion of binary oppositions, plays an important role when Metz tries to conceptualize the manner in which the communicational transference of story information is achieved in film. Metz concurrently discerns eight syntagmatic species – or to put differently; eight autonomous narrative elements – that govern time, space and story material through montage; the (1) autonomous shot, (2) parallel syntagm, (3) linked syntagm, (4) descriptive syntagm, (5) alternating syntagm, (6) scene, (7) episodic sequence, and the (8) ordinary sequence. So, the smallest autonomous narrative element in this cinematic language, the shot, can be expanded to more complex structures with specific functions in the distribution of information concerning the make-up of the diegetic world in terms of time and space, but also in terms of story material and meaning.

Bordwell, theoretically and methodologically, differs greatly from this paradigm of cinema semiotics. Different from Metz’s inductive communicational model, Bordwell prefers a deductive inferential model. As Robert Stam emphasizes in his treatment of the semiotic legacy in film theory, Metz’s notion of cinema language can be best described as a form of deferred (or one-way) communication. Bordwell however proposes an inferential model where the spectator deductively interacts with the information provided by the film. In his collaborate effort, The Classical Hollywood Cinema (first edition 1985) co-written with Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson, Bordwell gives a general introduction of his theoretical approach towards film. Bordwell discerns three levels or systems on which classical Hollywood style functions: the systems of (1) narrative logic, (2) cinematic time, and (3) cinematic space.

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16 Christian Metz in his work relates back to one of the founding fathers of modern structuralism, Ferdinand de Saussure, who distinguishes two separate linguistic concepts langue and langage. Although it is a highly technical and complex discernment which I will not pursue in this note, Metz argues that film language functions on the level of the latter. Langage is described by de Saussure as the practical, less systematic, daily spoken language, as opposed to langue; an abstract bilateral language system that is shared by a community. See: Robert Stam, ‘Cine-Semiotics’ in: Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis (eds.), New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics, Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and Beyond London etc.; Routledge 1992, 29-69. cf. 35


18 Ibid., 41-42.

19 Stam, ‘Cine-Semiotics’, 34.

20 He delineates the period between 1917-1960 – when the mode of production in the Studio System was considered quite homogeneous, – although there can be made arguments against this periodization. See: Bordwell, Staiger, Thompson, The Classical Hollywood Cinema. Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960 (rev. ed.) London; Routledge 2004, 3.

These systems are quite elaborately worked out in the earlier mentioned *Narration in the Fiction Film*. The main line of reasoning of Bordwell in this study lies in the storytelling capabilities of the (in cinema dominant) Hollywood fiction film. The systems function in such a capacity that storytelling actualises unity, clarity, comprehension and redundancy.

Above all, storytelling must be transparent unless obscurities are part of the strategy to delay crucial information in order to reconstruct the story or to create an emotional affect. To theoretically strengthen this argument, Bordwell applies the concepts of *fabula* and *syuzhet* along the line of the Russian Formalist literary critics, whom describe narration as events in a chronological cause-and-effect-chain within a given time-frame and spatial surrounding. The *fabula* (story) is however not present in the film, but an imaginary construct by the spectator that is cued by the *syuzhet* (plot) that is presented in the film. The *syuzhet* in other words is the formal and stylistic organisational construct of events, time and space, as it is represented by the film, which not necessarily follows a chronological order. Also the parallelism of events, in classical cinema, cannot be literally provided for by the *syuzhet*, but should be constructed in the fabular rendering by the spectator. This latter element is essential in differentiating Bordwell from other scholars with a one-way communicational notion of film narrative like Metz. Bordwell integrates a cognitive approach in his theorizing which bestows an important role to spectator involvement. This cognitive approach towards a theory of narration in film on which Bordwell already elaborated in his *Narration in the Fiction Film* gets a reaffirmation in his subsequent *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* and *Poetics of Cinema*.

Profoundly influenced by the Austrian-British art historian and philosopher Ernst Gombrich, Bordwell postulates a theory wherein the viewer is actively involved in the mental creation of a diegetic world which is presented via the *syuzhet*. This mapping of *syuzhet* material, as a cognitive process, is dependent on two distinct mental concepts: *cognitive schemata* and *mental sets*. The former relates to the 'traditional formal pattern of rendering subject matter'. Recapitulated briefly, this means that the artist of a work of art is trained in modelling its subject matter, whether it be a phenomenological or fictitious (and maybe even an abstract or a fantastical) reality, in such a capacity that it can be rendered cognitively by the spectator. The spectator, by extension, shares the same basic, canonical or normative modelling schemata as the creator of the work of art. The artist nonetheless can decide to alter or change familiar forms in order to achieve a certain strategy like uncertainty, delay, suspense, and so on. As Bordwell underlines in *Poetics of Cinema*; our cognitive capability of deduction which the narrative exploits, is based on ordinary understanding or *folk psychology*:

>'Narratives exploit proclivities, habits, and skills we take for granted – sharpening them, twisting them, and subjecting them to confirmation or questioning. Narratives use folk psychology, which is notoriously unreliable in certain matters but nevertheless remain our court of first effort. In real life, it may not be fair to judge someone on our first impressions, but we do, and narratives capitalize on this tendency.'

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22 Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 49.


These formal psychology-driven strategies, in part, seem to function in a capacity that has been proposed by the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky in his influential article ‘Art as Device’ (1917). Shklovsky argues that the true effort of poetry should be to complicate our daily, automatized view (or perception) of the world through its own formal characteristics. Shklovsky accounts for two formal devices; ostranenie and zatrudnenie. Ostranenie, Shklovsky most influential concept, is a formal strategy where a known element which is part of daily perception gets complicated or defamiliarized. The delayment of understanding, as a formal device, is provided for by zatrudnenie.

Although Bordwell draws influence from Shklovsky, and broaches the concept of ostranenie, he downplays this influence with his own terminology. Delayment and defamiliarization in Bordwell’s terms aren’t necessarily agents in influencing the classical plot, but they are a very important strategy for art cinema. But to activate strategies of suspense, delay and so on in the spectator, the concept of mental sets is important: through our biological cognitive disposition, experience of the phenomenological world, but also through our training in, and knowledge of, conventionalized perception, we scrutinize new experiences and try to appropriate the fictional world. Bordwell uses another term to describe the spectator’s mental sets in a more common way as ‘viewer expectations’. These expectations are the starting point for the spectator to confront the developing narrative through the stylistic cues which are provided by the syuzhet. At the moment of assimilation of the first parts of syuzhet material, the spectator, in Bordwell’s constructivist view, starts to set out hypotheses. These hypotheses, from the moment of their inception, will continue to be scrutinized constantly, as new syuzhet cues function as testing material in order to validate, discard, or alter them: ‘[t]he spectator frames and tests expectations about the upcoming story information. Since hypotheses exemplify the anticipatory quality of schema-driven perception.’ It is not my intention to further explore the theoretical validity of Bordwell’s cognitive approach. Nonetheless, it is vital in understanding his basic views on how narrative film functions. Also the fact that Bordwell seems to be directly influenced by the renowned hermeneutic literary critic Wolfgang Iser seems important. Iser argues in his The Reading Process, that literature evokes a cognitive process, on the part of the reader, that is both rewarding as an interpretative enterprise, and unique to literature. Bordwell’s appropriation and extension of Iser’s reader-response theory becomes especially salient when Iser refers to film’s lack of imaginative freedom because of its visual realisation of the diegetic world. Iser also focuses on the hypothesis-forming activity, previously elaborated on by Bordwell:

‘While these expectations arouse interest in what has to come, the subsequent modification of them will also have a retrospective effect on what has already been read. (...) Whatever we have read sinks into our memory and is


26 David Bordwell, Narration in the Fiction Film, 51.

27 Bordwell tries to cover both Gadamer’s concept of ‘Erfahrungshorizont’, and the concepts provided by the Constance School reception theorists Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. Although Gadamer, Jauss, and Iser mainly theorize about socially and culturally acquired mental sets. Bordwell mainly argues about biologically given cognitive mental sets.

28 Bordwell, Sorytelling in the Fiction Film, 37.

foreshortened. It may be later evoked again and set against a different background with the result that the reader is enabled to develop hitherto unforeseeable connections. (...) The new background brings to light new aspects of what we had committed to memory; conversely these, in turn, shed their light on the new background, thus arousing more complex anticipations. Thus, the reader, in establishing these interrelationships between past, present and future, actually causes the text to reveal its potential multiplicity of connections. (...) This is why the reader often feels involved in events which, even though in fact they are very far from his own reality.

It has however to be noted that Iser exclusively concentrates on the reader’s and text’s closed interaction. Different from Bordwell, Iser does not consider extratextual or extradiegetic elements that may influence the reading or hypothesising process between text and reader. Bordwell’s emphasis on extratextual/extradiegetic and a-priori biological preconceptions therefore expands Iser’s theory from its constraints.

Bordwell’s main opponent on the aspect of whom or what governs the narration in cinema is literary critic and film theorist Seymour Chatman. In his article ‘In Defence of the Implied Author’, Chatman strongly opposes the idea that the narration is the main organizing entity that distributes the story material through the syuzhet. In his view, Bordwell wrongfully ignores the question of the implied author. Bordwell’s rigidly neo-formalist and constructivist discourse however has no privileged place for the organizing power of something called a narrator or implied narrator. Bordwell only speaks of a narrator, in terms of an presence that can narrate the story – as a off-screen voice-over, or a character that overtly fulfills an expository function to introduce specific fabula information after the, i.e., in medias res beginning. So in what way does Bordwell define narration then? Summarized, Bordwell states that narration embodies ‘[the] principles of causality and motivation (...) in the plot that transmit story information.’ The motivational element Bordwell refers to, can be approached in three different ways. Narration is compositionally, generically and artistically motivated. All these kinds of motivation result in invisibility of narration. Bordwell moreover argues that classical narration has three characteristics that have been developed by noted narratologist and Aristotle’s Poetics scholar Meir Sternberg. As Sternberg, Bordwell argues that narration in classical storytelling is (1) self-conscious, (2) knowledgeable, and (3) communicative. The degrees of self-consciousness,


31 This article, part of his book on film narration, Chatman argues that an abstract entity (the implied author) is the main organizing force of narration. This highly technical academic debate concerns Chatman’s dislike of Bordwell’s theoretical departure of an, in narrative theory disputed presence of an organizing (implied) narrator. See: Seymour Chatman, ‘In Defence of the Implied Author.’ in: Idem, Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film. Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1990. 74-89.

32 Bordwell more recently opposed ‘neo-structuralist’ approaches. In his article ‘Neo-Structuralist Narratology’ (2004, and in a revised form also part of Poetics of Cinema) he claims that Chatman (and his neo-structuralist colleagues Metz, Gaudreault, Jost and Gardies) continuously approach narration in film ‘feature centered’. He however favors a formal/functionalist approach, which takes a ‘design stance’: what purpose does the overall design serve. This is the approach I will be taking as well. This is not meant to be seen as a strategy to ignore or downplay the debate between ‘neo-structuralists’ and ‘formal-functionalist’ on the usefulness of applying traditional (that is literary) narrative concepts as enunciation, focalization, etc. on film. David Bordwell, ‘Neo-Structuralist Narratology’ in: Marie-Laure Ryan (ed.), Narrative Across Media. The Languages of Storytelling Lincoln and London; University of Nebraska Press 2004, 203-219 cf. 203-204.


34 Ibid.
knowledgeability, and communicativeness however fluctuate during the development of the plot. All these elements, once again, in classical cinema ensure the invisibility of narration.

These expectations on which this hypothesizing is based depends, according to Bordwell, greatly on norms. In classical Hollywood storytelling the cause-and-effect-chain is of the greatest importance. Causality is one of the driving forces behind narration, but is also part of its normative and highly conventionalized teleology. This causality, in part, involves the character, events and actions on the level of narrative logic. The key terms in this respect are: ‘causality, consequence, psychological motivations, the drive toward overcoming obstacles and achieving goals.’ Espeically the narrative role the protagonists play is of great importance: ‘character-centered—i.e., personal or psychological—causality is the armature of the classical story.’ All these narrative features are of course embodied in a character. To actualize their narrative logical potential, characters are given some additional features which insure their personal psychological unity as well. Stereotypically, they are provided with a ‘bundle of character traits’ that grounds their behaviour in a consistent and dramaturgical unity. As I stated before, the dramaturgy of classical Hollywood storytelling is aimed at clarity, redundancy, unity, and comprehension. Thus, the motivation of characters - psychologically driven, and defined by a specific bundle of traits- will enhance the understandability when they take action within a causal succession of event, to achieve a goal which will guarantee narrative closure. But also the distribution of cues concerning cinematic time and space imply this causality. Let’s turn to Bordwell’s notion of cinematic time and space, which are inseparably connected to narrative logic.

Time and Space in Relation to the Narration
Time and space besides narrative logic are essential elements of the classical Hollywood style, as in every other narrative art form. In Hollywood narratives, however, time and space are greatly influenced and subordinated by the narrative logic, which revolves around the characters and events. In other words, the construction of the plot influences the way in which cinematic time and space are employed. In the specific case of 'time', Bordwell argues that there are some conventionalized manipulative strategies that ensure a certain temporal order and duration. This temporal aspect of classical Hollywood narration is very important since, as I will show, it is one of the most fundamental and conventionalized aspects of storytelling, and determines Bordwell’s and Thompson’s thoughts on the classical structure of narrative plot. Hollywood storytelling greatly depends on a linear time order that is quite simply described by Bordwell as a ‘123’ succession of events. This linear succession of events, propelled forward by character driven plot developments, thus creates a logical chronological ordering pattern. Since this linearity encourages clarity and comprehension, the conventionalised temporal order is unlikely to be structured in a manner that evokes confusion and unintelligibility. According to Bordwell, in the Golden Age of Hollywood, the use of flashbacks – a strategy to break with linearity, in order to structure the present events and character traits as a result

36 Ibid..
37 Ibid., 42.
38 Ibid., 43.
of the past - was sparsely used. Bordwell states that even after the acceptance of the flashback as a logical and conventional strategy to tell stories, their average application remains around, at highest, 10% of the entire film. Besides flashbacks, the application of flashforwards is, theoretically, also possible. But Bordwell underlines that in the classical Hollywood practice, there are very few examples to be named. This is due to the legitimacy (or the unwritten rules) of story comprehensibility:

The narration will not move on its own into the past or the future. Once the action starts and marks a definite present, movements into the past are motivated through characters’ memory. The flashback is not presented as an overt explanation on the narration’s part; the narration simply presents what the character is recalling. Even more restrictive is classical narration’s suppression of future events. No narration in any text can spill all the beans at once, but after the credits sequence, classical narration seldom overtly divulges anything about what will ensue. It is up to the characters to foreshadow events through dialogue and physical action.

The primacy of memory and/or the constitutive circumstances of a characters psychological development confer to the psychological causality that, in Bordwell’s view, is the backbone of temporal manipulation and what psychologists designate as ‘temporal integration’ in classical narration. This latter aspect of temporal integration refers back to the spectator activity which is of great importance in Bordwell’s theory. The use of flashbacks – as a strategy to insure psychological causality – evokes a process that ‘permits the classical viewer to integrate the present with the past and to form clear-cut hypotheses about future story events.’ The duration of events which is presented chronologically, according to Bordwell also follows conventionalized principles. To comply with the basic pillars of comprehensibility only the most important events will be presented. So, to put it in other words: only events and details of events that bear significance for the overall fabula construction by the spectator will be cued by the syuzhet material. The plot development is, as I already pointed out redundantly, character driven, so the duration and temporal ordering of events depend greatly on the setting of deadlines to which the characters have to act. Deadlines can be set in different ways. Bordwell discerns several forms that have different effects for the dramaturgical influence on cinematic time. The importance of this very aspect is most clearly put by Bordwell himself:

It should be evident that deadlines function narrationally. Issuing from the diegetic world, they motivate the film’s durational limits: the story action, not the narrator, seems to decide how long the action will take. Planning appointments makes it ‘natural’ for the narration to show the meeting itself; setting up deadlines makes it ‘natural’ for the narration to devote screen time to showing whether or not the deadline is met. Moreover, appointments and

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39 Of course Orson Welles’ master piece Citizen Kane (1941), is one of the prime examples of Hollywood filmmaking where an extensive uses of flashbacks has a profound influence on the narrative structure and subsequently on Hollywood cinema.


41 Ibid., 30. In his Poetics of Cinema Bordwell admits that this notion of temporal integration, has loosened since self-aware narration in modern cinema often breaks this rule. Flashforwards, a narrative device from art cinema in Bordwell’s view enhances the idea that ‘we must recognize and engage with the shaping narrative intelligence.’ I will come back to this issue this in my analysis of Lost and Bordwell’s more recent thinking on modern cinema See: Bordwell, Poetics of Cinema, 155.

42 Ibid., 43.
deadlines stress the forward flow of story action: the arrows of the spectator’s expectations are turned toward the encounter to come, the race to the goal.\textsuperscript{43}

The conventionalized linear perspective on time re-enacted through character-driven plot development, and the primacy of significant events evoke a sense of ‘naturalness’ in the construction of cinematic time. When one takes into consideration which amount of duration the story-time encompasses – that is the entire time-frame in which the story takes place\textsuperscript{44} – compared to the screen time, it will becomes obviously clear that this ‘natural’ narrative manipulation of time is quite artificial. The trimming of the useless fat – that is, the omission of uninteresting or insignificant story material – also according to Bordwell follows conventionalized punctuation techniques. Mostly early Hollywood cinema, and literary adaptations, uses several techniques to cue the speeded passage of time or the omission of fabula material. Some of the examples are the montage sequence, fades, the whipe, a sound bridge, and a dialogue hook. I will at the moment not delve deeper in these techniques, since they will be dealt with later on, when I’m discussing Thompson and television narratives. Nonetheless it is important to underline that not only visual cues can provide for temporal punctuation, but also auditory ones such as the dialogue hook and the sound bridge.

Another conventionalized method to indicate temporal ordering is the use of editing techniques. One of the most prominent techniques is crosscutting. Bordwell states that ‘[s]trictly speaking, crosscutting can be considered a category of alternating editing, the intercalation of two or more different series of images. If temporal simultaneity is not pertinent to the series, the cutting may be called parallel editing; if the series are to be taken as temporally simultaneous, then we have crosscutting.’\textsuperscript{45} So, although a certain event happens simultaneous with another, this technique can create a linear illusion that two different events are happening at the same time. Nowadays this problem can, for instance, be dealt with through split screen representation; events that take place at the same time are presented beside or above each other within one frame.\textsuperscript{46}

This shift of emphasis on editing is also important in relation to cinematic space. The framing of the diegetic world is the guiding line in which this is spatiality achieved as an illusion for the spectator. The make-up of the cinematic space comes to the fore in the mise-en-scène. Although this term is somewhat powerless since it designates everything visible on screen, it is a key concept in pointing out every visual aspect of the diegetic world that is being framed through cinematography. In his chapter on space Bordwell makes clear that the spatial framing and construction is focused on the human body and thereby is character driven as well.\textsuperscript{47} The composition of the image is balanced according to several principles that have their roots in the emergence of the linear perspective in Western

\textsuperscript{43} Bordwell, \textit{The Classical Hollywood Cinema}, 45.

\textsuperscript{44} In contrast to screen time.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 48.

\textsuperscript{46} Bordwell gives some examples from experiments in early cinema, such as Abel Gance’s \textit{Napoleon} (1927) which is revolutionary in its use of a tripartite split screen. Good contemporary examples stem from television news items – when a correspondent is shown besides the news anchor – video clips, and later, this strategy found its way in television drama’s such as the celebrated spy-thriller \textit{24} (Fox, 2001–...), where split screen storytelling was most influentially aesthetizised.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 51.
art since the renaissance: centering of important objects, balancing of all the elements, frontality for maximum visibility, and the illusion of depth through several planes of action and view.\textsuperscript{48} Whilst summarizing, Bordwell emphasizes the subordinate role of space in relation to the anthropocentric narration: 'Centering, balancing, frontality, and depth—all these narrational strategies—encourage us to read filmic space as story space. Since the classical narrative depends upon psychological causality, we can think of these strategies as aiming to personalize space. Surroundings become significant partly for their ability to dramatize individuality.'\textsuperscript{49}

But space does not only functions in a capacity in which it enhances the spectator’s perception of space as part of the psychological causality of narration. Through the conventional continuity editing space can also function in the hypothesis-forming process which is cued through the narration. All the rules of continuity editing (most importantly the 180 degrees axis of action, eye-line matching, the shot-reverse shot, and the establishing shot) aim once again at the clarity, redundancy and comprehensibility according to the prevailing narrative logic; ‘(...) classical editing is organized paradigmatically, since any shot leads the viewer to infer a limited set of more or less probable successors. For example, an establishing shot can cut away to another space or cut in to a closer shot; the latter alternative is more likely.’\textsuperscript{50} The point-of-view from which the diegetic space is dissected and rendered through the syuzhet is traditionally aimed to evoke a sense of the invisible witness, who is observing all relevant events in a seemingly neutral manner. This again enhances the invisible character of narration, but still is an artificial construction of space that is based upon an ideally guided human perception:

‘Cutting around within a locale is most likely to be based upon eye-line matches and upon shot/ reverse-shot patterns, less likely to be based upon figure movement, and least likely to be based upon optical point-of-view. (...) The classical construction of space thus participates in the process of hypothesis-forming that we saw at work in narration generally.’\textsuperscript{51}

The circle of Bordwell’s theoretical framework thereby is closed. The artificiality of the classical Hollywood editing system once again ensures the spectator’s hypothesis-based comprehensibility of the fabular rendering; through its conventionalized construction of time and space. And not to forget; the very stringent subordination of time and space to the narrative logic is what defines the classical narrative economy.

\subsection*{2.2 Kristin Thompson on New Hollywood Storytelling}
Kristin Thompson devoted a study on storytelling in what has been designated as New Hollywood. In \textit{Storytelling in the New Hollywood} (1998) she argues that New Hollywood not necessarily deviates much from classical Hollywood narrative. She clearly tries to swim against the stream in contemporary debate on the generic differences between


\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 54.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
Classical Hollywood cinema and New (New) Hollywood (or daringly coined post-classical Hollywood narratives). To develop her argument she quotes film scholar Warren Buckland, who gives a summary exposition on the general, often pejorative, stances towards New Hollywood:

'Many critics argue that, in comparison with Old Hollywood, New Hollywood films are not structured in terms of a psychologically motivated cause-effect narrative logic, but in terms of loosely-linked, self-sustaining action sequences often build around spectacular stunts, stars, and special effects. Complex character traits and character development, they argue, have been replaced by one-dimensional stereotypes, and plot-lines are now devised almost solely to link one action sequence to the next. Narrative complexity is scarified on the altar of spectacle. Narration is geared solely to the effective presentation of expensive effects.'\textsuperscript{52}

Thompson, like Buckland, does not agree with this negative attitude towards New Hollywood. She nonetheless argues that, on a generic level, the New Hollywood storytelling does not differ that much from classical storytelling. Although the institutional context has changed significantly\textsuperscript{53} the way of storytelling in Hollywood structurally remained the same. As with classical storytelling the primacies of progression, clarity and unity still are the main characteristics in which the narrative logic, cinematic space, and time is guaranteed.\textsuperscript{54} The aspects of Classical Hollywood - which have been elaborated by Bordwell on the previous paragraph – from Thompson’s point of view still hold true:

'What happened in the mid-1970s was not a shift into some sort of post-classical type of film making. Rather, some of the younger directors helped to revivify classical cinema by directing films that where wildly successful. The three most significant of these where The Godfather, Jaws, and Star Wars, and it hard to imagine films more classical in their narratives. They perfectly exemplify how Hollywood continues to succeed through its skill in telling strong stories based on fast-paced action and characters with clear psychological traits. The ideal American film still centres around a well-structured, carefully motivated series of events that the spectator can comprehend relatively easy.\textsuperscript{55}

So, according to Thompson the core narrative structure has not much changed besides a new and profitable tactic to commercially exploit box office hits. But how does she make her argument clear? And how does she ground it methodologically? Her effort to academically underline her presumptions is postulated in an inductive approach towards the (New) Hollywood storytelling plot structure. She makes a more or less random selection of films to study their structure. This trans-historical corpus of films in Thompson’s view all point to one direction: classical storytelling is still very much alive as it was in the Golden age of Hollywood.


\textsuperscript{53} That is, the decline of the monolithic Studio System in the Golden era of Hollywood.

\textsuperscript{54} Thompson, \textit{Storytelling in the New Hollywood}, 11.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 8.
The basic starting point of her notion of narrative is the goal-oriented character(s). This is of great importance since the protagonists are an essential part of the narrative logic in classical and New Hollywood narration. As she reminds us: ‘(...) in virtually all cases the main character in Classical Hollywood film desires something (...), [they] tend to be active, they seek out goals and pursue them rather than having them simply thrust upon them.’\(^{56}\) So, their active motivation sets up the main line of action in the plot development. Thompson discerns three clusters (present in Hollywood narratives) that centre around (1) one goal-oriented protagonist, (2) two parallel goal-oriented protagonists, and (3) multiple goal-oriented protagonists.\(^{57}\) She states that by using this ‘goal-oriented’ approach to structure:

‘[w]e can account more precisely for the structural dynamics of Hollywood storytelling by suggesting that the most frequent reason a narrative changes direction is a shift in the protagonists goals. We have already seen that such goals are central to plotting in the classical film. If we can account for plot structure by means of these goals, we have a schema that has some initial plausibility.’\(^{58}\)

What are the differences between the three kinds of protagonists’ constructions within the large-scale structure of the plot? Obviously I do not have to devote a great deal of attention on the goal-oriented protagonist. The largest bulk of Hollywood film narratives stay very close to the single protagonist around whom the plot structure revolves. The second class of two parallel protagonists deserves some more attention. Thompson herself gives us a clear and redundant description:

‘Parallel protagonists are usually strikingly different in their traits, and their lives initially have little or no connection. Yet early on in the action, one develops a fascination with the other and often even spies on him or her. Hidden similarities between the two or gradually revealed, and one of the characters may change to become more like the other.’\(^{59}\)

In Thompson’s view the choice for a parallel protagonist cluster brings certain challenges along with it, since the two protagonists normally do not have same bundle of character traits and goals. The most important aspect lies in the twofold goal-oriented plot line that unfolds independently with the two, often spatially separated, protagonists. Their paths however eventually converge; the two protagonists can stereotypically develop their relation - if they function as an oppositely gendered couple - in a heterosexual romance. In the case of same gender pairing of protagonists there often ensues a rivalry or longing relation, where one desires a certain characteristic of the other, as the latter part of the quote already suggested. In this specific cluster of goal-oriented protagonists the syuzhet, in Bordwell’s


\(^{57}\) Ibid., 45.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 27.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 46.
terms, should offer a clear structure of the spatial and temporal shift which belongs to either one, or the other protagonist.\textsuperscript{60} Otherwise the story comprehensibility will diminish significantly.

The 'multiple-protagonist narrative' cluster is described by Thompson in a tripartite spectrum.\textsuperscript{62} The most casual extreme of the spectrum is 'a series of plotlines which are shared by the same [narrative] situation' but don't have a significant causal impact on each other. The paths of the involved protagonists will cross, but their narrative 'cross-reading' has no effect on their respective future plot development. At the other more stringent extreme, stands the 'multi-protagonist narrative of a group'. The different plotlines which ensue from the different protagonists are developing towards different goals. Their narrative 'cross-reading' does leave a significant influence and thereby can even alter or completely change the goals of certain other protagonists. The renewed goals and the plotlines, nonetheless, lead to a resolution that has an effect on the entire group of protagonists.

Thompson also describes the middle-ground of the spectrum. Obviously it is a mixture of the two poles on the extreme ends. Here, the narrative situation is defined by a group of protagonists and their respective plotlines. These plotlines are however heading towards different directions and thereby ensue in independent resolutions. The major characters, in Thompson's words, 'crisscross and affect each other' and thereby significantly influencing all the independent plotlines and resolutions.\textsuperscript{62} Thompson’s elaboration on the goal-oriented protagonist is essential in underlining how the large-scale plot structures work in Hollywood cinema, which will be my focus in the following paragraph.

**Thompson on Plot Structure**

These three clusters of protagonists, as I already suggested, will not be analysed by Thompson in a plot structure that gained prominence in the screenplay guides that have been published since the emergence of narrative film, with Syd Field as both a contemporary and historical exponent. Screenplay-guru Field states that every solid script should consist of three acts, reminiscent of the earlier mentioned beginning, middle, and end in Aristotle’s *Poetics*: beginning/set-up, middle/confrontation, and end/resolution.\textsuperscript{63} The transgression from one large scale part of the plot to another, comes about through turning points. Thompson attributes several traits to these turning points, but they all evolve around the characters’ goals. On the one hand, turning points occur when 'a protagonist’s goal jells' and it is explicitly articulated by the character.\textsuperscript{64} On the other hand, they can occur when a goal is achieved and another one replaces the preceding driving rationale of the character. But Thompson is also apt to underline that a turning point not always takes place at a transgression from one to another other large scale part of the overall plot structure; they might as well occur just before or after such a movement. This choice to position turning points around large-scale

\textsuperscript{60} Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*, 46..

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 47-48.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 49.


\textsuperscript{64} Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*, 29.
plot movements and not directly at it, can facilitate other narrative strategies such as suspense and delay.\textsuperscript{65}

Besides the fact that this observation also has consequences for the ideas on the ascribed tripartite plot structure in Hollywood narration Thompson also notes that turning points, besides fuelling highly dramatic intervals, also can be 'small but decisive' or 'quiet'.\textsuperscript{66} This 'small but decisive' conception of turning points is central in her critique on Field. His idea of a tripartite plot structure is still very much alive, and prescribed by many screenplay gurus as the perfect potion for a successful Hollywood script. Thompson, however, argues that a description of a three-part structure will not account for every element that is present in a large body of Hollywood films. Here she takes a different path than previous practical writings on (classical and New) Hollywood storytelling.\textsuperscript{67} She proposes - as opposed to Field's three act structure - a four act structure which is build up as follows; (1) the setup, (2) complicating action, (3) the development, (4)the climax.\textsuperscript{68} Her concept of the set-up is fairly simple; the protagonist and the surrounding diegetic world as it presented by the cinematic techniques to account for the canonised illusion of time and space is introduced. Within this given situational context the protagonist conceives of several preliminary goals to acquire the desired. These goals are not always all actualised but some of them propel the action into a line of development, as Field would underline.\textsuperscript{69} Thompson, however, does not agree with Field on this. Predominantly the second and third discernment differ from the usual tripartite plot structure. Thompson roughly cuts the classical middle piece in half to illustrate that the middle part of the plot structure serves as a turning point as well. But this turning point is one of the most important ones. In her view the development is preceded by the complicating action: '(...) the complicating action serves as a sort of counter-setup, building a whole new situation with which the protagonists must cope.'\textsuperscript{70} In other words; this counter-setup, or complication, creates such a new situation, compared to the initial set-up, which the protagonist has to evaluate his tactics in order to, again, achieve its goals under changing circumstances. In this second part the final contours of the premise, goals, tactics and obstacles get their definitive stature, according to Thompson. She nonetheless emphasises that Field was not ignorant of the fact that his second part had something that can be called a 'mid-point'. But because of Field's emphasis on highly dramatic turning points, he eventually decides not to regard the mid-point as a movement in large scale relations.\textsuperscript{71}

The third part of the plot (the development) provides for the protagonist's fully 'jelled out' struggle to overcome the obstacles, as they are fully delineated in the previous part. This struggle is in the best tradition of Hollywood storytelling characterised by 'situations that create action, suspense and delay, with the apotheosis of the climax after


\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 33.

\textsuperscript{67} Thompson touches on different approaches towards the structural generics of Hollywood storytelling; three act (Syd Field) instances of five acts up to even a ten act argument.

\textsuperscript{68} Bordwell also scrutinizes Thompson's notion of the four-part plot structure in \textit{Poetics of Cinema}. Although he does not always agree with Thompson on where to place the turning point in analysis, he generally agrees with Thompson's conception of large-scale parts in modern classicism. See: Bordwell, \textit{Poetics of Cinema}, 104-105.

\textsuperscript{69} Field, \textit{Screenplay}, 159.


\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 31.
the last turning point.\textsuperscript{72} The way in which this four act system is realized is dependent on what category of protagonist(s) functions the narrative employs. To put it in other words: if there only is one protagonist, only one line of action is brought up in the set-up. When more protagonists are part of the narrative several lines of action are developed in the set-up, and they can evolve independent of each other, in another pace, within the overall framework of Thompson's four act system.

To make her theoretical elaborations more palpable she analyses Steven Spielberg's box office hit \textit{Jaws} (1975). This choice is however not only made to illustrate her stance on the plot structure of Hollywood narrative since the mid 60s. Besides that, Thompson wants to argue that the pejorative claims towards New Hollywood (or post-classical) storytelling are not factually grounded. If one brings the opening quote of this chapter into mind again one can see why. When Buckland summarizes the arguments against Hollywood storytelling during the 70s, it comes to the fore that the criticism is mainly focussed on New Hollywood's alleged fetish with 'loosely-linked, self-sustaining action sequences often build around 'spectacular stunts, stars, and special effects'.\textsuperscript{73} Thompson is not disputing the fact that a significant amount of New Hollywood films centre around the star, big and spectacular special effects and so on. But as my previous discussion of Thompson's \textit{Storytelling in the New Hollywood} suggested, the narrative logic of plot development is not revolving around loosely-linked and self-sustaining action sequences. This is also the case with one of the pivots of New Hollywood filmmaking; \textit{Jaws}.

This enormously successful special-effect driven 'popcorn' movie still largely complies to the classical 'rules' of Hollywood narration; a central character that sustains the causality of action (chief Brody, Roy Scheider) in a four-part plot structure. The set-up concerns itself with former NYPD cop Brody's new position as police chief on Amity Island, his fear of water, and the initial unwillingness of the Mayor and shop owners to warn the public for a killer shark during the summer vacation. What follows isn't a 'string of shark attacks', but a construction that shows how 'the plot breaks into discrete parts, how dangling causes prepare us for a change of time and space, how motifs create echoes and parallels, how goals are formulated, recast, thwarted, or achieved-and, most basically, to see how films achieve their fine-grained, scene-to-scene comprehensibility.'\textsuperscript{74}

The introduction of two other main characters, the local 'gun for hire' Mitchell Quint (Robert Shaw) and shark expert Matt Hooper (Richard Dreyfuss), influence the further plot development. Quint ushers in a second line of action in the set-up, wherein he eventually gets the backing of the local community to kill the shark. According to Thompson, none of the shark-attacks ensue in a turning point. All three turning points are closely related to Quint.\textsuperscript{75} Quints' contract signing with the Mayor, to ratify the community's wish to kill the shark for a considerable amount of money, moves the plot in the complicating action, where Brody closes the beaches and the arrival of ichthyologist Hooper on the island 'confirm[s] that the amateur hunters are dangerous and present obstacles to Brody.'\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 9. See also footnote 53.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 33.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 34.
his capacity will convince Brody to reaffirm some of his goals which have come under pressure by the undertakings of Quint and the community's drive to deal with the situation as quickly as possible to avoid the possibility to miss the income of potential tourists. After a string of failed attempts to kill the shark, the developments revolves around the animosity between Hooper and Quint. The turning point towards the eventual climax, is procured by the reconciliation between Hooper and Quint, and thereby creating the circumstances (Hooper's compression tank and Quint's strychnine spear) to effectively kill the shark with the synthesised efforts of the amateur and the professional under guidance of the 'outsider' Brody. By bridging the gap between the two men, and fulfilling his overarching goal to kill the shark, Brody has to overcome his fear of the ocean. The last three minutes, which is by Thompson designated as the epilogue (or final lesson), concerns itself with a reflection on Brody's 'baptism', which enables him to become a full part of the community: 'I used to hate the water'.

With the latter, Thompson hopes to underline a specific characteristic which is connected to what Thompson calls modern/contemporary classicism (instead of post-classicism); the final lesson, or the epilogue. This is something truly new compared to classical narration, and Thompson tries to argue, that the epilogue functions as a confirmation of the 'stability of the situation, while settling subplots and tying up motifs.' Although epilogues vary in screen time, the average lies on three minutes, so it is a relatively small part compared to the four part structure. This emphasis on the historical continuity of rigid classical storytelling techniques will be continued in the coming paragraph, concerning the contemporary debate on puzzle/multiple draft narratives.

2.3 Recent Developments and Reflection
After setting out Bordwell's and Thompson's position towards classical storytelling, I want to broach recent developments in narrative film theory. Warren Buckland and also Thomas Elsaesser made an effort against the arguments by Thompson and Bordwell that Hollywood narration in general did not change that much over its existence since (roughly) 1917. Buckland advocates a renewed analysis of the emerging puzzle narratives that gained prominence since the 90s. They state that even among contemporary (Hollywood) films there are undeniable instances of change in the way to tell stories. But what makes this more contemporary debate interesting? Most importantly, it functions as a critique on Bordwell's theoretical framework, especially his dependency on Aristotle and Meir Sternberg in relation to plot structures. Buckland states that the nestor of narrative film theory is down-playing the importance of what has been designated as 'forking-path/puzzle films'. Buckland is not pleased with Bordwell’s emphasis on, and reaffirmation of the Aristotelian notions of the unity of the plot and complex plot structures in contemporary narrative film theory. In his introductory chapter of Puzzle Films (2003), Buckland tries to argue that Bordwell ought to re-think his position in order to see that recent narrative variations should not be reduced to classical plot structures.

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But what is Bordwell arguing? In his article 'Film Futures' (2003), Bordwell states that there are compelling examples of fairly recent films that employ a narrative forking-path strategy. But Bordwell derives this specific narrative concept from Jorge Luis Borges' influential short story The Garden of the Forking Paths (1943). In this story the implied labyrinthine quality of the fictional embedded novel of T'sui Pen 'has its counterpart in quantum physics, which has played host to the idea of parallel universes-an infinite array of possible worlds, each as real as the one we apparently know. Bordwell's aim is to investigate how this idea of infinite parallel universes can be traced in film narratives. He brings four films to the fore that on a basic level seem to inhabit a narrative structure that accommodates for the notion of forking-path plotlines. But Bordwell soon comes to realize that every narrative fails to convey the scope of possibilities that Borges' story implies. Film in Bordwell's view still has to rely on its medium specific conventions and techniques to tell these kinds of stories. The conventions and techniques, not surprisingly, are based on the 'folk psychology' that he advocates in his cognitive formalist narrative theory, as discussed in Bordwell's paragraph in this chapter. Instead of trying to create a narrative that can function as a mimetic structure for parallel universes, which stem from philosophy or quantum mechanics, the narratives that flirts with these ideas simplify the structure; 'so instead of the infinite radically diverse set of alternatives evoked by the parallel-universes conception, we have a set narrow both in number and in core conditions.' Cognitively, this trimmed narrative structure allows for easy comprehensibility and hypothesis-based rendering of the syuzhet material. The maximum of possibilities, as Bordwell argues based on the four films, lies around three possible futures that mostly ensue from a single crucial incident. Furthermore, Bordwell postulates seven conventions that he deduced from his small corpus of films. Summarized, forking-paths are conventionally constructed to be; (1) linear; (2) signposted; (3) intersecting; (4) unified by traditional cohesion devices; (5) running parallel to each other; (6) not equal, that is the last path taken presupposes the other ones, and; (7) not equal, because the last path taken is the least hypothetical one.

The first convention is quite straightforward. Every trajectory, i.e. every forking plotline that ensues from the crucial incident is presented linearly and therefore obeys to basic temporal relations in storytelling. In other words, a choice or chance ensues in a plot trajectory that is based on a little fragment of a parallel universe, with an unavoidable consequence. The second convention, the signposting of forks, entails the 'setting up of a pattern that indicates a reset'. This means so much that after one trajectory is completed towards a certain consequence, visual and/or auditory cues signal a reset to the initial crucial incident. From this 'beginning' point, an alternate universe develops in a subsequent trajectory. The third convention, in Bordwell's view, highlights the simplicity principle in

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80 He uses four films which can be designated as having a forking-path narrative, on which Bordwell builds his analysis: Lola Renn (Tom Tykwer, 1998), Blind Chance (Krzysztof Kieslowski 1981), Sliding Doors (Peter Howitt, 1998), and Many Different Ways to Be No. 1 (Wai Ka-Fai, 1997).

81 David Bordwell, 'Film Futures' in: Substance (2002) vol. 31, 1: cf. 88. Bordwell incorporated and slightly adjusted this article in his recent study Poetics of Cinema (New York and London; Routledge 2008). As in 'Film Futures', Bordwell argues that there is a tendency in contemporary cinema to stray from the mimetic or naturalistic conventions of classical storytelling. But as my coming exposition on this development in contemporary cinema will show, these films tend to use traditional (or classical) narrative devices to guarantee comprehension.

82 Bordwell, 'Film Futures', cf. 90.

83 Ibid., 92.
forking-path storytelling; intersection, namely, suggests that the different worlds are related to each other through recurring events and characters. Therefore, forking-path narratives begin to show their artifice and dependency on classical storytelling techniques in order to keep the overall story material redundant and cognitively comprehensible.\footnote{Bordwell, ‘Film Futures’, 95.} So, conditions in terms of characters and events that have been set initially in an earlier universe, also serve as the core conditions in a subsequently presented trajectory.\footnote{According to Bordwell this does not make sense from an ontological or epistemological point of view, since the theoretical possibility of multiple-universes is severely downplayed to the unity of time, space and continuity of our mundane single three-dimensional universe paradigm.} These core conditions are further strengthened in the fourth convention. Through the formal techniques of the appointment and deadlines, the linear cause-and-effect-chain is enforced. These traditional devices, thus, enable the spectator to keep track of sequences in the traditional tripartite unity of time, space and continuity.

The interrelated influence - or contamination as Bordwell later puts it - of the different universes continues in the fifth convention. The parallelism between the universes, in terms of the establishment of core situations and an ensemble of characters, will mostly invoke a vivid variation.\footnote{Ibid., 97.} This parallelism is, again, not something new to cinema, as Bordwell reminds us:

‘Most narratives contain parallel situations, characters, or actions, and strongly profiled parallelisms, as we know from Intolerance (1916) and The Three Ages (1923), are a long-running cinematic tradition and have become fairly easy to follow. Forking-path plots can bring parallelisms to our notice quite vividly, thereby calling forth well-practiced habits of sense-making.’\footnote{Ibid.}

Parallelisms can take different forms. There is a lot of freedom to achieve a parallel situation in different universes, which can be done through crosscutting. But also the convergence of the climax (or resolutions) in the same locale in every universe can account for the parallelism.

The sixth convention, in Bordwell’s view, emphasizes the temporal constrains of film. As he argues that ‘all the paths are not equal, [since] the last one taken (...) presupposes the others, Bordwell shows that the subsequent universes entail a time-bound process.\footnote{Ibid., 98.} This process is connected to the human psychological properties of prospection and retrospection. It is unavoidable to structure the serially presented universes in such a manner that ‘[t]he outcomes of one world influences the background from which we will approach another world.’ This, once again results in a contamination of worlds for the sake of story comprehensibility. Our knowledge of the different universes has a cumulative quality that is enforced through the ‘elliptical replay of events’. Since most forking-path narratives employ parallelisms, certain events of an earlier trajectory will return in a subsequent one. It is therefore quite pointless to exactly replay events one already has knowledge of: they are presented more pointy and therefore have

\begin{itemize}
  \item[\footnote{Bordwell, ‘Film Futures’, 95.}]
  \item[\footnote{Ibid., 97.}]
  \item[\footnote{Ibid.}]
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\end{itemize}
far less screen time. The contamination goes even further; the knowledge of previous trajectories even can influence the protagonists. The lessons learned from previous attempts to obtain a certain goal can influence the resolution of the final trajectory, where the previous failures seem to ‘crosstalk’ through the borders of possible futures. It is also important to note that Bordwell indicates that the characters psychological unity and causality is maintained throughout the presentation of different universes. This also indicates a deviation of the 'laws of nature', whereby the spectator, but also sometimes the protagonist gets influenced by different parallel universes.

To complicate things further, Bordwell poses his seventh and final convention. Besides the inequality of forks because of the primacy effect in time-bound linear storytelling in film, there is also an inequality in forks because of what he calls the recency effect:

'Because endings are weightier than most other points in the narrative, and because forking-path tales tend to make the early stories preconditions for the last one, these plots suggest that the last future is the final draft, the one that "really" happened; or at least they reduce the others to fainter possibilities. And if the protagonist seems to have learned from the events shown earlier, the ending may gain still more prominence as the truest, most satisfying one.'

This prompts Bordwell to state that the concept of a forking-path narrative is deceptive, since it in no way adheres to the quantum mechanical scope it has in Borges' short story. He rather prefers to speak of multiple-draft narratives. These films still are products of the human mind, and they more or less obey to cinematic conventions that ensure cognitive-based storytelling comprehension. Therefore, as I interpret Bordwell's stance, these narratives seem to have a more metafictional character, in that it reflects on the process of plot construction, viewer expectations and an awareness of the 'fine tuning' of a narrative in a sequence of trial and error.

Warren Buckland argues that this article by Bordwell is one of the main representative publications in regard with the growth of attention towards complex storytelling in film. One of the main problems Buckland nonetheless has with Bordwell's analysis of the forking-path/multiple draft narratives is quite profound. As I mentioned earlier, Buckland regards Bordwell's emphasis on Aristotle's notion on the unity plot and the complex plot as reprehensible. To establish his critique on Bordwell, Buckland re-reads Aristotle's Poetics. For Aristotle all art is mimetic. Therefore he describes the plot as the 'arrangement of the events that are imitated'. But, in order for the plot to support mimesis,

89 These aspects of forking-path narratives, according to Bordwell, comply with some very basic psychological causes of the primacy effect. So future trajectories will either omit, negate, and/or vary on the initial conditions of the primal future. This, again, distorts the equality between futures or parallel worlds. See: Bordwell, 'Film Futures', 99.

90 Bordwell, ‘Film Futures’, 100.

91 Literary scholar Patricia Waugh elaborated on the concept of metafiction in her influential Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction (1984). She gives a definition of metafiction: 'Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artifact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.' See. Patricia Waugh, Metafiction. The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction London and New York; Routledge 1984, 4.

92 Buckland, Puzzle Film, 2.
the events have to be *necessary* and *probable*. Necessity and probability in this respect are by Bordwell actualized in his concept of the (folk-psychology driven) narrative logic. Aristotle’s notion of the complex plot is defined by the concept of *peglegmenos*, which according to Buckland can be translated as 'interwoven'. As Buckland puts it:

‘In a successful complex plot, the second line of causality (which introduces recognition and reversal) is interwoven into the first, the characters’ plotline. By using the term “interwoven” Aristotle understands that, while the second plot initially disrupts the first by radically altering the hero’s destiny, the second plot is eventually integrated into the first, resulting in a unified, classical plot once more, in which reversal and recognition appear to be probable and even necessary actions.’

So, the qualities of reversal and recognition, at first, constitute a complicating factor within normal, or simple unified plot development of the character. The reversal works both on the spectator and the character. On the one hand, the reversal ensues a plotline that will radically change the position (fate or destiny) of the character. This plotline, however is something that is out of reach of the character, and thereby, as Buckland states it, ‘exists over the characters’; it is imposed on them. Nonetheless the characters, soon come to realize the effect of the imposing reversal, and come to recognize the influence it has on ones fate. This recognition makes the new course the plot is taking, again, probable and necessary. On the other hand, the reversal actualizes a change in expectations with the spectator. So, Aristotle’s ’interwoven-ness’ can be regarded as device that synthesizes something that is strange and imposed on both the characters and the spectators, whereby the classical unity of plot gets reaffirmed again. Buckland, with the contributions in his volume on puzzle narratives, strives to emphasize that Bordwell is on the wrong track in that ‘(...) the majority (...) of [t]he puzzle film is made up of non-classical characters who perform non-classical actions and events. Puzzle film constitutes a post-classical mode of filmic representation and experience not delimited by mimesis.’

Bordwell replied to this criticism in his *The Way Hollywood Tells It* (2006). Quite unaffected by the critique on his reliance on Aristotle and his alleged reductionism of complex narrative material into simple unified narratives, he replies that recent ‘innovative’ developments in filmmaking seem to focus on:

‘the more offbeat options (...): the maladjusted protagonist, degrees of subjectivity, scrambled time schemes, multiple protagonists, and plots based on converging fates and social networks. Many invite reviewing, teasing the spectator to discover the hows and whys of their construction. At the same time, these strategies exploit the redundancy built into the classical norms and often mobilize some underused resources of studio-era movie making. And although the innovations look fresh on the movie screen, many rely on our acquaintance with story schemas circulating in popular culture at large.’

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93 Buckland, *Puzzle Film*, 4. Underscore TS.
94 Ibid., 2.
95 Ibid., 5.
But the former also seems to suggest that Bordwell somewhat strayed from his usual path. He accepts that there are deviations from classical storytelling – maladjusted protagonists, narrative subjectivity, far going temporal manipulations, reviewing of narratives by the spectator, greater influence of other schematic paradigms from other popular culture products, and so on. But he is not keen on recognizing that this affects the very core of classical storytelling; the narrative economy. The narrative economy ensures a seamless style and narration which procured a conventionalized ‘naturalness’ to the spectator, so that they would not to be aware of the artificial construction. Nonetheless, Bordwell seems to downplay this element and remains put with his, in my view, somewhat conservative inclination to regard everything as conventional Hollywood cinema. For him, contemporary Hollywood cinema is all about style. Even then, from a rigid historicist position, he retraces the contemporary ‘innovative’ application of style back to old Hollywood experiments:

‘The more flamboyant instances of today’s style remain classical in their assumption of how dramatic space will be mapped out of our comprehension. Still, compared to productions from the studio era, they are not quite as redundant, they are more willing to create gaps and inconsistencies, and they strive to make the viewer appreciate their cunning artifice. As puzzle films, time scrambling plots, and the network narratives draw us into the game of story comprehension, the style asks us to become connoisseurs of pictorial contrivance.’

Bordwell elaborates on this stance in his recently published Poetics of Cinema (2008). He not only expands on his notions of ‘puzzle films, time scrambling plots, and network narratives’, he also reaffirms his theoretical use of fabula and syuzhet in relation to the narration, which he plotted out in his canonical work Narrative in the Fiction Film: ‘[n]arration, the interaction of the syuzhet arrangement and the stylistic patterning of the film, is the very force of that conjures the fabula into being’. This reaffirmation also underlines and elaborates on the unaffected role of style in his theorizing.

It is also convenient to take a short closer look to Bordwell’s take on network narratives. Besides his thoughts on the narratological implications when one is trying to convey parallel universes, Bordwell also devotes a chapter on the recent proliferation of network narratives in his Poetics of Cinema. There is of course a reason for treating both more recent narrative strategies. As I underlined in my introduction, Lost employs several devices to convey story information. One of these devices, besides the structural use of the flashback and foreshadowing techniques, is the self-coined technique of flash-sideways: a fragmented enacted reference to an alternative universe. This self-conscious technique is procured by the narration through several characters which are part of a multiple-protagonist cluster. As Thompson already noticed in her broad concept of the multi-protagonist cluster, this character configuration is the most suitable for creating narrative circumstances where several connected or initially

97 The ‘stylish style’ of contemporary Hollywood according to Bordwell is for a significant part due to the influence of the television’s aesthetics of intensified continuity; ‘rapid editing, bipolar extremes of lens length, reliance on close shots, and wide-ranging camera movements’. See: Bordwell, The Way Hollywood Tells It, 121, 152.

98 Bordwell, The Way Hollywood Tells It, 188.

unconnected characters can eventually crisscross, broach and influence each other’s plotlines. Bordwell makes a more or less cognate argument when treating network narratives:

‘[a] network narrative centers on several protagonists. Some pursue discrete goals, whereas others may have no goals at all. Whether these characters know one another or are strangers to one another, they inhabit more or less the same space-time framework and can interact face-to-face in given conditions. Their lines of action intersect, in one-on-one convergences or more inclusive relationships. Sometimes characters plan intersections in advance (by setting appointments or deadlines), but to a high degree the convergences are controlled by chance. (...) Converging-fate narratives may conceal long-standing connections among the characters. Convergences, minor or major, can become as important as the events in the separate story lines. The plot structure therefore must find ways to isolate or combine characters in compelling patterns that will replace the usual arc of goal-directed activity.’

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Although I will be focusing on Thompson multi-protagonist cluster in my analysis of Lost, it is wise to keep Bordwell’s notion of the network narrative in mind as a convenient contemporary metaphor for how large ensemble-centered narratives tend to be structured, that is, in terms of: (1) several more or less goal-oriented protagonists that; (2) share a similar space-time continuum; in which their plotlines eventually converge; which is (3) often procured by chance. How the convergence came to be is (4) often concealed.

My task in the coming chapters is twofold. In the next chapter I will explore the theoretical developments in thinking on televisual narration. Then I will try to argue that the contemporary developments in televisual storytelling can further problematize the classical notion of narrative economy, in favor of a challenging ‘un-natural’ (or supernatural) narrative devices that will cue the spectator to become what Mittell describes as ‘amateur narratologists’ (and Bordwell in contemporary cinema as ‘connoisseurs of pictorial contrivances’) to appreciate the narrative spectacle or ‘narrative pyrotechnics’, but also challenges a delayed and stretched comprehension.

100 Bordwell, Poetics of Cinema, 199.
3. Thinking about Fictional Televisual Narratives

Since Ellis’ observations in the early eighties there has been a profound increase in the attention towards the storytelling characteristics of the medium. British television theorists Lucy Mazdon and Michael Hammond in their *The Contemporary Television Series* (2005), for example, speak of the ‘series/serial’ format that has emerged in the nineties television dramas such as the *X-Files*, *The West Wing*, and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.²⁰¹ Although they in my opinion are intuitively right in their observations, their contribution doesn’t really offer a thorough analysis of what this conjoining of television’s two most dominant storytelling forms actually consists of.

To explore and scrutinize their notion of the convergence of the two dominant forms of drama television I will start with John Ellis in the 80s and his elaboration on film, television, and the drama series and serials. Taking a leap to the late nineties with film scholar Kristin Thompson also gave televisual narration some thought in her famous collection of lectures on television, *Storytelling in Film and Television* (2003). She gives an outline of possible theoretical approaches for comparing film and television. In her chapter ‘Series, Serials and Sagas’, she is clearly influenced by Bordwell’s take on narrative in fiction film. I want to investigate if the Ellis’ distinctions between cinematic and televisual narration still holds in contemporary television. The most contemporary television scholar Jason Mittell more confidently gives an overview of Television’s poetics at the outset of the (digital) new century. As I will show Mazdon and Hammond only see the tip of the iceberg. Mittell indeed also sees a mixture between series and serials. But he also account for other possible forms and variations.

Besides their formal ideas on narration I will also broach some institutional and technological changes in the history of television in order to highlight the circumstances in which television and cinema practices converged, and thereby facilitated the development of more complex ways of storytelling.

3.1 Early Eighties with John Ellis

In the wake of notable scholars as Raymond Williams, John Ellis was one of the first British Cultural Studies scholars that tried to give an account of narration in television. In his canonical work *Visible Fictions* he tasked himself to analyse in narration on Broadcast Television. But the medium was not analysed by him without its connection to another very important audio-visual medium: cinema. His analysis of television is therefore highly dependent on a thorough comparison with cinema and its modes of telling stories. Ellis however does not narrow himself to narration in fiction drama television. He also tries to give an account of other forms of narration that are present in news, game and sport programs. Although this was of course an admirable undertaking I will focus myself on his ideas of drama television. Nonetheless, I will give a short introduction of his description of the several forms of narration he discerned in the early eighties, in the following paragraph. After that short introduction I will focus on his narrative conceptualising of both the series and serials that he discerns in the realm of fictional storytelling in television.

In his introductory paragraphs Ellis' tries to underline the most important feature of television that, in part, determines the way in which television narration is organized: realism. Ellis underlines the troublesome relation academics have with the application of the concept of realism, he still wants to use it in its argument. Realism is of course a concept that is closely linked to the artistic paradigm of an accurate representation of the phenomenological world. The theorising concerning realism in the realm of the moving image is greatly marked by the writings of the French film scholar André Bazin. The essence of Bazin’s notion of realism lies in the capability of film to reveal the reality of the phenomenological world surrounding us. But film should not develop in the lines which can fully represent this reality in its entire splendor. Especially the space-time continuum as it is known by our own human perception should, as faithful as possible, be respected without too many intervening filmic techniques. Those techniques would undermine the stability of the presented space-time continuum of a given storyworld. Ellis also focuses on Bazin’s notion of realism in the terminology of unified portrayal and harmonious whole:

The essence of his notion of filmic realism is the regime of unified portrayal: every criterion of realism aims at the same objective, to combine all the elements of the representation at any one point into a harmonious whole. This prevents the reading of the image, scanning it to see its different elements and their possible conflicts or combinations, which is a central feature of modernist tendencies in the other visual arts.

The regime of the unified portrayal and the ensuing element of a representation of a harmonious whole will play an important role in Ellis' theorising on television narration. Ellis nevertheless has some criticism concerning this very normative description of realism. He also hypothesises on a tendency in television realism that will foster a ‘(...) development of more sophisticated reading skills, and the habit of understanding images as combinations of meanings rather than as the imprint of an external reality. So he does not take the notion of realism he has adopted as a given, but as the premise of a basic, preliminary and contemporary exploration of television's storytelling features thus far.

Narration in Series and Serials
The manner in which Ellis discusses series and serials is highly dependent on Raymond Williams. Williams wrote his canonical study Television. Technology and Cultural Form (1974) after having travelled to the United States for a conference in the late 1960s. There he became fascinated with the way in which American commercial Broadcast Television was organized. In Television he developed the famous concept of flow. To understand this concept one has

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102 Ellis, Visible Fictions, 10.


104 Ellis, Visible Fictions, 10.

105 Ibid..
to take into account that Williams regards the programming of commercial television as a fragmented succession of specific elements. These elements can be divided in several categories such as *news and affairs*, *education*, *children's programs* and *films*. They are, however, fragmented by i.e. *commercials* and *publicity*, but also with the other mentioned categories. The way these elements are put into a successive broadcast order, with interruptions of other elements such as commercials, creates what Williams calls a flow.  

In his study Williams shortly discusses all the elements from which this flow is build up. The category that is of importance for my treatment of Ellis, is what Williams designates as *drama*:

> This includes all kinds of dramatic work (other than special categories found in education, children's programmes and commercials). It is subdivided into 'plays' offered singly, even if under some general title such as Play for Today or Armchair Theatre; 'series', in which each play is normally self-contained but in which certain regular characters recur – principal characterisations, for example, thus building up through several items; and 'serials', in which a connected dramatic presentation is offered in several linked episodes.

It becomes clear that Ellis takes this somewhat summary treatment of the category *drama* as his main focus. He is especially interested in what Williams describes as 'series' and 'serials', and decides to build out the two forms of the drama category.

The self-containedness of the series remains intact and is further developed with his notion of unity and cohesion of segments, which he extrapolated from Bazin's thinking. Ellis divides the segment of drama into several narrative (sub-) segments as well. These internal segments provide for a classical dramatic plot construction which was already provided for by Aristotle's dramatic three part plot structure: the beginning, middle and end. Ellis however accentuates a very important difference when one also takes into account that this classical plot element is also present in Classical Hollywood storytelling:

> The unifying principle behind these programmes is not as it is in cinema (significant patterns of repetition and innovation of meanings; narrative sequence; central problematic); it is the series which provides coherence between segments. The series provides the unity of a particular programme, pulling together segments into a sense of connection which enables a level of narrative progression to take place between them. The series is the major point of repetition in TV, matching the innovation that takes place within each segment.

To understand what Ellis is arguing, I have to turn to his ideas on narration in cinema. The properties of cinema, as stated between brackets in the previous quote, are essential in his analysis of televisual drama narration. Ellis is keen

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107 Williams, *Television*, 80. emphasis TS

108 The status quo in the beginning is disturbed, the protagonist search for the disturbance in the middle, the disturbance is elevated and the equilibrium of the beginning is restored. This is thoroughly explored in the previous chapter.

on remarking that his treatment of classical Hollywood narrative is seemingly normative and reductionist. There are always counter examples to be named, when one is trying to lay out the generic elements of formulaic ways of storytelling in a commercial environment such as the Hollywood production system. Nonetheless, this normative description offers an indication of the basis on which the production of commercial narrative cinema is build upon. Ellis describes the basic properties of classic Hollywood narration as follows:

‘Filmic narration is an economic system: balancing familiar elements of meaning against the unfamiliar, it moves forward by a succession of events linked in a causal chain. The basic terms of this movement which recur throughout are those produced in an initial disruption of a stable state. The narration works through these terms, changing and rearranging them across the movement of events until a new stable state is reached.’

The disruption which catapults the causal succession of events is, according to Ellis for the most part dependent on the subject matter; romantic heterosexual relationships, espionage, crime and so on. Most notably the disturbance of romantic relationships (from the male perspective) seems to be the main narrative strategy to strive for a final stability again; the acquisition of a loving relationship with a woman figure. This especially holds true for the golden age of Hollywood between the 1920s and 1960s of the previous century, according to Ellis.

Ellis’ definition of classical Hollywood narration seems too reductionist when one brings into mind what Bordwell lays to the fore in his more rigid formalist approach. In his chapter in the collaborate effort *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, he gives a three separate systems which designate the classical Hollywood narration: ‘(...) narrative logic (definition of events, causal relations and parallelisms between events), the representation of time (order, duration, repetition), and the representation of space (composition, orientation, etc.).’ It seems that Ellis in this light only focuses on the narrative logic of cinema. His emphasis on the male perspective (or gaze) in relation to the female figure seems to lead back to Laura Mulvey’s canonical article on the male gaze and visual pleasure in classical Hollywood cinema. Quite a considerable amount of Ellis’ analysis is based on a prototypical vantage point for Cultural Studies in the eighties, where gender studies and methodology covered a considerable amount of the academic discourse. Although this stance should not be down-played, it should, in my opinion, not have such a considerable part in his analysis of television narration. Despite his elaboration on typical cultural studies approaches, he lays a significant emphasis on the economy of the classical Hollywood narration is dependent on a very dense en restricted organization of elements. This is a very important aspect when he deals dealings with televisual narration.

110 Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 62.

111 Ibid., 64.

112 Ibid., 66.


114 Laura Mulvey’s well-known study of the male gaze in relation to visual pleasure in cinema stimulated the emergence of feminist film theory. But in general, feminist theory was widely applicated and accepted in British Cultural Studies, where Ellis was an important part of. See: Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ in: *Screen* 1978 (3), 6-18.
Hollywood’s strict organization of plot elements that insure closure and the consequent restoration of the disruption is not the main aim of television narratives. In Ellis’ view fictional drama television narrative’s main prerogative lies not in the achievement of harmony and final closure, but in (1) repetition and the (2) continuous refiguration of events:

The segment form implies repetition: TV’s characteristic form of repetition is the series or the serial, a form of continuity-with-difference that TV has perfected. This form fosters the segmental approach, the generation of large numbers of diverse coherent and relatively self-contained elements. The serial implies a certain narrative progression and a conclusion; the series does not: whether documentary, drama or everlasting soap opera, it has no end in view. The series always envisages its own return. The series itself divides into two types: fictional series that are centered around a particular situation and set of characters, and nonfictional series that are characterized by a recurring format and known set of routines.¹¹⁵

The fictional series, in his view, can be seen as a specialized segmented element in the flow of television programming. As he points out every episode in the series is composed of several plot, character, and setting segments that together form a strong cohesion.¹¹⁶ This strong cohesion of elements resides in the stands alone character of the episode. Every episode as such, narratologically stands on its own with a minimal narratological reference to the other episodes. Series like *The A-Team* (NBC, 1983-1987) are a fine example to illustrate Ellis’ point. Every episode consists of the core of main protagonists (Hannibal, B.A. Baracus, Murdock, and Faceman) who fight injustice forced on the innocent (narrative situation). The internal cohesion of the single episode, like Hollywood’s narrative economy, is very strong. But the overall series – that is all the episodes and seasons together – do not offer interrelated narrative progression and references. As Ellis puts it in general terms, the series: ‘operates across all the modalities of fiction from farce to tragedy. It is characterized by the constant repetition of basic narrative situations (...). Each week the characters encounter a new situation which has no permanent effect upon them: the following week they will be in the same relation one to another.’¹¹⁷ This is one aspect of what Ellis understands as the continuous refiguration of events. The core conditions of characters, setting and plot development on the episodic level are the same. On the seasonal level it however becomes clear that the narrative is characterized by a continuous string of repetition of core conditions (and motifs as recurrent jokes, specific character traits, and so on).

The serial narratives, according to Ellis, have some fundamental elements that are dispersed and stretched over several episodes or an entire season. These elements (like love affairs, rivalry, strong antagonistic clashes) perpetuate themselves, never fundamentally change and never come to a final conclusion, in terms of cinema’s narrative economy. The basic property of the serial is its ongoing refiguration of events over the course of its run:

‘[The] TV serial multiplies incident along the way. It uses its characters, plays around with the possible permutations of relationships and situations. Its span is often that of generations. It implies certain knowledge accumulated over the span of its broadcasting, but this itself causes worries within the broadcasting institutions, because it is quite

¹¹⁵ Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 123.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 178.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 125
conceivable that a large proportion of the audience will miss one or other episode, or will not be hooked on the expository first episode. Hence a number of techniques: the title sequence that introduces characters (faces connoting a characteristic) and even their relationships; the repetition of material from the end of one episode at the beginning of the next; carefully placed references to events in the conversations of characters.\(^{118}\)

A perfect example of serial television is a soap opera (as Ellis already mentioned in an earlier quote) which, hypothetically, can run for years and years without a conclusion, and is always pushed forward by the same kinds of events. The main problem for serial television for Ellis lies in its overarching construction which presents problems for broadcast television. The makers of serial television have to reiterate previous events – via the use of i.e. expository sequences, title sequences, recaps, and so on – to ensure that television spectators will get a grip on the expanded narrative over the time of its run, and are prepared to invest their time in consumption. Therefore he states that the series are the dominant form of narrative form in fiction drama television, because of their easy narrative accessibility.\(^{119}\)

In this regard it is striking that Ellis never mentions Patrick McGoohan and George Marksteins’ innovative and successful British cult serial *The Prisoner* (ITV, 1968). In its one season run it provided both for narrative progression (in terms of intricate character and plot development, and cross-episode narrative references) and closure in the program’s final episode. This series already foreshadows the advancement fiction television narratives will take in mainstream television since the early 90s. The following paragraphs will elaborate on the basics of fictional televisual narration that has been laid out by Ellis. Both Thompson and Mittell will take more nuanced positions that can account for more diverse and narratologically complex varieties of fiction drama television. As will become clear, Ellis’ emphasis on the open-ended nature of television is one of the weak points in his theorizing on televisual narration.

### 3.2 The Nineties with Kristin Thompson. The Dispersal of Narrative

Besides film Thompson also ventures on the path of television. Her take on film in terms of large-scale structures and narrative techniques, has a profound influence on the manner in which she approaches television in her seminal work *Storytelling in Television*. But before I am going to deal with Thompson’s stance on the narrative properties of television, I will start with a more general diagnosis that Thompson makes in the mid-nineties of the 20\(^{th}\) century: *the dispersal of narrative*. With the emergence of, predominantly, the pictorial mass media the outlet for and interrelatedness between narratives has risen significantly. Television, in Thompson’s view, is the driving force behind what she calls ‘the dispersal of narrative’. The enormous hunger for narratives in contemporary television and film seems to propel a vast network of narratives in and across specific narrative media. Something *Lost* exemplifies with its expanded narrative universe through (comic) books, video games, the interactive on-line

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\(^{118}\) Ellis, *Visible Fictions*, 123.

\(^{119}\) Ibid., 124.
www.thelostexperience.com, and so on. Thompson in this respect primarily speaks of sagas, spin-offs and serials; a practice that has its roots in New Hollywood filmmaking.

The unstoppable hunger for narratives in a highly competitive industry continuously provides for an ongoing output of stories within all kind of pictorial media; that is cinema, television, television movies, comic books, the at that time barely emerging You Tube, and other streaming video sites. This has a profound influence on our conception of narrative as well: '[t]he circulation of plots among media reflects (...) an important change in our conception of narrative itself – and specifically a loosening of the notion of closure and the self-contained work of fictional art. That change has been due, in large part, to television.' Thompson hereby argues that television is for a great part responsible for overall changes in narratives in all media. The implication of this statement is quite profound when one brings into mind what Bordwell argued concerning the strict and dense narrative economy of classical Hollywood narration, and Ellis' reaffirmation of the narrative economy in television drama.

Since Ellis' strict discernment between series and serials, formats try to experiment with narrative networks of plots, sub-plots and even unrelated intermezzo's. Thompson also discusses this tendency, where she broaches the growing use of 'the interweaving [of] several important plotlines'. Buckland, in the previous chapter, already emphasized (and criticized) Aristotle's concept of peglegmenos to account for complex narration. Before I will discuss Thompson's contribution to thinking on television narration, I will first highlight parallel developments in the history of film. Thompson argues that series and serials, to a certain extent, resemble the cinematic practice of sequels.

This practice of sequels is largely born out of New Hollywood’s commercial desire to extend a narrative to maximize profit when a story appeared profitable. During the emergence of New Hollywood in the mid 1960’s and most notably the 70s, the changing commercial Hollywood industry devised new tactics in order to turn a 'narrative franchise' into a cash-cow. This does not necessarily means that every artistic ambition is absent in every stage of production. Within popular culture there are some excellent examples of commercial and at the same time artistic sequels. But the extending of the cinematic narrative into other media has its roots in New Hollywood films as Jaws and the original Star Wars trilogy Thompson also devotes some of her attention to the practice of adaptation. She lays emphasis on the fact that some scholars have focussed their attention to the conversion of literary narratives to cinematic narratives in the 60s of the previous decade. But hardly any of this focus has been given on adaptations of television narratives to film and vice versa. Thompson comes to the conclusion that '[i]n each case the adaptation, created several years after the original, reflects the greater use of both serials and sequels in both media.' The essence of serial television is in Thompson's view defined by a rather 'more complicated narrative strategy'. Firstly she mentions the reciprocity in open and closed plotlines. From this stance episodes can contain plotlines which

120 Thompson, Storytelling in Television, 74.
121 Ibid., 55.
122 One only has to think of the Godfather trilogy by Francis Ford Coppola, The Star Wars Saga by George Lucas and the Alien Quadrology by respectively Ridley Scott, James Cameron, David Fincher and Jean Pierre Jeunette
123 Ibid., 87.
124 Ibid., 93.
alternate between self-contained strands that result in a harmonious closure, and open ones. These open plotlines intersect several episodes, conventionally on a seasonal or sub-seasonal level. This results in the stretching, delayment and suspension of actions and events that are part of the open narrative strand. This narrative strategy of interwoven mixture between open and closed plotlines helps a drama narrative to sustain itself over a longer period of time and adds to a dispersed regulation of suspense and anticipation in the narrative’s growing diegesis. Thompson emphasizes that manner in which the serial stories are told - in terms of narrative structure, logic and redundancy - still remains the same to the classical Hollywood tradition.

Television over the years of its existence has procured a significant change in what she suggests to be some sort of narrative literacy. She refers back to Raymond Williams to illustrate her point. In his work on television Williams argues that television, more than any other medium, has increased the general exposure of drama to a broad and diverse public: ‘It seems probably that in societies like Britain and the United States more drama is watched in a week or weekend, by the majority of viewers, than would have been watched in a year or in some cases a lifetime in any previous historical period.’ Thompson makes two additions to Williams’s notion of the gaining influence of drama narratives on society in general. Firstly, because of the increased access and exposure to enacted visual narratives, the ability to comprehend them increases. The increase of and familiarity with different forms and genres of visual narratives allows for a more developed appreciation and comprehension of complex stories. Secondly, this increase of exposure also stimulates an exploding demand and production in all media outlets for all kinds of stories. A similar trend was already recognisable in 19th century popular culture where the textual serial format, thanks to the growing literacy rates in 19th century nation states, also gained popular prominence.

We have to go back to Adorno’s negative but very shrewd comparison between early drama television series and nineteenth century popular novels. I think that the key to the progression of television as a popular storytelling medium has its birth in the nineteenth century with the advent of popular serial novels. Adorno saw that the serial format, and its eventual incorporation into the post-war Culture Industry, as eventually destined to produce shallow, accessible and bleak expressions without any form of resistance or critique towards the system it is part of:

‘the popular or semi-popular novels of the first half of the nineteenth century, published in large quantities and serving mass consumption, were supposed to arouse tension in the reader. Although the victory of the good over the bad was generally provided for, the meandering and endless plots and subplots hardly allowed the Sue and Dumas to be continuously aware of the moral. Readers could expect anything to happen. This no longer holds true. Every spectator of a television mystery knows with absolute certainty how it is going to end.’

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125 I use this term. Thompson speaks more in terms of an increased exposure to different forms of narrative.


127 Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television*, 79.

128 One of the seminal works that covers the cognitive changes in 19th century western society is Jack Goody’s *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* Cambridge; Cambridge University Press 1977.

Adorno’s modernist complaints are of course not entirely unjust given period in which he wrote the article. Television was still developing into a full grown medium with its own specific characteristics that can transcend the formulaic, and Adorno assumed that the audience had a passive and homogenous quality. The comparison is nonetheless very interesting in another way, since contemporary serials seem to echo the late nineteenth century serial popular novels, as David Levary suggested with his idea that long-term television narratives resemble the serial Dickensian narrative. As I want to underline, contemporary television drama seems to have outgrown its outdated description, and is capable of producing narratives that, in the true tradition of Sue, Dumas and Dickens also signify a return the era where ‘readers could expect anything to happen’; especially but not only through its use of self-conscious and eccentric narrative strategies. Ellis also contemplates on the comparison between 19th century serial novels and serialized television and shares, Adorno’s complaints and hesitations:

‘There is a passing resemblance between TV serials and series and the massive, often serialised, novels that are the high point of the nineteenth century. Each is prone to the development of incident and detail rather than the concise narrative development exemplified by cinema films. Yet their overall architecture is very different, with the novel’s majestic synthesis of its characters and incidents (a characteristic of Dickens) contrasting with the fragmentary and often open-ended structure of the TV series.’

His stance is understandable since the concepts of flow, repetition, and the continuous (open ended) refiguration of narrative events play such an important role in his theorizing. Thompson underlines that this conception of television still is very much alive during the 90s: the worry remained that fictional television narrative would remain a shallow and unsophisticated way of storytelling compared to cinema and literature because of its formal restrictions and continuous flow. Thompson is however quite persuasive in proving the contrary.

Thompson is compelling in accentuating that the interwoven dispersal of narrative through a serial form is one of the main strengths of television and opens up a variety of new elongated ways of storytelling. One should of course be mindful not to forget to mention the importance of soap operas as the prime precursor to modern dispersal of narrative on television. Soap operas can be seen as a starting point where the first televisual experiments of this dispersal took place. It is not surprising that the first in depth theorizing on televisual narrative started exactly there. Tania Modlevski is one of the first academics to study the narrative structures of soap operas. In her 1982 book Loving with a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women, she argues that the narrative complexity of seemingly generic day time soap operas is highly underestimated. She relies on another noted television scholar, Horace Newcombe, to emphasize that the serial format offers great possibilities for the development of interwoven plots on a day-to-day basis that supports both intimacy and continuity: ‘(...) the serial nature of the programs television can offer us depictions of people in situations which grow and change over time, allowing for a greater audience involvement, a

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130 David Levary, ‘Lost and Long-Term Television Narrative’, 315
131 Ellis, Visible Fictions, 64-66.
sense of becoming a part of the lives and actions of the characters they see."  

Although Modlevski favors a feminist-based analysis, where the soap narrative purports an affect-driven emotional fulfillment or pleasure with its spectators, her emphasis on the importance of the possibilities of the serial format to achieve intricate interwoven plot structures should not be ignored.

**Thompson on Plot Structure and Narrative Devices in Television**

The eventual penetration of different film genres and art cinema conventions into the serial format is the changing point for the further development of fictional televisual narration. Since *Storytelling in Television* is a one-off excursion in the field of television for Thompson she understandably depends on her knowledge as a film scholar. Very much like Ellis, she refers to the classical storytelling in order to make observations and statements about television. In her first chapter she, quite usefully, reiterates her core notion of classical narration:

> "Hollywood favours unified narratives, which means most fundamentally that a cause should lead to an effect and the effect in turn should become a cause, for another effect, in an unbroken chain across the film. That is not to say that each effect follows immediately for its cause. On the contrary, one of the main sources of clarity and forward impetus in a plot is the “dangling cause”, information or action which leads to no effect or resolution until later in the film."

The concept of the *dangling cause*, is in Thompson's view one of the most important narrative devices of television. She remarks that previous thinking about the televisual narrative never broached that specific aspect. For her the dangling cause is one of the backbones of serial short-form televisual narration. Besides telefilms, Thompson mostly refers to what she calls short form television with either 30 or 60 minute running time (with commercials). Like her treatment of New Hollywood narration, she focuses on their large-scale plot relations. She accentuates that short form television ideally inhabits a two, three or four act plot structure. 

Dependent on the screen time, and broadcast company (commercial or public) most television narratives use the *turning point* to highlight the large-scale plot progression in short-form narration. Most turning points in commercial American television occur just before the commercial break.

But let's focus on Thompson's elaboration on the general basic narrative principles of televisual storytelling that can be applied in a formal analysis of television. These are narrative strategies are not unfamiliar if one takes my previous chapter on Bordwell in mind: (1) temporary suspension and (2) dangling causes; (3) unity, and (4) clarity of the plot; (5) staging the action around the personal and psychological traits of the character; whereby the (6) action is

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134 Ibid., 43.
goal-oriented; and plot and character actions are (7) consistent en (8) (psychologically) motivated.135 The linear causality (that is the successive cause-and-effect chain) of the classical narration, is also deductible in television.

Thompson furthermore elaborates on, and exclusively emphasizes five devices from classical narration which found their way in televisual narration in order to successfully convey the above mentioned basic narrative principles. The first technique (or cue) is the dialogue hook. This auditory cue involves a sentence which is uttered by one of the characters, which will prepare the spectator for the next scene. The second technique is expository writing. By means of the superimposition of text in a new scene, or the placing of textual information in between scenes, it is possible to designate information about a new spatial and temporal coordinates. The deadline is the third technique and is used to enhance the comprehensibility of long-term temporal relations. The deadline is also responsible for setting out, and regulating long-term suspense. The technique which is responsible for short-term temporal relations – and closely connected to the previous technique, as an opposing narrative device – is the appointment. The last technique mentioned by Thompson is motifs; this technique marks (or underlines) the most important consequences that have resulted from certain lines of action. Motifs don’t confine themselves as strictly a narrative expression. They can also materialize as visual or auditory motifs.136 The afore mentioned devices not only guarantee a comprehensible linear causality; they also bring about a redundant distribution of story information in order to avoid unclarity and incomprehensibility in the fabula construction.

In the serial multi-plot drama (or derived variations thereof) the use of narrative arcs enables this specific mode of storytelling that allows for stretched and dispersed complex overlapping narrative.137 As she elaborates on the varieties of long and short-term arcs:

135 Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television*, 20-21.

136 Ibid., 24-25.

137 Ibid., 58.

138 Ibid., 63.

‘[t]he conventions of multiple-story dramas encourage writers to pace the plotlines differently from those of more conventional programs. Typically the self-contained story to be closed off within the episode proceeds at a brisk pace. Action intended to arc over several episodes moves a bit more slowly, and really long-term plotlines add only a tiny bit of information each time they surface.’138

How this ‘juggling’ with various short and long term plotlines is achieved, is ascribes to televisions unique capability of dispersed exposition. Thompson emphasizes that most writing manuals have difficulties in giving tips on how to recap crucial story information (for hypothetical new or late comers), on the long and short term. According to Thompson the key for dispersed exposition, is positioning the recap. Most obviously, there has to be a recap at the start of the episode, but also (in commercial television) after act breaks. A recap can take different forms to assure a maximum redundancy of crucial story information concerning the plotlines that have been laid out. Thompson only talks about (invisible or hidden) recapping through the dialogue’s logic after a commercial break: characters often, in a non-
Intrusive manner, reiterate the situational, spatial and temporal circumstances from before the act break.\textsuperscript{139} This functions well within the story's diegesis during the episode. But there are more techniques to ensure dispersed exposition. The use of flashbacks is also a conventional technique to place and reiterate important past events which did not take place in that specific episode. For longer running television serials with long term story plotting, there is also a tendency to place collage-like recap episodes mid-way or at the beginning or end of a season.\textsuperscript{140} Unfortunately Thompson does not say much on the dispersal of narrative in large-scale relations. She nonetheless gives an opening for considering the many complexities on serial television storytelling. In this regard it is, again, unfortunate that she did not mention her ideas on the different goal-oriented character clusters in New Hollywood. The complexity of the intertwining and arcing of a number of plots in a serial is, in my opinion, also for a large part dependent on which of the three clusters of protagonists is chosen by the creators.

In my final chapter, where I will analyze \textit{Lost}, I will try to show that this is one of the very important aspects of the serials narrative complexities. But I first turn to Jason Mittell. Like Ellis and Thompson he relies heavily on theoretical narrative concepts derived from film. He is however far more insightful in how television, in a remedial and technological sense, developed over the years. These developments also give an indication of the circumstances in which the narrative complexity of contemporary serial television eventually came to blossom.

\subsection*{3.3 The Start of the Twenty-first Century with Jason Mittell.}

In the wake of Thompson's defence of a formal approach towards television, several scholars tried to fill the gap that seems to have been vacant for a long time. Wisconsin-Madison alumni Jason Mittell turned out to become the frontrunner of the next generation of television scholars. Over the past decade he published a number of articles and books in which he proposed a new attitude towards television studies. Especially his contribution for a renewed television genre theory, and the acknowledgement of the progressing narrative complexity in American television, have been favourably accepted within academic discourse.

Although his ideas on the levels of the televisual text, the several stages of production and television aesthetics are rich and of great importance, I will focus mainly on his work on narrative complexity. In his article 'Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television' Mittell tries to underline that television, compared to cinema, has taken a different turn towards storytelling. Although the first experiments with more complex serialized narratives where undertaken by creators that rooted from film (such as David Lynch and Barry Levinson), the new generation were to 'embrace the broader challenges and possibilities for creativity in long-form series, as extended character depth, ongoing plotting, and episodic variations are simply unavailable options within a two-hour film.'\textsuperscript{141} Variations in long and short-term plotting, and extending character depth are just a handful of possibilities which

\textsuperscript{139} Thompson, \textit{Storytelling in Film and Television}, 68

\textsuperscript{140} \textit{Lost} is one of the most prominent examples that use the recap episodes, to underline and reiterates significant story information, which is relevant for comprehending the further progression of the plot. I will analyze a recap in the second part of my analysis.

\textsuperscript{141} Mittell, 'Narrative Complexity', 31.
normally do not hold for cinema. Although Thompson also sees these possibilities in cinema, the sheer scope of
several years of season plotting has a far greater diegetic territory than cinema ever can hope to cover. Mittell
nevertheless tries to make clear that he is not arguing that cinema has lost its position as a profound storytelling
medium in our culture. He wants to point out that the modes of industry, but also fundamental changes in
spectatorship, of the two media have changed significantly during the last two decades with the introduction of digital
technologies. This is in every aspect fascinating since Ellis in the early eighties already noticed that his analysis of
television narration is highly dependent on the contemporary state of technological development, spectatorship and
the institutional organisation of television practice.

So, before I return to Mittell’s ideas on narrative complexity in contemporary American television I will give a
short account of some of the changes that in great part are responsible for creating the right circumstances for this
narrative complex narratives to bloom.

Mittell on Changes in Television Practice
To adequately analyse the changes in the domain of television, Mittell uses a, for film theorists, familiar
methodological paradigm; that of historical poetics. As I already stated, Bordwell popularized this methodology as an
opposing research paradigm for film studies in the late eighties, during the heydays of French structuralist analysis.
Mittell describes his *modus operandi* as a methodology ‘that situates formal developments within specific historical
contexts of production, circulation, and reception’. In this respect cultural products are not seen in the isolated
context of the visionary maker and the ‘text’, but as a product that is shaped by several historical factors, in a
particular cultural context, which influenced a different poetics that deviates from the previous norm. This does not
mean that the innovation which is provided for, by the cultural products poetics, remains marginal. It can well become
the new norm in the practice of television. Mittell gives an account of the changes in the American television practice
from its early beginnings.

As the new medium emerged in the mid 1940’s the institutional base from which television sprung was,
initially, not cinema but radio. So the experience that had to be conveyed to the public in the early days of
development was aimed on the live and simultaneous character of radio. This meant that television and radio often
shared the same programming schedules and genres, but in the case of television was enhanced with the moving
image. Gradually the conventions of the theatrical performance became part of television’s *modus operandi* in order
to convey the content of the (dramatic, musical, news) program to the studio audience and television viewer. The
basis for scripted pre-recorded television programs was still missing because of the enormous financial costs.

142 Mittell, ‘Narrative Complexity’, 30.
143 Jason Mittell, *Television and American Culture*, 165.
144 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin offer a compelling argument in their *Remediation* that accounts for the way in which new
media, at first, appropriate the medium specific characteristics of older and more familiar media (in this case radio, cinema and
theater). After the initial appropriation the new medium develops its own synthesized characteristics that can even have a more
powerful and successful medium specificity. In their book they, however, only focus on television’s initial remediation of film; they
do not mention the influence of radio and theatre in the formative years of television. See: Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin,
In the early fifties the first steps and financial risks were taken to appropriate the cinematic medium’s specific characteristics and institutional practices into television production; the advent of anthology drama and ‘telefilm production exchanges the efficiency and immediacy of live production for increased control and flexibility in shooting and editing.”

Where the live television recording was located at the heart of the professionalized radio industry (New York City), the production of drama television eventually was located at the Hollywood area in Los Angeles for quite obvious reasons. The synthesis of the two media which both allowed for non textual serialized and anthologized narratives resulted in the first commercially successful television drama series *Dragnet* (NBC television, 1951-1959).

These productions where characterized by their single camera production. This was vastly time consuming, when one was making non-live television and resulted in an aesthetic that, besides some close-ups and varying angles, mostly consisted of *master shots* that gave an overview of the entire plane of the setting and the characters' action. The introduction of multi-camera production eventually offered the possibility to switch between different angles during live transmissions. For telefilms the multi-camera production practice allowed for a more efficient recording of scenes comparable to Hollywood's multi-camera simultaneous recording of dialogue via the shot-reverse-shot.

The introduction of videotape technology in the late 50s further improved and changed television production. This relatively cheap magnetic audio-visual storage device secured the possibility to build up an archive and opened up the possibilities for pre-recording shows on the same day for later transmission (such as late night talk shows), syndicated re-runs of popular programs on different channels and transmission in different time zones. As the technology developed during the decades after its introduction, the on-tape-editing capabilities improved significantly as well. In the eighties the use of videotape technology finally became the norm for production.

Most notably, the production value of television drama increased significantly during the 80s because of the lowering production costs and higher budgets to compete with other successful television dramas. The conventions of Hollywood gradually infiltrated the production of television, where pre-production, production and post-production became more specialized. Michael Mann’s *Miami Vice* (NBC Universal Television, 1984-1990) is one of the prime examples of what can be considered to be the New Wave of television: MTV and cinema inspired cinematography and editing, a soundtrack consisting of pop music, intricate on location shooting and special effects, full-blown marketing strategies, popular culture references and aesthetics, and so on. This trendsetting mode of production and distribution ushered in a new paradigm that has been continued ever since in different forms and aims.

In the late 20th and early 21st century, as Thompson also noted, both the introduction of cable television and the advent of the digital era, with TiVo (and other digital on-demand services) and internet, has profoundly changed the way in which media, most notably film and television, are rooted in our daily lives is also discussed by Mittell. New media scholar P. David Marshall offers a more in-depth description of the generational shift that is occurring between

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146 The crime procedural *Dragnet* originally started as a radio series for NBC (1947-1957). Other examples of serialized narratives in cinema and radio are *Dick Tracey* (originally a comic, remediated both in a radio and movie serial), *Flash Gordon* (originally a comic, also remediated in various radio and movie serials), *Lights Out* (various radio networks, 1934-1947).

147 Ibid., 173.

148 Ibid., 175.
traditional TV broadcast and new internet-focussed post-broadcast consumers of television content. The popularity of fandom outings and amateur reviews on blogs and social network sites has fundamentally changed the experiencing nature of fictional television narratives. Besides distribution media as DVD and Blu-Ray, the digital content that is on offer (whether it be legal or illegal) via peer-to-peer torrent software, file exchange sites as rapidshare and mega-upload, and streaming video sites is daily accessed by billions of consumers of narrative.

Besides the new way of experiencing television from the side of the audience, the production and distribution characteristics are changing as well; direct and less hierarchical reciprocal interaction between the fanbase and the production team, multi-medial viral, experience and other forms of marketing strategies, and alliances with new media. As Marshall puts it in threefold:

’[Firstly] the industry has developed alliances with sites such as YouTube where exclusive content deals are struck in exchange for controlling the piracy of television content. Second, the television production industry has moved much more readily than film into a music distribution model for its programs. Thus, through iTunes one can pay for the downloading of particular television episodes. Third, and possibly most costly, the network websites have become more elaborate places for the distribution of programmes than in the past. Increasingly, television websites are now designed for ‘catch-up’ television, where past episodes and/or compilation summary videos of past episodes can be streamed from the site. Catch-up television has become standard for major American networks, and uses what is called pre-roll advertising to pay for its delivery.’

Although this is not entirely of interest in my thesis, since I am dealing with televisual narration, it is necessary to give a general account of these developments since they influence the experience of narrative as well. The sheer amount of different possibilities, circumstances and forms to produce, distribute and consume narratives is enormous compared to the previously hierarchized broadcast television. To put Marshall’s argument short, the previous Broadcast era was dominated by traditional vertical top-down hierarchy imposed by the industry on the audience. The post-broadcast era implies a fundamental sociological shift towards a more horizontal notion of the ‘network society’, facilitated through the use of digital media.

Mittell on Televisual Narration

In Mittell’s recently published Television and American Culture (2009), televisual narration is exhaustively treated. The influence Bordwell has on Mittell’s formal investigation of televisual narratives is quite obvious. Although Mittell is not

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150 Marshall, ’Screens’, 43-44.

151 Manuel Castells’ The Rise of the Network Society (1996) seems influential in Marshall’s analysis of the change of paradigm in conceptualizing the hierarchical relations in Western society. Especially the one-way oriented hierarchy notion of the relation between mass media and the audience (i.e. propagated by Adorno) is significantly revised by Cassells: ‘(...) the audience is not a passive object but an interactive subject opened the way to its differentiation, and to the subsequent transformation of the media from mass communication to segmentation, customization and individualization, from the moment technology, corporations, and institutions allowed such moves’. See: Manuel Castells, The Rise of the Network Society. Revised Edition Malden, Oxford, and Chichester; Blackwell Publishing 2010, 365.
as theoretically hyper-descriptive in his terminology, he endorses Bordwell’s conceptualizing on narrative and his cognitive assumptions that the spectator, in his mind, is actively trying to unify, clarify, and invest narrative logic on the diegetic world through ‘a process called narrative comprehension.’ The plot is responsible for the distribution of narrative information which eventually will lead to the construction of the story. Viewer expectations, hypothesising and the gradual readjustment via testing and discarding of hypotheses via new information remains one of the most important roles of the spectator.

He starts off by setting a basic narrative perimeter in which television functions as a storytelling medium. At the centre of his treatment he places the backbone of televisual narration: characters and events. Characters are quite plainly mentioned as ‘the people featured in the narrative.’ They have agency, which Mittell describes as ‘the ability to undertake action and make choices that have narrative consequences’. So far, there is nothing new if one brings into mind Bordwell and Thompson narrative explorations of film and television. The resemblance with film narration starts to decline when Mittell argues that television narratives, overall, tend not to focus on a strong antagonist-based development of ‘goal-orientedness’. The protagonist’s goal to confront an antagonist is not uncommon, especially in a more self-contained episodic structure. The main device for viewer investment, however, lies more in the foregrounding of changing relationships between characters, as Ellis already has argued. This can certainly be seen in soap operas, where strong antagonists eventually become heroes or allies for certain protagonists. So, in Mittell’s view the development of character-depth and dramatic character relationships on the long term, are far more important for the continuous story information conveyance than the primacy of antagonist confrontation at the final stages of plot development. This is not to say that antagonistic confrontation is not part of narrative devices to create (act, episodic or seasonal) cliffhangers and suspense.

The events, the other element of the backbone of televisual narration, are also important for the continuous conveyance of story information. As Mittell argues when he mentions the practical side of set production, lighting, mise-en-scene, cinematography and so on, all the formal elements of a specific television program are thoroughly conceived to provide a sustainable diegesis with familiar elements that ensure a quick situational recognition. But most importantly, a well thought of consistency and familiarity of formal elements that are responsible for the conveyance of the setting, are pivotal in creating the right atmosphere ‘that viewers welcome into their homes each week.’ The events, just like film, have to take place in the carefully constructed diegetic world to enhance plausible circumstances for the viewers to accept ‘a change in a character’s status to be dramatically significant, whether within a relationship (…), professional situation (…), or even a matter of survival (…)’. So, overall, the causality and narrative highlighted significance of events follow the same principles that Bordwell has set out in his work on film narration. The events are ordered in large part scales, according to Mittell, in a three-act structure: ‘the first act

152 Mittell, *Television and American Culture*, 218.

153 Ibid., 214.

154 Ibid., 216.

155 Ibid., 180.

156 Ibid., 216.
presents and then disrupts a situation, the longer second act prolongs and complicates the disruption, and the third act resolves the conflict and restores the equilibrium.\textsuperscript{157} Compared to Thompson's notion of the plot structure, Mittell's dealings with the large-scale structure are quite simplistic and conventional. Especially the shallow depth when treating televisual characters (as described in my previous indentation) grows pale in comparison to Thompson's intricate elaboration on the differences in character clusters, and their respective influence on the large part scales of the plot development in contemporary classicism. How the three-part structures and their plotlines are employed differs depending on what form the narrative takes. Contrary to Ellis' twofold discernment, Mittell describes four dominant narrative form(s) in fiction drama television: (1) \textit{anthology series}, (2) \textit{episodic series}, (3) \textit{episodic serials}, and (4) \textit{serial narratives}:

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<tr>
<td>\textit{General Characteristics}</td>
<td>Every episode has a different self-contained storyworld through its stand-alone narrative; no inter-episode references or relations; self-contained basic narrative structure; aimed at final closure.</td>
<td>Consistent over-all storyworld, but independent episodes; characters, relationships and setting constant across episodes; independent plots; episodic closure; procedural narrative structure.</td>
<td>Mixture of serial narrative and episodic serial; multi-episode plotlines; story arcs; strong episodic procedural form; several plotlines in one episode with mostly a episodic resolution and some ongoing developments.</td>
<td>Ongoing serial narration in consistently changing storyworld; less or no stringent episodic structure; mixture of long and short term plotting; strong character relationships and depth; complex mixture of major and minor plots without stringent episodic procedural structure.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first format in the spectrum, the anthology series, is characterized by its stand-alone narrative. Every episode presents a closed-off, ‘freestanding and unrelated storyworld’.\textsuperscript{159} Their popularity has diminished over the decades, but besides the classics as \textit{The Twilight Zone} (CBS, 1959-1964) and \textit{Tales from the Crypt} (HBO, 1989-1996) there are some sparse contemporary anthologies such as \textit{Nightmares and Dreamscapes} (TNT, 2006). The episodic series are far

\textsuperscript{157} Mittell, \textit{Television and American Culture}, 227.

\textsuperscript{158} Based on table in: Mittell, \textit{Television and American Culture}, 230. Expanded by TS.

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 228.
more common in contemporary television. Characterized by its 'consistent storyworld, but each episode is relatively independent. (...) characters, setting, and relationships carry over across episodes, but the plots stand on their own, requiring little need for consistent sequential viewing or knowledge of story history to comprehend the narrative.'

The development of plotlines and their eventual closure only takes place on the episodic level. Furthermore, the plotlines are straightforward and self-contained, and often revolve around a narrative enigma. Popular contemporary American examples of these kinds of narratives are the Law & Order franchise (i.e. L&O, L&O Special Victims Unit and L&O Criminal Intent, 1990-...) and NYPD Blue (ABC, 1993-2005). Contrary to the previous two forms of television narrative, the episodic serial and serial narratives demands far greater audience investment because of a far more intricate narrative construction:

'The key feature of serial narration is continuing storylines traversing multiple episodes, with an ongoing diegesis that demands viewers to construct a storyworld using information gathered from their full history of viewing (...). Serial programs do provide closure of storylines, but rarely in the same episode in which the plot was introduced. When storylines are resolved in serials, they are often replaced with even more suspenseful and engrossing narrative enigmas – the resolving third act morphs into a disruptive final act of a new plotline. The three acts of any story rarely correspond to the structure of a single serial episode, with carry-over of a lengthy second act across weeks or months of a series.'

The serial narrative and the mixture between episodic series and serial narrative (episodic serial) predominantly was the main narrative paradigm for daytime soap operas in the 50s and 60s. As Modlevski already argued, this form of narrative opens up the possibility for intricate plot constructions that are not only limited to episodic duration. During the late 70s and 80s the serial narrative gradually infiltrated different television genres such as medical drama’s and crime shows. As Thompson, Mittell underlines the serial narrative makes use of narrative arcs, that work on the seasonal level, but mostly runs through (parts of) the entire series' multi-seasonal narrative. So, on the episodic level, in general, consists of two or three plotlines (which the television industry designates as A plot, B plot, C plot and so on): 'A plot focuses on the central narrative conflict, usually featuring the main character and taking up the largest portion of screen time, while B and C offer thematic counterpoint contrast, or resonance with secondary characters.' Besides the plotlines in either an episodic, seasonal, or multi-seasonal story arcs, ongoing runners are also part of the narrative. Runners are specific 'established issues in the storyworld that rarely trigger explicit narrative events and main plotlines' that constitute continuity in terms of evoking focus and pleasure, and often revolve around character relationships and the situational status quo of specific characters.

160 Mittell, Television and American Culture, 228.
161 Ibid., 229.
162 Ibid., 230.
163 Ibid., 231.
164 Ibid.
The basic large-scale storytelling principles of drama television are greatly determined by many specific structural limitations. Quite contrary to Thompson, he argues that television is far less flexible in its storytelling capabilities than literature (even the serialized novels of the 19th century) or film.\(^{165}\) The scheduling paradigms of the major networks in the United States demand strict screen duration: either 20-22 or 45-50 minutes without commercials. Particularly the specific regime of commercial breaks was pivotal in the conventionalizing of act breaks with narrative hooks, to guarantee the continuing involvement of the audience despite the interruption.\(^{166}\) The concept of the narrative hook is also worked out by the Australian television scriptwriter Linda Aronson. In her guide *Television Writing* she elaborates on one of the dominant narrative hooks, the button, which signals the act break: 'A button is a startling piece of information delivered in the last line of a scene, particularly immediately before a commercial break or at the end of an episode. It is designed to make the audience return to the show to see what happens. Drama series that involve serial content about the lives of the regulars always end on a button.'\(^{167}\)

So, the previous example is what Mittell sees as part of the extrinsic norms that molds the way in which larger ongoing narratives are conceived. The demands of a network or fanbase has increasingly penetrated the practice of serial drama television making: '(...) network mandates to boost ratings or fan reactions to particular characters or stories can alter long-term plans that writers have for a television series, highlighting the fact that television storytelling must juggle numerous pressures to maintain an ongoing storyworld while attempting to craft coherent and consistent episodes comprising a larger narrative arc.'\(^{168}\) Besides the extrinsic norms, television narratives in itself also create intrinsic norms; that is, self imposed storytelling characteristics of a particular show. Since the writing on the series is done by a team of writers, the safeguarding, and sometimes changing of the internal norms and overall consistency of plot development is done by the showrunner. What defines the intrinsic norms also relies on the genre identity of the television drama. The genre identity is pivotal in the cueing of viewer expectation in terms of the programs structure. When the intrinsic norms of a specific kind of generic narrative proves successful and is subject to isomorphism of the production and distribution side, one can speak of a genre cycle.\(^{169}\) Early popular series like the police procedural *Dragnet*, paved the way for many police procedurals to come; via the help of its intrinsic structure, it’s promoting as police procedural, and the critics and audience affirmation.\(^{170}\) The problems with formulaic narration in television by critics as Adorno (and Ellis’s emphasis and the repetitive nature of television) often spring from the

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\(^{165}\) Thompson sees the stringent institutional limitations as the strength of serialized television. She admits that novelists and filmmakers do not have the same restrictions as (commercial) television writers and producers. She, however, accentuates that the dispersed narrative counters the restrictions because of its possibilities to stretch, alternate between open and closed plotlines. Dispersed exposition also helps to keep story information redundant, even after a commercial break.

\(^{166}\) Mittell, *Television and America Culture*, 232.


\(^{168}\) Mittell, *Television and America Culture*, 233.

\(^{169}\) Ibid., 236.

\(^{170}\) In Mittell’s study *Genre and Television* (2004) he argues that genre isn’t something that is solely present in the text alone: ‘Even though texts certainly bear marks that are typical of genres, these textual conventions are not what define the genre. Genres exist only through the creation, circulation, and consumption of texts within cultural contexts. But for the sake of my argument, I will mostly focus on some of the formal characteristics of genre. See: Jason Mittell, *Genre and Television. From Cop Shows to Cartoons in American Culture* New York and London; Routledge 2004, 11.
notion of genre conventions: ‘watching a genre can serve as a ritual activity that provides for a comfortable and predictable experience, reinforcing certain repeated meanings.’\(^{171}\) Mittell however rightly states that the experiments with genre mixture are pivotal in the breaking of generic expectations, and can, as Thompson stated, provide for a more developed appreciation and comprehension of complex stories. The most prominent examples of television narratives that are considered to be complex and innovative are those who mixed genres: ‘(...) a celebrated innovative program such as *Twin Peaks* does not dismiss genres in exchange for some idealized creative vision, but rather plays with the assumptions and conventions of soap operas, detective dramas, and supernatural horror to highlight the limits of formulas, while still embracing some of their conventional pleasures.’\(^{172}\)

And this is important for the coming chapter, where I will analyze the contemporary serial narrative *Lost*. Besides its genre mixing, it still obeys to basic general narrative 'principles' that I have plotted out in the earlier chapters on (modern) classical narration. As Ellis, Thompson and Mittell have underlined drama television is heavily indebted to the clear and redundant storytelling techniques. But as Thompson has emphasized, the serials ability for dispersed exposition (and narration), opens possibilities for sustaining several short and long-running story arcs over a considerable period of time, without sacrificing comprehension. This is not to say that re-watching (or re-reading the televisual 'text') is not necessary for a better fabula construction. Especially with *Lost*, it is sometimes convenient to look up earlier parts of specific story arcs or episodes to fully understand the internal narrative references and certain cause-and-effect chains in its scrambled narration. But as Mittell and Marshall stated, the unprecedented possibility for television viewers to ‘catch-up’ in the digital age (via DVD, streaming video, downloading, and so on), frees the spectator from regime of imposed broadcasting by the industry. This opens up another perspective that has not been dealt with by neither Thompson nor Mittell: the televisual drama narrative that can be experienced not on a week-to-week basis, but on a self-appointed screening at home, without commercials in a semi-continuous run. So, in the coming chapter I will synthesize thinking on film and television narration. I will try to analyze how the dispersed narration takes place in *Lost*'s serial narrative (both the episodic and seasonal level) and which role the character clusters play therein. I will also focus on some devices and characteristics of *Lost*'s narration that normally have been attributed to art cinema: such as the flashforward, self-conscious narration, and the thwarting of the clear unity of space, time, and action. Striking in *Lost* is its ability to elicit narrative effects that distort easy narrative comprehension, through its intricate dispersed serial narrative, while still holding true to basic modern classicist storytelling principles: a tendency that Bordwell has seen in forking-path/multiple draft/puzzle films and network narratives in contemporary Hollywood, European and Asian cinema.

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171 Mittell, *Television and America Culture*, 237.

172 Ibid., 237.
4. Analysis of Lost

In the fall of 2004 J.J. Abrams, Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse Lost was introduced to the television screen by broadcast network ABC. Via enigmatic promos, viral internet marketing, an alternative experience on the web, and early favorable sales of the program to foreign broadcast companies the producers tried to force feed this expensive new television drama to the general public. Part of the show’s appeal are the themes of destiny and free will, references to western philosophy (i.e. through some of the characters last names: Locke, Rousseau, Bakunin, Hume and others), and numerous other implicit and explicit references to literary and popular culture. But as Mittell said in his introduction to Lost, the formal aspects should be considered primarily. During the writing of his Television and American Culture, Lost did not yet come to its conclusion. Contrary to Mittell, I am in the favorable position to overlook the ’finished’ narrative. Part of the success of Lost relies on its narrative structure that, as Mittell has argued, elicits a form of pleasure in its audience to become ‘amateur narratologists’. As is the case with many serial narratives, the dispersal of narrative through long and short term arcs necessitates the whole history of viewing in order to attempt constructing the fabula in its totality. Although I will not be dealing with qualitative statements on some of the main enigma’s that are also part of the strategy to follow the show’s plot development, I will give a short account of the basic premise of the serial narration.

The primary narrative situation (or situational circumstances) and the accompanying bundle of ensuing plotlines unfolds on a mysterious tropical island with no clear geographic coordinates (logically somewhere in the South Pacific). Oceanic flight 815 from Sidney to Los Angeles has broken into three parts in mid-flight above the island, and leaves a miraculously surviving group of passengers of the mid-section scattered on a part of the shoreline, without knowing the fate of the passengers from the other parts of the plane. The group soon discovers that they are not the only inhabitants of the island: polar bears and wild boars roam the island, a mysterious monster kills off some members of the group, whispers from the ’Others’ haunt the forests, a 16-year-old French distress signal is picked up, and an old seemingly impenetrable hatch is discovered in the ground. This is the set-up of the primary narrative situation that gradually comes to the fore in the first season. The most important general overarching narrative enigma’s that arise from the primary situation are summarized as follows: (1) what is the nature and influence of the island on its inhabitants and surrounding, (2) how and why did this specific group of passengers survive, and (3) will they be able to flee from the island to safety. The basic episodic premise for predominantly the first three seasons deals with one character of the core ensemble of protagonists, or as Thompson would say multi-protagonist cluster of a group. Each of them offers his or her perspective on the primary situation and procures a strongly motivated plot trajectory. Mittell also gives a preliminary characterization of Lost’s narrative structure:

'[i]n many ways, Lost’s use of narrative structure follows conventions of television storytelling. It typically emphasizes moment-to-moment clarity and comprehension via the continuity system; it segments its stories into commercially

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173 The Dutch commercial SBS-group for example acquired the rights to air the first season just two weeks after the American premiere of the show on ABC.

174 The literary references range from just mentioning specific works as props on the set, characters reading and mentioning specific books, and naming episodes after the works of i.e. Charles Dickens and Lewis Carroll. The references also function on a more narratological and intertextual level: mimicking plots, events, referencing to books, and so on.
divided acts with suspenseful act breaks; and each episode offers clear A and B plots and runners. As a large ensemble series (…) Lost draws upon serial fiction conventions of charting the relationships within a community.”

But this is just the beginning to explain the narrative properties of Lost. The way in which the individual members of the core ensemble formulate their goals according to the challenges offered by the developments in the primary narrative situation is however dependent on one of Lost’s most important intrinsic conventions of the first three seasons: the use of the character-centered flashback. Through the use of flashbacks the fabular background, psychological foundations of the protagonists’ character traits and direct and indirect relationships between the survivors are revealed. So, the first three seasons can be seen as a network narrative where the convergence of their plotlines culminates in the plane crash; how the individual trajectories in the multi-protagonist cluster led to this dramatic convergence is conveyed through the flashbacks. In the last three seasons the intrinsic narrative structure changes significantly. Where the first half of Lost primarily focuses on what moved the survivors to board the doomed Oceanic flight and if they (with their differing or partly overlapping motivations and goals) are able to get off the Island, the third season’s two finale episodes reveals something different: through the use of dispersed character-centered flashforwards it will come to the fore that some of the characters of the core ensemble will eventually get off the island with far reaching and highly dramatic consequences. The last season even offers a, for television, never structurally used narrative device: the character-centered flashsideways, where a parallel storyworld is presented (one where the plane crash did not happen) intercalated between the events in the primary narrative situation on the island. Although it would be a daunting task to account for, and subsequently analyze all the formal practices that have been applied over the six season run of the show, I will try to focus on two characteristics of its narrative that loosen the strict narrative economy often attributed to Hollywood and television narration: (1) the role of the multi-protagonist cluster, and (2) the cluster’s influence on the temporal organization, through the extensive use of strongly formalized flashbacks, flashforwards, and flashsideways. The two characteristics I have chosen, will build on my expositions in the previous chapters; Thompson’s conception of the goal-oriented multi-protagonist cluster of the group and her notion of television’s unique capability of dispersal of narrative will play an important part in my in-depth analysis of Lost’s flashback structure; Bordwell’s elaboration on forking-path narrative will play an important role in my more general analysis of the flashsideway in the final season; Mittell’s description of the serial narrative will be the implicit narrative form from which Lost will be analyzed. His very basic idea of a tripartite plot structure in contemporary serial television, will however be upgraded with Thompson’s emphasis on the characteristic five part plot structure in New Hollywood: I will also propose that the specific practice of the fifth act (also known as the final lesson or epilogue) also penetrated television storytelling, on both the episodic and overall seasonal level.

Narrative Dispersal through the Multi-Protagonist Cluster
As I mentioned, Lost’s narration is based on the multi-protagonist cluster of the group. The internal structure of the first three seasons, on an episodic level, relies on a strong subjective narration through one of the protagonists’ plotlines and accompanying flashbacks. Every protagonist brings along its own specific bundle of character traits,

175 Mittell, Television and American Culture, 263.
psychological motivations, and goals. Besides the partial subjective narration of the central character in the episode, the intertwined ongoing cross-episode plotlines are mostly narrated in a more balanced manner; that is, the narration presents the diegesis through the actions of the protagonist which are closely connected to these plotlines. For convenience sake I have made the following table that gives an overview of all the episodes and their central character:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Episodenummer</th>
<th>Season 1</th>
<th>Season 2</th>
<th>Season 3</th>
<th>Season 4</th>
<th>Season 5*</th>
<th>Season 6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Jack &amp; Juliet</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Michael</td>
<td>Sun &amp; Jin</td>
<td>Faraday, Charlotte, Miles, Frank, Naomi</td>
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<td>Kate</td>
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<td>Kate</td>
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<td>Mr. Eko</td>
<td>Desmond</td>
<td>Sun &amp; Jin</td>
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<td>Juliet</td>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Sayid</td>
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<td>Tail section</td>
<td>Juliet</td>
<td>Sun &amp; Jin</td>
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<td>Desmond</td>
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<td>Hurley</td>
<td>Jack</td>
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<td>Sun &amp; Jin</td>
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<td>Desmond</td>
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<td>Hurley</td>
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<td>Desmond</td>
<td>VARIOUS</td>
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**Bold=** protagonist centred flash-sideways  
**Underline=** protagonist centred flashforward  
**italics=** protagonist centred time travel  
**normal=** protagonist centred flashback  
* = season 5’s narration alternates between different time coordinates: most importantly 2007 off the Island, and 1955, 1974, 1977, 1988, 2004 on the Island. The individual episodes occasionally use flashbacks, but not in the previous structured manner. Therefore I didn’t account for it in this column.

With this overview it also becomes clear that some characters, like Jack Shephard (7x), Kate Austen (7x), and John Locke (7x) have more episodes that center around their psychological and teleological fabular background, compared to the other protagonists in the first three seasons. But it also shows that the conveyance of background story information that is connected to possible construction of a specific character’s psychological and teleological unity, is dispersed and seemingly hierarchized through the number of flashback episodes associated to the characters. Another interesting element of *Lost’s* storytelling properties is the shift toward to narrative devices of the flashforwards, time traveling, and what the makers designate as flash-sideways at the end of season three. Showrunners Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof on several occasions explained how the interaction between Nielsen ratings, fan outings, and their own creative process has influenced the overall plot development and construction of their show. The average Nielsen

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176 In *Poetics of Cinema* Bordwell also argues that the amount of screen time a specific character receives, influences the inference that this character – who is part of a multi-protagonist narrative – may in fact be (one of ) the main protagonist. He illustrates his argument with the amount of screen time Don Vito and Michael Corleone (75%) receive in *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972). See: Bordwell, *Poetics of Cinema*, 91.
rating where enormous during the first two seasons: hovering between 15 to 20 million viewers per episode. The initial distrust of the ABC executives in the viability of Lost faded during the first season which gave the production crew more scope to develop the dispersal of narrative. As Case explains the initial conditions of making Lost on a Q&A for the Writers Guild Foundation: ‘Everybody thought it was going to be twelve episodes (...) For us the model was The Prisoner or Twin Peaks which where short-lived shows. (...) We started to do a little bit [unsure if the ABC executives saw Lost as a long term project]. Between the first and the second season we did the hardcore baking of the mythology that was build for the long term. (...) We concocted enough mythology to get us through the first season and we knew certain things would be down at the end of the line and we had some big things demarcated. At that moment we know we had the built it for a hundred episode model as opposed to a twelve episode model.’ During the start of the third season however the Nielsen ratings dropped significantly to an average of 13.47 million viewers. Damon Lindelof explains how: ‘Once we reached the point where we can no longer continue to work towards something [at the end of season 2], and we are just working you’re gonna see it, and the audience started responding ‘oh my god the show is going nowhere’. And then the network started seeing ‘oh my god those guys are right’. It was not a ‘told-you-so-moment’ but they decided to end the show based on the fact that creatively (...) the absence of a plan and the idea we had to spin out wheels became very apparent.’ The decision to negotiate for an end date with the ABC executives enabled them to make definitive long-term plans to conclude the narrative. As Cuse and Lindelof furthermore state in the Q&A, around midway season three the segmented flashback structure began to affect the creative process, since the information about the characters backstories was largely provided for. They decided to chance the show’s intrinsic norms in order to usher in the next phase of Lost’s narrative tactics: the structural segmented en dispersed use of character-centered foreshadowing in the subsequent season, time travel in the fifth, and the dispersed and fragmented application of a for television even more experimental narrative device; a character-centered reference to a parallel storyworld.

But before I will venture on the path of Lost’s more experimental last three seasons, I will first take the three characters with the most flashback episodes that specifically center around their experience on the island; surgeon Jack Shephard, fugitive Kate Austen, and the miraculously cured, former wheelchair-bound John Locke. With these three characters I want to show two things. Firstly I want to illustrate that within the multi-protagonist cluster of the group, there is a certain hierarchy which is reflected in the amount of character-centered flashback episodes. Secondly, I want to show that the flashbacks function on several levels: (1) the flashbacks provide a parallel situation from the character’s past with the primary situation on the island, (2) the flashbacks function as a device to account for their dramaturgical teleology and unity, and (3) their temporally scrambled dispersal adds to the delayed

177 Nielsen ratings are audience measurement systems developed by Nielsen Media Research, in an effort to determine the audience size and composition of television programming in the United States. These ratings belong to the key adult 18-49 demographics.

178 See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lost_%28season_3%29

179 For a part of the Q&A, see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tz6p_Z1OsYI. Excerpt from Writers Guild Foundation produced DVD Writing - Inside the Writers Room with Lost (2009).
possibility to construct important fabula information into a causal motivated whole. Since the use of flashbacks will be analyzed, one should not forget to turn to Bordwell and his ideas on the possibilities of temporal ordering in cinema:

'Manipulations of fabula order offer obvious narrational possibilities. Adhering closely to fabula order focuses the viewer’s attention on upcoming events – the suspense effect – that is characteristic of most narrative films. This helps the viewer to form clear-cut hypotheses about the future (...). By following the fabula order the syuzhet also encourages the primacy effect since each action can be measured as a change from the first one we see. Reshuffling fabula order can be used to break or qualify the primacy effect, forcing the viewer to evaluate early material in the light of new information about prior events (...). Postponing the representation of some fabula events also tends to create curiosity.'

In *Lost*, the primacy effect is severely affected by the scrambled serial presentation of the events that have led to the protagonists’ arrival on the island. In Bordwell's terms, the majority of the flashbacks are external, since they contain fabula information from before the first event that the syuzhet conveys to the viewer: the moment Jack Shephard wakes up on the island after the plane crash; conveyed by an extreme close-up of his opening eye. Furthermore, most flashbacks are external enacted events the character’s past life, which are typically signposted by the characteristic extra-diegetic swoosh-like sound bridge, or an auditory hook that originates from the flashback’s diegesis. Most of the flashbacks are triggered by events that ensue from the primary narrative situation, which force the protagonist to take action and set up appointments and deadlines that guide long and short term arcs. Consequently the flashback functions as a conventional device to account for the psychology-driven logic of the character’s motivated actions. But they also come to function as what I would like to call a *prologue*: all the combined flashbacks function as the set-up conditions for (or premise of) the characters' psychological motivations and the narrative conditions on which they arrive on the island. The individual event clusters that are presented form anchor points in a progressively growing diegetic space-time continuum. This continuum is shaped by the totality of overlapping and broaching arcs of the other characters' external enactments of previous events.

To make my point more palpable I have made three diagrams that illustrate the cross-season temporal ordering of event clusters presented in Jack, Kate and Locke’s flashbacks. I will start with Kate Austin:

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180 Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 78.

181 There is one notable exception in Season 4 episode 8 ‘Meet Kevin Johnson’. Here a flashback functions as enacted recounting by Michael. After the flashback the other present characters in the primary situation are aware of the series of events that took place in the enacted recounting. The term comes from Bordwell’s conceptualizing on the manner in which the syuzhet can distribute information of prior events. The first possibility is recounting: by means of speech, pantomime, tape recording, film clips etc. The second form, enacting, conveys the prior event via a direct representation. Enacted recounting is a mixture of the previous two forms: a representation 'by report' and by 'direct presentation'. See: Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 77-78.
→ Achronological Syuzhet Order (AChSO)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AChSO</th>
<th>s01e02</th>
<th>s01e03</th>
<th>s01e12</th>
<th>s01e22</th>
<th>s02e09</th>
<th>s03e06</th>
<th>s03e19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Event clusters</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int/ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
<td>Ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

↓ Chronological Fabula Order (ChFO)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ChFO ↓</th>
<th>General description of event clusters in external enacted flashback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Kate kills her abusive (step)father Dwayne by blowing up his house. Her mother turns her over to the U.S. Marshal. Kate flees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Kate is about to marry police officer in Florida with a false identity, in the hope to settle down in a small community, thereby avoiding capture. After the marriage she decides to confess to her husband that she is a fugitive and a liar, and flees again.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Kate goes back to Ohio to talk to her mother. With the help of a pregnant woman named Cassidy, she discovers that her mother has, again, informed the police that she is nearby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Kate (incognito) is in Ohio to make another attempt to seek forgiveness from her dying mother (she does not accept and screams for help), she inadvertently causes to death of her childhood sweetheart Tom (responsible for the meeting with Kate's mum) while being chased by the U.S. Marshal. She manages to flee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Kate is part of a bank heist in New Mexico where she opens a deposit box, containing a toy airplane once owned by Tom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Kate is on the run in Australia and is eventually handed over by a farmer (where she thought she found refuge) to the U.S. Marshal for reward money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Final moment of the flight before the crash: Kate is being held by U.S. Marshal for repatriation, but, while he is unconscious, is able to unlock the handcuffs before the crash.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Placing the event clusters in the correct chronological order (ChFO), one can easily account for the cause-and-effect chain that resulted in Kate's arrest by the U.S. Marshal and her presence on the flight. The dispersal of this narrative information over the course of three seasons, however, results in a flaunting strategy to maximize the suspense and curiosity in unraveling the origin of her psychology-driven motivations in the primary situation, whilst constructing the backstory of her arrest. For example, by placing event cluster E after F and G in the AChSO, E evokes a preliminary inference that she has been arrested for her contribution to the bank heist. Ten episodes later however, Kate’s flashback cues fabula information on her attempt to ask for her mother’s forgiveness over something terrible she has done. The events that present this seemingly terrible and unforgivable act are not revealed until the ninth episode of the third season: here it comes to the fore that Kate murdered her abusive father by blowing up his house, something her mother never saw as the right solution, despite his aggressive nature. How the flashbacks are enacted is dependent on actions and events in the primary situation during the episode. In Kate’s case, the dying U.S. Marshal’s

182 Cassidy is a woman conned by her lover Saywer. This is revealed in the external character-centered flashback of Saywer in season 2 episode 13 'The Long Con', six episodes earlier. In the fifth season, in flashforwards, it comes to the fore that Kate re-establishes her friendship with Cassidy and her young baby (Saywer's son).
warning for an escaped convict on the island in the pilot episodes evokes the external enactment of previous events revolving around Kate and the U.S. Marshal on the airplane. The enacted flashback on Kate's marriage in Florida ('I Do' season 3 episode 6) is less directly connected with developments in the primary situation. This enactment is elicited by her soap-esque burgeoning love triangle with the misfit southern conman Saywer and Jack. She is forced, while being hold prisoner, to comply with a deadline – set by a mysterious party outside of the main protagonist group; the Others led by the manipulative Ben Linus – to convince Jack to perform surgery on the terminally ill Ben. If she will not submit to the deadline, Kate will be responsible for the execution of Saywer. The eventual choice to save Sawyer is influenced by her previous troublesome relationships with male love interests, as the enactment emphasizes. The overall pattern of flashbacks, dispersed over a lengthy period of time, severely influences a form of perversion. I want to re-emphasize that I use the term perversion not in a pejorative but etymological manner: stemming from the conjugation of the Latin per- (away) and -vertere (turning). The perversion ('away-turning' or distortion) is not only evoked by the narrative's deceptive teleology, but also by the stretched and dispersed narration through the multi-protagonist cluster; by constantly turning away to other characters, plot-lines, and spatio-temporal coordinates the ability to construct a coherent fabular whole is thwarted, distorted and delayed. So my conception of perversion in the particular case functions on a formal and inferential level.

The scrambled causality of the presented event clusters in the first four flashback episodes (G → F → E → D) procures a deceptive narrative teleology: the bank heist in 'Whatever the Case May be' (s01e12) is not the main reason why Kate is pursued by the police. And the content of the deposit box #815 merely functions as motif foreshadowing a strong twofold emotional connotation. For Kate the toy plane (see illustration 1) has great emotional value because it belonged to Tom who died while protecting her. The spectator is however persuaded to infer a second emotional connotation: the plane in deposit box #815 (the same number as the flight that crashed on the island, see illustration 2) is a symbolic forerunner of her eventual plane crash on the island. The second installment of event clusters (A → B → C) offers an insight in the causes and consequences of her crime and therefore a more unified comprehension of her bundle of character traits: distrust in other people (mainly men), the tendency to run from decisive situations for the sake of survival, difficulties in maintaining loving heterosexual relationships, relying on in-dependency, and her apprehension of being possibly responsible for someone's demise.

183 The problematic love-triangle will be sustained over the entirety of the show; a typical narrative device from the soap opera practice, to uphold the tension for possible relationships over a longer period of time.

184 This concept consequently also applies for the other narrative devices (flashforward, time-travel, and flash-sideways). This vantage point to consider television narration as perverted has also been suggested by Hungarian film philosopher Laszlo Tarnay in his contribution to the debate on the future of film theory (during the book presentation of Annie van den Oever (ed.) Ostrannenie. On the ‘Strangeness’ in the Moving Image. The History, Reception, and Relevance of a Concept (Amsterdam University Press 2010) in the EYE Institute for Dutch Film November 12th 2010). Opposed to my more formal implication of the concept of perversion, I want to mention Janet Staiger's Pervers Spectators. The Practices of Film Reception (2000). In this book Staiger argues that spectators of both film and television may uphold divers perverse – that is resistant or negotiated – reading strategies. These strategies defy the norms that have been part of the creative production process. This is however a path I'm not taking. See: Janet Staiger Pervers Spectators. The Practices of Film Reception New York and London; New York University Press 2000, 31.
Doctor Jack Shephard’s psychological motivations and external plot-trajectory are conveyed by a different scrambled flashback configuration. The amount of character-centered episodes that revolve around him also seems to suggest that he has a more prominent role in the multi-protagonist cluster of the group. This is not only based on his relatively high amount of character-centered episodes overall (14). In his analysis of the pilot, Mittell convincingly argues that this episode is strong in ‘grounding viewers in Jack’s experiences to establish him as the protagonist.’

This conjecture, on the basis of the narrative structure in the pilot, is eventually substantiated by the revelation of Jack being the main protagonist and ‘savior’ of the group in Lost’s series finale. Let us focus on the central flashback episodes of Jack Shephard in the first three seasons:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AChSO →</th>
<th>s01e01</th>
<th>s01e05</th>
<th>s01e11</th>
<th>s01e20</th>
<th>s02e01</th>
<th>s02e11</th>
<th>s03e01</th>
<th>s03e09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Event clusters</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>A → G</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>int/ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
<td>ext</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ChFO↓</th>
<th>General description of event clusters in external enacted flashback</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>A young Jack is attacked by a group of bullies. Instead of leaving, he remains to help his companion who is also assaulted. He ends up severely beaten, and his father (Christian) states that he should not have pretended to be a hero since he does not have what takes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Jack operates on a woman named Sarah, who suffers from severe spinal trauma. Jack struggles with his (seeming) inability to ‘fix’ her. To distract himself he runs a ‘tour de stade’. During his run he meets a man (Desmond) who convinces him to have more faith in himself. When Jack returns to the hospital, Sarah made a miraculous recovery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Jack is about to marry his former patient Sarah. In the events leading up to the marriage day, his father praises his commitment, but emphasizes his characteristic inability to let go if his mind is set on something, because of</td>
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186 This man is Desmond Hume, the mysterious inhabitant of the hatch, as revealed in the primary situation in this episode. Desmond becomes one of the core ensemble later on the series and has the extraordinary ability to travel through time.
this stubborn commitment.

<p>| | |</p>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>D</strong></td>
<td>Jack is asked to operate on man’s spine to remove a tumor. Christian advises his son not to accept, but the man’s daughter eventually convinces Jack since she invests him with the status of a miracle worker because of Sarah’s recovery. The man dies during surgery and Jack tries to console his daughter. During her despair they kiss. Jack confesses this to his wife, but she already decided to leave him for another man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E</strong></td>
<td>Unable to cope with the fact that Sarah pushes for a divorce, Jack tries to find out the identity of her new lover. He discovers that Sarah had regular contact with his father; so he starts to suspect Christian. Sarah, however, reveals that Christian has confided in her, because he started drinking again and struggles with his alcoholism. She urges him, cynically, to fix his father’s problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
<td>Jack operates on a woman because his drunken father isn’t fit to do so. The woman dies and Jack’s father states that it was an accident. It is revealed that she was pregnant, and that Jack’s father kept this information from him, thereby indirectly causing her death. Jack decides to tell the board that his father has an alcohol problem and is unfit to be chief of surgery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G</strong></td>
<td>Jack’s mother urges Jack to find his father in Australia. Jack is reluctant, but his mother emphasizes that he must, after what he did to his father. In Australia Jack finds out that his father died of alcohol abuse. After identifying his father in the morgue he makes preparation to return his body home. At the airport the airline states that he does not have the right documentation to bring his father home; he successfully pleads the Oceanic personnel to be considerate of his situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>H</strong></td>
<td>Jack is in the plane talking to the woman (Rose) beside him, moments before the plane starts to shake, and eventually breaks into three parts in mid-air.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unknown</strong></td>
<td>Jack falls in love with a Thai woman in Phuket. She gives him his tattoo on his left shoulder.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once again, my chronological presentation (ChFO) of the external event clusters fits the teleological development of events one is familiar with in classical cinema. Only the undetermined event cluster (‘Stranger in a Strange Land’, s03e09) is difficult to place in the chronology of the other event clusters. This episode’s flashbacks functions as a symbolic backdrop for the developments in the primary situation, where Juliet is literally brand marked by the Others as a murderer (Juliet is part of the mysterious Others, but eventually kills one of her own to save Jack, Kate, and Saywer). On the other hand this flashback answers to fan speculation on the significance of Jack’s tattoo (see note 189), which is revealed to be a spiritual ‘mark’ that defines his character; acquired through the Thai woman’s ‘gift’ to deduce somebody’s character traits and physically invest it with a tattoo. But let us return to the dispersed exposition of Jack’s external fabula construction. The hints of his reluctant role as the main protagonist are thematized in the flashback construction.

The troublesome relationship with his authoritative father is framed in a not so uncommon manner in "White Rabbit" (s01e05); after being severely beaten up by the bullies, Christian talks about responsibility and ‘having got

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187 This is the lady, Rose, he saves on the beach after the crash in the pilot episode.

188 The nature of one of Jack’s idiosyncratic tattoos was a much discussed item in the fan community; this episode is a partial answer to the speculations among the fans. For a fine example on an ‘amateur’ study of Jack’s tattoo’s can be found on: [http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Jack%27s_tattoos](http://lostpedia.wikia.com/wiki/Jack%27s_tattoos).

189 Juliet, like Kate, comes the function as the pivot of a love triangle between her, Jack and Saywer. Thereby she eventually becomes one of the characters in the multi-protagonist cluster.

190 One only has to think of another troubled relationship in popular culture; namely between Indiana Jones and his father Henry. How the origins of the problematic father-son relationship are conveyed in Lost’s ‘White Rabbit’, formally bears resemblance with
what it takes' to make tough decisions in difficult circumstances. His emphasis on inhabiting those skills as an accomplished spinal surgeon, and his son's obvious lack, is cinematographically conveyed in a manner that bears several significant cues. The medium shot's layered composition (see illustration 3) evokes a hierarchical distance between the boy, who has to account for his behavior in the intimidating locale of the 'study', and his father, who reigns on his 'throne' holding a whiskey glass. The signpost that actualizes the enactment in the primary situation of 'White Rabbit' (s01e05) – where Jack contemplates on how and if he can function as the leader of the group – is the sound of chinking ice cubes in Christian's whiskey glass. The auditory signposting of the enactment, and the alcohol consumption during Christian's conversation with little boy Jack, in retrospect also bears significance in relation to the continued relationship Jack has with his father in his adult life. Especially since the dispersed presentation of event clusters E and F becomes part of the viewing history, the inference on the reason why they ended up in Australia is far more salient. The auditory cue also penetrates the diegetic world of the primary situation, where the chinking ice cubes hint at the presence of Christian on the island. In his manifestations on the island (see illustration 4) Jack's father wears his idiosyncratic and at the same time archetypical suit of authority in which he has been introduced, through a spatially layered composition that, again, evokes distance and parallels the previous unwillingness of the syuzhet to clearly disclose Christian's face. This is again one of the many examples to illustrate how the formal conveyance of fabula information provided by the external enactments, diegetically tries to slip in the cart tracks of the plot developments in the primary situation. The other character trait that is associated to Jack – supplementing his struggle to become the leader of the group of survivors – is the narrative emphasis on his desire 'to fix' problems.

The primary situation on the island in the episode 'Do No Harm' (s01e20) – which forces Jack to treat the seriously wounded Boone – ushers in the segmentized and scrambled elaboration on this obsession which will come to its preliminary conclusion in the third season's opening episode. The flashbacks that ensue from this situation convey the information that his strong motivation to fix a patient can potentially be a flaw in his character. The ability to let go, something Christian urges his son to learn in the external enactment, finds its parallel in Jack's decision to stop the prolonged suffering of Boone and let him die peacefully. In the season starter 'Tale of Two Cities' (season 3) Jack is questioned by Juliet in the primary situation. Juliet's physical resemblance with his ex-wife cues the enactment where Jack meets up with Sarah in the lawyer's office to finalize their divorce. The cluster of events in the enactment conveys Jack's inability to recognize his failed marriage and the further deterioration of his relationship with his father. While being held by the Others in the primary situation, where the odds are against Jack, the exposition of the external events creates an emotional parallel where he breaks down and loses his desire to 'fix' and 'heroically lead'.

Lucas and Spielberg's Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade (1989). The title of this episode obviously also refers to one of Lindelof and Cuse's favorite novelists: Lewis Carroll and his Alice in Wonderland (1865).

191 Jack's psychological motivation to fix is eventually taken quite literally in the final episode of the show. Here he plugs an ancient phallic-like pillar back into place, to save the island and stop the monster from leaving the island. In the process of saving the island Jack dies.
Besides the previously treated reluctant leader, John Locke also has a prominent position within multi-protagonist cluster. The enigmatic Locke is continuously framed in a mysterious context in the primary situation: the ominous extra-diegetic music accompanied by ambiguous close-ups of his cragged face throughout the first season, and his, in retrospect substantiated, description of the powers that govern the events that have transpired and will come to pass.\textsuperscript{192} He eventually comes to function as a rival to Jack’s leadership claims in the group. His character founding event clusters are schematized below:

### $AChSO \rightarrow$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event cluster</th>
<th>s01e04</th>
<th>s01e19</th>
<th>s02e03</th>
<th>s02e17</th>
<th>s03e03</th>
<th>s03e13</th>
<th>s03e19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>int/ext</td>
<td>F*</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### $ChFO \downarrow$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of event clusters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong> John joins a commune in California before his discovery of his father and mother. John meets young drifter Eddie who he introduces to the community. The community secretly grows weed and stores weapons in their greenhouse. When Eddie asks John what is going on in the greenhouse during a hunt in the forest, John states to Eddie that he is more a warrior than a farmer. Eddie turns out to be an undercover agent trying to infiltrate the commune and Locke was chosen because of his psych profile which states that he is ‘amenable for coercion’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B</strong> Locke meets a woman (Emily) in the department store he’s working. He sees her again in the parking lot and chases her. She discloses that he is his mother and that she claims that he is born without a father and is destined to be very special. With the help of a private detective he discovers that his mother is a psychiatric patient and eventually finds his father (Cooper). Cooper tries to be on good terms with his son. Locke starts hunting with his</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{192} In the second part of the pilot episode John suggests that their presence on the island should be seen in the light of a game of backgammon, where there are 'two players, two sides; one is light one is dark'. The fifth season finale reveals that two ancient enemies (Jacob and the Man in Black) are combating each other philosophically (free will and responsibility vs. determinism and corruption). The dark force on the island – which is revealed to be both the mysterious smoke monster and antagonistic Man in Black – eventually takes over the physical appearance of John Locke. Jacob is partially revealed to be the manipulator of several protagonists’ plotlines in the flashbacks. In this light Jacob can be seen as the anthropomorphism of what Bordwell calls \textit{chance}: the device that is responsible for the convergence of plotlines in the network narratives.
father. Locke finds out his father has kidney failure and decides to donate his kidney to him. In the hospital his mother tells him that his father has conned him to get his kidney, and doesn’t want to see him anymore.

| C | Locke is participating in a support group to get to terms with his father’s deception. There he meets Helen with whom he develops a relationship. John has trouble letting go, and stalks his father’s residence. Cooper eventually confronts him and Emily gives him her house keys to 'validate' their relationship. She however urges him to let go of his father and stop stalking him. |
| D | Locke reads an obituary that states that his father has died. Together with Helen, now his fiancée, he attends his funeral. During his work as an estate agent, John however sees his father again. Cooper confesses that he staged his death and that he needs his son to get $200.000 from a deposit box. John reluctantly agrees to get the money. Helen becomes suspicious and follows him. After she discovers that John is in contact with his father again, she leaves him. His father, again, disappears. |
| E | Locke lives as a recluse in his apartment; depressed over his father’s theft of his kidney and his break-up with Helen. A man (Peter) approaches him at his apartment, asking John to help him with exposing his father. Peter’s mother is being conned out of her deceased husband’s inheritance by Cooper. When Locke finds his father and confronts him, Cooper pushes him out the window. After John wakes up in the hospital, he discovers that his fall has left him paralyzed. The police informs him that his father has fled. |
| F* | Locke wakes up on the island after the crash and sees that his toes wiggle (internal enactment) → (ext) Locke is working in his cubicle at a paper company. His condescending boss keeps an eye on him. During his break he plays a war game with a colleague. John discloses to his colleague that he is about to go on a 'walkabout' where he will confront nature with basic hunting techniques. His boss interrupts and demeaningly states that he is a fool in thinking that he can go on a 'walkabout' in the Australian outback. When John finally decides to quit his Job it is revealed he’s in a wheelchair. |

I am not going to elaborate too much on the scrambled presentation of Locke's past life over the course of the first three seasons. Similar to the other characters in the multi-protagonist cluster, the external events are structured to delay the conveyance of crucial information over a longer period of time. Locke's structure is nonetheless far less scrambled than Jack and Kate's enactments. The central enigma’s connected to Locke’s character – how he got paralyzed, and why he knows so much about the island – are only partially accounted for in the first three seasons. His character traits – mostly actualized by his relationship with his unreliable and deceiving father, and his fascination for hunting and paramilitary habits – are problematized in the primary situation where he is continuously confronted with possible plot-trajectories that either help him to ascertain his role on the island or to decide on who or what to trust in order to meet his destiny. My goal here is to illustrate – with the help of the two parts of John’s enactment structure marked with an * – how the flashbacks in Lost convey a (1) dispersed narration on the episodic level, and (2) how Lost employs internal flashbacks, besides grounding character-depth and external fabula information. For the first goal I have chosen 'Walkabout' (s01e4, F* in the diagram) because of its interesting 'embracing' use of internal enactments to contextualize the set-up and climax in its two layers of narration. I will account for the temporal organization of the enactment structure within the episode’s four act structure \(^{193}\) in the following diagram:

\(^{193}\) Reminder: the four act structure is build up as follows; (I) the setup, (II) complicating action, (III) the development, and (IV) the climax. I also included (V), the final lesson, which will be accounted for in my analysis below. See chapter 2.2, and Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*, 27-28.
The internal enactment opens in medias res at the beginning of the episode with an extreme close-up of Locke's opening eye. This visual motif is recurring in several other character-centered episodes, such as Jack's awakening in the pilot. One of the following shot utilizes a racking focus between Locke's astonished facial expression on the background, and his wobbling toes on the foreground – indicating the significance of this correlation (see illustration 5). The familiar montage and diegetic sounds of screaming people and the damaged airplane engine’s misfiring on the background, firmly grounds this short scene into the spatio-temporal coordinates of the beginning of the pilot episode.

This internal flashback ushers in the first act of the episode, where the situational conditions of this episode are set up: a wild boar is roaming the beach during the night, scavenging the survivors remaining resources and hurting everybody who crosses its path. The next morning, when the group bickers on how to deal with this situation, Locke proposes a plan in which two people accompany him into the forest to distract the boar in order for him to

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194 Importantly, this motif also cues the presumption that the internal events are presented from the perspective of the character to which the eye belongs. One can also argue that the eye motif cues the focalization of the narrative; a part of the (subjective) narration that centers around one specific character. I have however chosen not to focus on the concept of focalization.
silently come up from behind to slit its throat. Saywer strongly denounces his plan because Locke only has one 'l'il bitty knife'. The turning point that propels the main plotline into the complicating action is signaled by a medium shot where Locke shows a metallic suitcase containing a wide range of hunting knives, while Hurley in the background exclaims 'who is this guy?'. The answer to this question is signaled by the auditory hook of a ringing phone. The auditory cue ushers in both the new large scale part of the episodic main plot-line (or A plot) and the first external enactment. A close-up focuses on Locke's face while he is having a conversation on the telephone. The man on the other side continuously refers to him as 'Colonel Locke' and reminds him of their agreement to meet at 'the usual rendezvous point'; thereby suggesting a military context. The conversation is however cut short by the sudden presence of Randy Nations who urges Locke to meet his deadline for a report. The shift from the close-up to an establishing shot reveals John sitting in a cubicle of a generic-looking office space. Randy condescendingly urges 'the colonel' not to make private calls during working hours and leaves. Seemingly disturbed by the demeaning tone of his boss, Locke proceeds with his calculations.

The calculator, producing the exact cricket-like sound of the mysterious monster on the island, bridges the transgression from the enactment back into the complicating action (II) of A plot. Michael and Kate decide to join Locke on his boar hunting. While Kate converses with Michael on past events and his son Walt, Locke forces the pair to a halt. A suspicious noise approaches them and Locke is about to investigate a nearby tree trunk. With his hunting knife he discerns the trail that the boar has left in the immediate surroundings. He signals Kate and Michael to follow his lead further into the bushes. With a wide range of military gestures he tries to position and prepare Kate and Michael to put his plan into motion. Michael’s loud-voiced irritations with Locke’s quasi-military procedures cause a frontal attack of the boar on the off-guard threesome, which leaves Michael severely wounded. A familiar shot with racking focus (see illustration 6) signals the end of the complicating action, and transgresses into the second external enactment via an auditory hook; while a phone is ringing a voice urges the colonel to 'keep moving'. In the enactment Locke is playing a military strategy game with a colleague during lunch. Randy comes to join them and overheard Jack’s preceding monologue on being a leader. Randy soon discovers a brochure on the table from a travel agency that organizes survival holidays in the Australian outback. Randy tauntingly asks John why he is torturing himself: ‘hunting, walking about, you can’t do anything like that!’ Locke however timidly responds that it is ‘his destiny’ and that Randy should not tell him ‘what he can’t do’.

The swoosh-like auditory hook signals the end of the enactment. Kate and Michael decide to go back to the beach while John sets off on his own, revitalized by the adrenaline producing experience he just had. While he is walking through the field contemplating, the third enactment silently marks the turning point that procures the development (III) In his apartment Locke talks with a woman called Helen on the phone. He over-exaggerates his self-proclaimed rebellion against Randy, stating that he never felt ‘more alive’. As he informs Helen about his plans for the two of them to go to Australia, she suddenly cuts of their conversation. She turns out to be an ‘adult phone entertainer’ of sorts, with no interest to go on a holiday with a complete stranger. She advises Locke to find a therapist and disconnects the line. After Helen hangs up, John violently smashes the horn back on the hook, thereby

195 It is unclear if this is a continuity error, or just plain coincidence, since Locke's actual love interest in later episodes is also named Helen.
ending the enactment. Kate and Michael in the meantime have lost the trail back to the beach. As Kate climbs a tree to get an indication of their whereabouts she sees a violent force rushing through the trees towards Locke. Unaware of the approaching danger, Locke tracks the boar further into the forest. A sudden forward-heading crane shot conveys the point-of-view of the approaching and, in previous episodes, merciless monster. The following high-angle medium close-up of a petrified John Locke is followed by a hard cut to black with an accompanying extra-diegetic sound effect; signaling the suspenseful turning point and act break. The climax (IV) begins slow-paced. On the beach Michael and Kate rejoin the group. Kate immediately tries to find Jack to tell him she is alright. She also reports that Locke left them to hunt the boar and was approached by the monster. As Jack shakes his head with slight astonishment, he spots another manifestation of his father across the beach (see illustration 7). Christian’s mysterious appearance prompts Jack to follow him into the bushes. With Kate joining him, he enters the vegetation to be suddenly startled by Locke. He has successfully killed the boar and drags its body on his shoulders with him. Back on the beach during the evening, Michael asks John if he has seen the monster. As Locke answers his question negatively, a honking horn signposts the transition into the final external enactment. In a tourists office in Australia John is arguing with the travel guide. The guide is not willing to take Locke with him on the bus because ‘of his omission’: he ‘neglected to mention his condition’. John argues that he has prepared himself for years to participate in the walkabout, but the nervously honking horn persuades the irritated guide to end the conversation. The parallel ‘omission’ and ‘neglect’ in the mise-en-scène and framing of this and earlier external enactments finally comes to the fore; as Locke furiously follows the leaving tour guide – shouting ‘do not ever tell me what I can’t do’ and ‘this is my destiny’ – it becomes clear that Locke is in fact wheelchair-bound (see illustration 8). The external enactment flows back into the internal flashback of the beginning of the episode. Here, the third repetition of the ‘foot’ motif in the internal enactment can be seen as a second apotheosis; it functions as a hidden final lesson (or fifth act), where it can be inferred that forcing ones destiny is foolish, since destiny will force its plans on you. When John notices that he has regained the use over his legs, the dramatic extra-diegetic musical orchestration stresses his miraculous resurrection. As he shakingly rises in astonishment, an initially off-screen diegetic voice hails him: ‘He you ... you! Get over here, give me a hand!’ John sees Jack struggling to get some heavy airplane debris of another survivor. Not waiting another moment he rushes over to ‘do what he can’, happily following the new path that has been forced upon him.
As I have shown with this analysis of 'Walkabout', the syuzhet is very intricate in the thwarting, dispersal and delayment of important fabula information on an episodic level as well. The enactments play an important role in motivating and highlighting silent and more 'loud' turning points that move A plot along. The specific use of internal enactments in this episode has a twofold function: they provide a narrative and aesthetic symmetry by, respectively, grounding past events into the overall four-part narrative structure of the episode, and providing an important visual motif associated to the main character into the primary situation. John Locke's overall event cluster also illustrates another more general use of the internal enactment. The episode 'The Brig' (s03e19, event cluster designated with *) contains a temporally dispersed internal enactment cluster which accounts for the specific fabula information that has been thwarted for five episodes. Locke has not been presented in the primary situation since 'The Man From Tallahassee' (s03e13, see also event cluster E), where he is taken prisoner by Ben Linus, the leader of the Others, and his never-aging aid Richard. In this episode’s climax Ben and Richard present Locke with a gift: they brought his father Cooper to the island. This climactic scene was preceded by the external enactment that revealed that his father action has left him paralyzed. In the set-up of 'The Brig', Locke secretly appears on the beach to convince Saywer to kill Ben Linus. He discloses that he infiltrated the camp of the Others, and claims to have taken Ben hostage. John and Sawyer's subsequent journey to, and arrival at the place where Ben supposedly is being held, is, however, juxtaposed with the segmented internal enactments that convey Locke's befriending with, and growing trust in the Others. When Saywer is led into the bow of a derelict 19th century sailing vessel where the hostage is being held, the following turning point procure the episode's climax: Locke's father is revealed to be the actual hostage. Initially confused, Saywer comes to realize that this man is responsible for the death of his parents in his early childhood, and angrily kills him. In other words, the internal enactment in this case already hints at the revelation that John orchestrated a cunning deception (with the help of the Others) to symbolically free both Saywer and himself from the 'evil' that has corrupted their lives before their arrival on the island. Furthermore this episode is just one example on how relationships and plotlines between characters or concealed but eventually converge or have multiple convergences; since Locke’s father is both influential in shaping his and Sawyer’s past which through the primacy of causality eventually brings them on the plane.

In conclusion, the internal enactments (like the external ones) function on several levels: (1) it can procure the inference that previous internal events are conveyed through the subjective narration revolving around the central character, (2) it can convey story information that has been thwarted earlier, and (3) it can – in its dispersed form – penetrate, influence, and parallel significant plot transgressions in the primary situation. With my analysis of these functions, I also hope to have illustrated how the grip of the narrative economy – that has been associated with classical and modern classicist storytelling – in Lost is perverted. My selective elaboration on how the multi-protagonist cluster conveys and influences an intricate dispersal of narrative in the first three seasons has now been accounted for. In the next paragraph I will try to argue how the flashforward and flash-sideways further complicates

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196 Part of Sawyer’s scrambled external enactment construction revolves around his childhood trauma. He witnessed a man killing his mother, before committing suicide. As the chronology of his plot-trajectory and psychological development through his enactments comes closer to a unified whole, it becomes clear that Cooper had an affair with Sawyer’s mother and stole his parents’ life savings. Sawyer’s father could not cope with this situation and killed his wife before he committed suicide.
the easy comprehension in the serial narration of *Lost*. Especially since these two narrative devices often create an effect that highlights the narrative's 'cunning artifice', and therefore further diminishes the invisibility of narration.

**Experimentation in the Second Half of Lost (s04-s06)**

The structural narrative shift towards flashforwards and flash-sideways changes the characteristics of the intrinsic norms in the second half of *Lost*. Although the overall structure of *Lost* can be seen as one extensive experimentation in stretching the boundaries of serial narration in television, the structural use of flashforwards and flash-sideways is in many ways innovative. Before I elaborate on the flash-sideways, I first want to account for the flashforward. As Bordwell states in respect to flashforwards:

'It would be impossible to find any external flashforwards, since the last fabula event necessarily sets one boundary of the syuzhet's time span. Moreover, the flashforward is hard to motivate realistically. (...) flashforwards cannot be attributed to character subjectivity; they constitute self-conscious narrational asides to the spectator. The flashforward is thus communicative, but often in a teasing way: it lets us glimpse the outcome before we have grasped all the causal chains that lead up to it.'

Bordwell perfectly describes the obvious narratological consequences of the use of flashforwards in the classical Hollywood paradigm. His emphasis on the self-conscious character of the flashforward, prompts him to say that this narrative device mostly is utilized in art cinema; which is characterized by its overt, self-conscious and ambiguous storytelling. The practical use of flashforwards in *Lost*, however, defies one aspect of his description: that it cannot be attributed to character subjectivity. As my first schematic at the beginning of the previous paragraph illustrated, the shift towards flashforwards did not alter the character-centered episodic structure. The characters from the multi-protagonist cluster are still responsible for their character-centered cueing of dispersed story information. The nature of the narration is however changing significantly. The first three seasons emphasized the grounding of the characters' backgrounds, traits and interrelation through their external enactments. The scrambled and dispersed exposition of these enactments mostly facilitated in the delayed unified comprehension of character motivations, goals, and narrative function in the primary situation of the narrative. Furthermore, this delayed comprehension is responsible for the anticipation, suspension, and joy in investing time to construct the character-depth and interrelations of the members of the core ensemble.

The flashforwards aim for another effect. With Bordwell in mind, the character-centered flashforwards focuses on a suspenseful building of anticipation, where the outcome precedes the full comprehension of the causal chain. The flashforwards in the fourth season present a multi-centered segmentized development towards an outcome which is hinted at in the flashforward that is part of climax of 'Through the Looking Glass (s03e22). Here, Jack is shown in a devastated physical and mental condition. On the sea-side somewhere in California, he meets up with Kate. During their uncomfortable reunion, Jack states that 'they should never have left the island'. Although Kate

takes pity on him – clearly affected by his depressed state – she fervently disagrees. As she leaves him, Jack continuously emphasizes that they 'must to go back'. The flashforwards in the fourth season thus are juxtaposed with the developments in the primary situation on the island, which will eventually lead to the departure of some of the protagonists from the island at the end of the fourth season. To complicate things further, the flashforwards will become the 'off-the-island' primary narrative situation in the fifth season. Here Hurley, Jack, Kate, Sayid, Sun and baby Aaron (by the press nicknamed as the Oceanic Six) try to cope with normal life again. Until Ben Linus shows up in Sayid and Jack’s life; setting up a manipulative scheme to get them, and the other members of the Oceanic Six back to the island.

Although it is not my goal to elaborate on how the flashforwards function in relation to large-scale plotlines, there is one episode that stands out in its overt self-conscious, experimental narration. ‘Ji Yeon’ (s04e07) utilizes an interesting juxtaposed flashback-flashforward-structure, that conveys a strong parallel emotion connected to (1) the enacted outcome and (2) the episodes situational climax. ‘Ji Yeon’ revolves around the South-Korean couple Sun and Jin and their continued struggle to maintain a trusting relationship. But before I start with my analysis, I first want to highlight the function of the recap at the beginning of an episode; something I have not yet accounted for. The recap preceding ‘Ji Yeon’, conveniently actualizes the significant fabula information (which is ideally) stored in the viewing history, in order to preliminary frame and guide the inference-making for the upcoming episode.198

The first shot, an extreme close-up, shows a positive pregnancy test accompanied by the recounting dialogue: ‘You’re pregnant’ (‘The Whole Truth’, s02e16). A rapid montage follows the previous shot, conveying both a flash of a previous enactment where Jin’s lover (Jae Lee) wakes up beside her, and a recounting line spoken by Sun; 'I'm not sure if the baby is Jin's'. The subsequent medium close-up presents Kate reiterating the fact that ‘Juliet was their [the Others’] fertility doctor, she experimented on pregnant women (...) you [Sun] should talk to her’ (set-up from 'D.O.C.' s03e18). Kate’s line evokes the inference that Juliet is still not completely to be trusted because of her former loyalties to the Others. But it also accentuates the potential impending doom that haunts Sun. The following shot-reverse-shot – the turning point signaling the transgression into the complicating action in 'D.O.C.' – conveys a dialogue between Sun and Juliet that elaborates on this impending doom: Sun frantically asks Juliet ‘what happens with pregnant women on this island’, on which Juliet dramatically responds that ‘they die’. The following establishing shot, selected from 'D.O.C.'s third act, shows Juliet while conducting an ultrasound on Sun. Juliet’s line – where she states that ‘the baby has been conceived on the island’199 – functions as an auditory hook procuring the final reiteration: a medium shot conveys a conversation from the episodes climax, where Sun acquiescently asks Juliet how long she has left. Juliet replies that ‘most of the women have made it to their second trimester; nobody made it to their third’. The climactic

198 My elaboration on the recap also facilitates in the comprehension of my analysis of ‘Ji Yeon’, since I did not introduced these characters yet. This is not to say that the recap can be explored as casually as I did here. The specific and different ways of reiterating earlier distributed fabula information (stemming from multiple episodes over a number of seasons) in an abridged form is worthy of a thesis.

199 The external enactment in 'D.O.C.' deals with Sun’s crumbling marriage with Jin and her extramarital affair with Jae Lee. In the primary situation, Sun worries if the baby is conceived by Jin. Juliet, however states that the tests indicate that she became pregnant on the island.
and dissonant extra-diegetic violin-piece emphasizes the severity of these final words. So, by cueing a fast-paced, rhythmic collage of the major turning points from the relevant preceding Sun-centered episodes ('The Whole Truth and 'D.O.C.'), the recap frames and re-actualizes certain aspects of Sun's story arc that will be worked out in the coming episode.

The meticulous plot construction of 'Ji Yeon' revolves around the juxta-position of A plot on the island, B plot on the freighter, and two character-centered enactments ensuing from Sun and Jin. I'm specifically focusing on A plot and the enactments. The setup of the primary situation in A plot takes place on the beach during night time. Jin joins Sun, who is seemingly disturbed by something. Sun discloses that she is worried by the fact that Desmond and Sayid did not yet return with the freighter to rescue them. Jin tries to distract Sun from being low-spirited, by gently forcing the conversation into another direction: 'let's talk about baby names'. Despite being pleased about Jin's improved mastering of the English language, she underlines that it will bring bad luck if they talk about the baby's name. Not concerned with Sun's superstitious disposition, Jin reveals that he thinks that it is going to be a girl and that he wants to name her Ji Yeon. Although Sun likes the name, she persuades Jin not to talk about baby names until they are off the island. Their handshake—conveying the ratification of their deal—signposts the progression in the setup.

The ensuing enactment, that parallels the movement towards the end of the first act, shows Sun's preparations to leave her apartment. As she finishes her make-up, sudden and violent contractions force her to call for an ambulance; urging them to arrive quickly since she thinks that something is wrong with her baby. After the LOST title sequence, an establishing shot cues Jin's arrival at a toy store in a non-specified Korean city. He rushes to the storekeeper, urging him to quickly help him find a giant panda, since he 'has to go to the hospital'. The storekeeper curiously asks Jin if he's going to the maternity ward. Jin's affirmative reaction, seduces the owner to ask him if it is a boy or a girl. Jin replies that he 'does not know yet' and, while receiving a phone call, rushes off. The swoosh-like bridge cues the return to the primary situation. A close-up of Jin's sleeping face in the daylight introduces the following morning in the primary situation. Sun ecstatically wakes Jin up, because Jack and Kate returned to the beach. They brought along two crew members of the freighter: Daniel Faraday and Charlotte Lewis. Sun approaches Daniel and asks him if his crew is going to rescue them. Daniel, however, cannot give her a definitive answer 'since it is not his call to make'. After a juxtaposed sequence presenting the developments in B plot, Jack informs on Sun's health. She states that she is doing fine. After her conversation with Jack, Sun urges Jin to gather food for two days and meet her at their tent in twenty minutes. Jin initially is confused by Sun's orders and asks her why he should comply to her demands. Her response constitutes the turning point towards the second act: 'we are going to Locke's camp'.

After the suspenseful act break, Sun is gathering medicine for her upcoming trip. As she is rummaging through the medical supplies, Juliet asks her what she is doing. Startled by her sudden appearance, Sun clammers

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200 The freighter lies sabotaged near the island and is secretly infiltrated by Desmond and Sayid. It is dispatched from Australia by a third party (Widmore) to find the island. The ongoing plotline in the primary situation of season four deals with the enigma if the freighter's crew is either friend or foe.

201 Jack and Kate tried to find Locke's camp elsewhere on the island, but returned unsuccessfully. In this season Locke persuades a part of the surviving group to join him to settle somewhere else on the island, since he questions Jack's leadership and plans to leave the island.
something about getting 'another bottle of vitamins'. Juliet is highly suspicious and asks Sun what happened to her previous bottle, since 'there should be twenty left (...)'. Juliet proves to be quite aware of Sun's reasons to silently steal some medicines because she finishes her sentence with '(...) or are you planning a trip?' Sun is shocked by Juliet's casual but correct inference. Unwilling to give the medicine, Juliet forces Sun to disclose her plan 'to join Locke' because she 'doesn't trust these people [Daniel and Charlotte]'. Juliet, however, emphasizes that Locke has no intentions to leave the island, thereby implying that Sun's misguided plan will only increase the possibility that she will perish. Sun, on the other hand, underlines that she also does not trust Juliet, and leaves.

The subsequent sound bridge signals the enactment where Sun arrives at the hospital. The Korean staff of the hospital immediately comes to recognize Sun as one of the Oceanic Six, thereby firmly grounding the inference that this enactment is a flashforward. As the gynecologist probes her distressed belly, he reassuringly states that he will find the cause of Sun's violent contractions. He also asks if there is somebody who should be notified of her hospitalization. In severe distress, Sun replies that he should get her husband Jin. The doctor's assurance that he will probably arrive soon, motivates a seemingly crosscutted transgression back to Jin leaving the toy store. While dodging the heavy traffic and trying to conclude his conversation on the phone Jin losess the panda bear, which leaves Jin standing on the street empty-handed. He is forced to go back into the toy store. Throwing a considerable amount of money on the counter, stimulates the owner to reluctantly hand over the last panda bear that has been set aside for another customer.

As the worked up Jin leaves the store, the familiar sound bridge procures the move back to the primary situation's A plot. A close-up of an improvised map cues the further development in the second act. As Kate tries to convey the easiest route to Locke's camp to Sun, Juliet approaches them. Sun clearly tries to avoid her pleads to remain on the beach, which prompts Juliet to change her tactics: she tries to convince Jin not to go, because if his wife 'doesn't leave the island in the next three weeks, she will die'. Unsure if Jin understands what she is implying, she repeatedly underlines the 'danger' over their plan. Yin, however, states that 'wherever Sun go, I go'. Not ready to let them go Juliet finally reveals that Sun had an affair, thereby implying that Sun is not carrying his child. Severely affected by this revelation, Jin heads back to the beach, creating the turning point that ends the complicating action. In the development Sun tries to reconcile with the upset Jin. While she is pleading to explain to him why she had an affair, Jin prepares to go fishing to calm himself down. Unaware of the tension between Sun and Jin, Bernard 202 approaches Jin in the hope to be allowed to join him. As Jin agrees with Bernard's proposal, the two men head off to the fishing boat. On the boat Bernard talks about the mysterious influence of the island that seemingly has cured his wife's cancer. Bernard also talks about his and Rose's decision to remain on the beach, hoping to be rescued: 'it was the right thing to do', since Locke ruthlessly killed one of the freighter's crew members. 203 Making the right choices, as Bernard emphasizes, will eventually positively influence the way in which Karma brings about the further developments in one's life.

202 Bernard is the husband of Rose; the woman that sat beside Jack in the airplane. Jack also saved her after the plane crash. Later on Rose reveals to Jack that her terminal cancer went into regression on the island.

203 During the climax in the primary situtation of 'Through the Looking Glass' (s03e22), Locke kills Naomi, a crew member of the freighter. By this action Locke divided the group in half: his group doesn't trust the crew of the freighter. Jack's group hopes that the freighter, eventually, will be taking them home.
After a lengthy return to B plot, an establishing shot shows Sun and Juliet sitting on the beach. Juliet apologizes for her earlier actions, but emphasizes that she did whatever she could to prevent Sun from leaving. After a gruesome expose on the symptoms that will lead to her possible demise, Juliet emotionally reiterates the consequences of her plan: ‘if you go [to Locke] you WILL die, and your baby will never be born’. As Sun contemplates on what Juliet said, the sound bridge signals the advent of a Sun-centered enactment. The synthesis of Bernard’s emphasis on doing the right thing, and Juliet’s plea to remain on the beach to hopefully get rescued within three weeks, silently functions as the turning point to the fourth act. Back in the hospital, the climax starts off with Sun having trouble delivering her baby. She still cries out for her husband, as the gynecologist is about to prepare for a c-section. Sun fervently tries to persuade to doctor not to proceed, since her husband is not yet there to witness the birth of their child. While Sun is struggling, she catches a glimpse of a man on the hallway; his facial features strikingly resemble those of Jin. After the man moves further along his way, the baby crowns. After some intense pushes she finally delivers her daughter whom she immediately names Ji Yeon. The sound bridge signals the transgression into B plot (with another climactic revelation).

Back on the island in A plot, the evening has fallen. Jin brings Sun dinner in their tent. As her previous enactments revealed, Sun will safely deliver her baby. The syuzhet thereby suggests the inference that they will make the right decision. As Sun is trying to explain why she had an affair, Jin calms her down by saying that it doesn’t matter. He recognizes that, before the island, he was a man who ‘withheld his affections’. Although she has been with another man, Jin is more than willing to forgive her, since he understands how he might have driven her away during their marriage before their arrival on the island. The only question he wants answered is posed in English: ‘is the baby mine?’ As Sun swears that the child is his, Jin comforts his emotional wife and also makes a solemn pledge: she will never lose him. The bridging swoosh ushers in the following enactment. Jin rushes into the hospital, halfway asking a nurse direction to the maternity ward. When he arrives at the right room, he makes a respectful bow towards the man guarding the door. He introduces himself as a representative of Paik Automotive, and wishes to convey his employer’s sincere congratulations to the Chinese ambassador for becoming the grandfather of a healthy child. As Jin leaves the maternity ward, the nurse asks why he is leaving so soon. As Jin replies that the birth has nothing to do with him personally, the flirting nurse suggests that it won’t be long before he returns to welcome a child of his own. Going along with the nurse’s tease, he jokingly urges her not to push him, since he has only been married for two months. This revelation – downplaying the anticipation that has been set in the previous scene in A plot – cues a return to a Sun-centered (becoming) enactment which in the light of recently procured inferences, can be seen as the lead in for a hidden fifth act disguised as a third climax. The flashforward hints at another character who will eventually escape the island: Hurley has flown over to South-Korea to see Sun’s daughter. As Hurley compliments Sun with her beautiful newborn, he also reminds her that the baby has a striking resemblance with Jin. Affected by Hurley’s observation, she reluctantly agrees. This prompts Hurley to make the suggestion ‘to perhaps, like, go see him’. In the next scene they arrive at Jin’s tombstone to ‘tell’ him about his daughter, thereby suggesting the hypothesis that Jin will eventually die. Connected to the theme of ‘making the right choice’ – which propelled both the juxtaposed flashback-flashforward enactment cluster, and A plot into the fifth act – this final revelation serves as an emotional, but ambiguously incomplete final lesson that affects both layers of narration. Jin’s choice to stay with Sun results in his

until this moment in the episode, it has only been suggested that Jack, Kate and Sun are part of the Oceanic Six.
hinted death, and Sun’s choice to remain with Jin will prevent her own death and the birth of her baby; but at a seemingly high cost.

This episode’s complex structure thus shows how the flashforward functions in creating curiosity for the cause-and-effect-chain in the coming episodes that will lead to the enacted outcome. But the episode also convincingly exemplifies that Lost’s narration is overtly self-conscious by revealing its artifice. In retrospect, Jin’s flashback cluster is not motivated through the actions of the character in the primary situation, but is juxtaposed by the narration in order to cue misleading temporal and causal inferences. This is, as I have shown numerous times, a general strategy in Lost’s narration. But this episode can also be seen as an outstanding example of ‘breaking the rules’ for the sake of juggling with expectations. The structural rule to juxtapose character-centered plotlines in the primary situation with either flashbacks, flashforwards, or (later) flash-sideways is violated, and thereby corrupts the show’s internal narrative logic. This brings me back to the other more obvious self-conscious device in Lost’s narration: the flash-sideway. Its use in the last season is remarkable, since it brings back into mind the forking-path/puzzle/multiple draft debate in cinema.

The somewhat more experimental and structurally less stringent fifth ‘time travel’ season is replaced by one that is retaining its form more consistently across episodes like the first three seasons. With the exclusion of two episodes which deal with character-centered flashbacks – Richard’s epic arrival on the island in the 19th century sailing vessel, and the birth of, and growing antagonism between Jacob and the Man in Black – every episode contains a character-centered flash-sideway cluster. The fifth season’s finale ushered in two narrative situations that are juxtaposed throughout the sixth season: (1) the aftermath of an attempt to destroy the island, which evidently did not come to pass, since the remaining characters are back on the Island in their original time-frame205; and (2) a seemingly parallel universe where the destruction of the island did happen and Oceanic flight 815 safely arrives at LAX airport in Los Angeles in 2003. The character-centered flash-sideways together convey story information of a significantly different

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205 The time-frame where the Oceanic Six successfully returned to the Island.
2003 world after their arrival on LAX. As the last season’s primary situation on the island progresses towards its end\textsuperscript{206}, the parallel world also comes to a climax on a similar pace: like the other two temporal ordering devices, the flash-
sideway clusters are intertwined with the primary situation and its plot development.

It is maybe convenient to reiterate Bordwell’s characterization of the narratives that seem to suggest parallel
universes of sorts. Summarized earlier, Bordwell stated that narratives that seem to imply alternate universes are
essentially and conventionally presented to be: (1) linear; (2) signposted; (3) intersecting; (4) unified by traditional
cohesion devices; (5) running parallel to each other; (6) not equal, that is the last path taken presupposes the other
ones, and; (7) not equal, because the last path taken is the least hypothetical one. It is striking that the first five
characteristics could also apply for Lost’s uses of flashbacks and flashforwards. By underlining this I also can give a
short summary of the results of my previous analyses.

As I showed in my analysis of i.e. Kate’s overall enactment construction, if one straightens out the perversion
in the dispersed narrative into a chronological schematic, one can account for a (sometimes incomplete) linear causal
chain. Furthermore, I showed that the segmentation of one specific enactment cluster obeys a similar narrative
‘forward-heading’ trajectory’ through the four-part (and sometimes five-part) plot structure. I also illustrated how
auditory and narrative signposting of the juxtaposition between (past or becoming) enactments and primary situation
functions. In my analysis of ‘The Brig’ I provided an example that showed a ‘narrative cross-roading’ or intersection of
external fabula information into the primary situation: when Saywer kills Locke’s father. The two layers of narration
can also intersect each other thematically, symbolically or formally, as I showed with the in-depth analyses of
‘Walkabout’ and ‘White Rabbit’: a reciprocal contamination of narrative layers. I also emphasized that Lost essentially
uses traditional cohesion devices that should insures psychological, spatio-temporal, thematic, and narrational unity in
a modern classicist sense; which should render the overall story material redundant and (folk-) cognitively
comprehensible. Parallelism between the layers of narration is also exhaustively dealt with in ‘Ji Yeon’, ‘White Rabbit’
and ‘Walkabout’, where different layers of narration cross-talk with each other: i.e. literally through bridging auditory
hooks that emanate through spatio-temporally distinct coordinates. The perverted and serially dispersed organization
of temporal ordering devices in the different enactment structures, however, interferes with the easy comprehension
the condensed classical narrative economy strives for.

The first five conventions also apply to the conveyance of the flash-sideways. This is however something that
will not be analyzed in depth here. Nonetheless, I want to make an interesting observation: one major ongoing
plotline in the flash-sideways is even connected to achieving ‘crosstalk’ between worlds; here, Desmond Hume in the
flash-sideway plot development, schemes several ‘shocking’ events that helps the characters remember their
(parallel) lived lives with each other, giving this alternative world a spiritual connotation. The two other characteristics -
highlighting the inequality of narrative layers or worlds - are however problematic in Lost’s use of the flash-sideways.
Since both storyworlds progress through their serialized, juxtaposed forward heading trajectory, it is difficult to speak
of inequality in terms of the recency effect: the last-path taken is most likely to be inferred as being the most
probable. They are presented ‘simultaneously’, and both head towards their respective climaxes.

\textsuperscript{206} Where the light (Jack) defeats the dark (Man in Black as Locke), and saves the island.
Finally, I would like to characterize the narrative quality of the three devices: (1) the flashback focuses on ‘what has been’, (2) the flashforward on ‘what will be’, and (3) the flash-sideways on ‘what could have been’, in the light of the primary narrative situation (what is). It is revealed in the climax of the second part of ‘The End’ (s06e18), that the conveyed parallel storyworld in the flash-sideways is, in fact, afterlife. This prompts me to make a debatable, but hopefully thought provoking concluding remark. Since I earlier broached the idea that flashbacks seem to function as a large scale ‘prologue’ (or set-up), maybe the flash-sideways can be interpreted to function as a large scale ‘epilogue’ (or fifth act) in juxtaposition with the show’s climactic primary situation on the island. Schematized my idea will look something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Has Been</th>
<th>What Will Be</th>
<th>What Is</th>
<th>What Could Have Been</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S01, S02, S03</td>
<td>S03, S04</td>
<td>S01, S02, S03 S04, S05,</td>
<td>S06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External enactments (flashback)</td>
<td>Becoming enactments, or foreshadowing enactments (flashforward)</td>
<td>Primary situation, time travel (S04, S05)</td>
<td>Flash-sideways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External: Prologue, Set-Up</td>
<td>Internal: Complicating Action, Climax</td>
<td>Internal: Set-Up, Complicating Action, Development, Climax</td>
<td>External: Epilogue, or final lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character-centered</td>
<td>Primary situation-centered, Character-centered</td>
<td>Primary situation-centered, Character-centered</td>
<td>Character-centered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although I primarily analyzed some remarkable characteristics of ‘what has been’, ‘what is’, and ‘what will be’ in the first four season, it might be rewarding to, in the future, also delve deeper in the long term plot arcs in the primary situation, the narrative consequences of time-travel, and the reciprocal relations between the flash-sideways and the climactic primary situation in the sixth season. This schematic nonetheless proposes to regard the devices from a design stance, rather than to see them just as spectacular narrative concoctions that dazzle the spectator. As several of my analyses showed, the employment of the flashback and flashforwards revealed some of *Lost*’s ‘cunning artifices’. This self-conscious ‘laying bare of the device’ furthermore challenges the narrative economy that for a great deal defined the seamless style of classical narration. So, the specific perverse patterning of these devices into a perverse narration delays easy story comprehension. But the choice for these devices also serves another purpose: on a meta-level they divide the narrative in a large-scale structure that adheres to a certain temporal ordering.
5. Conclusion

‘Having been lured by intriguing people more or less like us, you keep watching. Once you’re committed, however, there is trouble on the horizon. There are two possible outcomes. The series keeps up its quality and maintains your loyalty and offers you years of enjoyment. Then it is canceled. This is outrageous. You have lost some friends. Alternatively, the series declines in quality, and this makes you unhappy. You may drift away. Either way, your devotion has been spit upon.’

While contemplating on the difference between television and cinema Bordwell made these painful but very sound allegations addressed to television drama. Although I analyzed a serial television show that had a controversial form of narrative closure, there are a lot of television shows that never reach a more or less self-chosen finishing line: Twin Peaks, Carnivàle, Flashforward (ABC, 2009-2010), Arrested Development (FOX, 2003-2006), Life (NBC, 2007-2009), and the list goes on. The imputations of declining quality are also not unheard of and sometimes even the reason for cancelation. Lost also had its painful moments in the creative process during their third season, with the threat of a premature death hanging over the production team. Nonetheless, television drama seems to be a great competitor for cinema. As I hope to have shown that contemporary American television has more than a passing resemblance with cinema, and even other pop culture media. My analysis of the narratological differences and similarities between film and television was therefore not surprisingly my main ambition in this thesis.

Bordwell’s thinking on film proved to be quite useful in a formal analysis of television as well. His core notions on classical cinema, as well as modern developments in narrative film, are approached by a deductive folk-psychological inferential model. This model allows for a more profound analysis of film narratives that underlines the dynamic relation between the film and its audience. In other words, from this stance the narrative is not isolated intrinsic text that conveys its content to the spectator through a (deferred) one-way communicational situation. Instead it implies a bilateral dynamic between the easy-comprehension-design of the film’s syuzhet, and the deductive common-sense hypothesis-making activity by the audience to construct the fabula. This inferential relation between spectator and narrative is also implied by Jason Mittell. His notion of the amateur narratologist underlines the assumption that some televisual narratives challenge their audience. In his view, television drama is the most popular and accessible provider of these narrative challenges (or complexity) because of two important characteristics: the (1) serial form, and the (2) offbeat use of narrative devices

I will start with contemporary television’s often employed forms: the serial narrative. This form allows for a vast diegetic world cued through a narration that employs seasons of long and short-term plotting, and character development. This serial form is of course not something new. In the popular literary tradition it stems from the 19th century Dickensian (and abbreviations thereof) narratives. Although John Ellis and Adorno from their respective perspectives only saw a passing resemblance, David Lavery does see Lost as a profound contemporary example of serially told stories. As I tried to underline, the serial narrative in television does not only stem from a literary tradition but also from other traditions as the movie and radio serial in the first half of the previous century. The serial legacy in

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television itself starts with the soap opera. And this is Ellis’ main reason not to regard the serial narrative as he analyzed them in the eighties, as an equal to the 19th century literary predecessor. For him the serial narratives of soap operas were indefinitely open-ended; their core characteristic lies in the continuous refiguration of events without leading to a form of narrative closure common in cinema. In the nineties, Thompson however sees a practice in television which flourished in New Hollywood since the seventies: a dispersal of narrative through sequels, sagas, and the appropriation of narratives from other media. Since the vast interrelations between multiple protagonists in the soap opera were freed from its refigurating narrative quality through the use of cliffhangers and intercalation of long and short-term plotlines with closure moments, contemporary television showed its true serial potential. Television fictional drama’s potential to regulate suspense and anticipation over a longer period of time offered a new dynamic to televisual storytelling. The rise in popularity of the modern serial format in television Thompson ascribes to a form of narrative literacy. This narrative literacy bears some resemblance with Bordwell’s notion of ‘connoisseurs of pictorial contrivances’ in cinema, and Mittell’s amateur narratologists in television. Thompson however underlines a more general cross-medial notion of this familiarity with popular narratives coming from comics, cinema, literature, and so on. She partially ascribes the contemporary increase in familiarity to the advent of internet. Mittell and Marshall were helpful in giving an indication of what this proliferation of the internet changed in television practice. In terms of production, distribution, and reception the digital post-broadcast era implies a more horizontal and reciprocal relationship-pattern between the three basic sociological pillars of Western society. Although the previous observation remains slightly underdeveloped in my thesis, it should be pertinent to research this aspect of narrative experience in the future.

The earlier mentioned comparison between television and New Hollywood does not stop with the narrative dispersal. As Thompson and Mittell have shown in their treatment of storytelling in television, it has moved greatly towards film in its storytelling characteristics. One of my main starting points was to investigate to what extent Mittell’s claim of contemporary television’s resemblance with New Hollywood could be substantiated. I made an exposition of Thompson’s take on what she designates as modern classicism. Her ideas on the difference between classical Hollywood storytelling and modern classicism rests on the latter’s two narrative practices: (1) the use of either one of the three protagonist clusters and its subsequent influence on the progression of large-scale plot development, and (2) the addition of a fourth act and a final lesson to the traditional Aristotelian three-part plot structure. The first chapter furthermore dealt with a basic exposition of Bordwell’s take on classical narration and the contemporary debate between Buckland and Bordwell on how to approach new narrative manifestations in Hollywood, European and Asian cinema. In his investigation of what has been designated as forking-path narratives, Bordwell comes to the conclusion that this conceptual take on some narrative structures is problematic because of the impossibility to represent different dimension, realities, or temporal coordinates without contaminating both storyworlds. Through the use of conventional storytelling techniques based on folk-psychological comprehension, the parallel worlds are rendered comprehensible. He therefore prefers to use the term ‘multiple-draft narratives’ to designate those films that seem to disobey classical storytelling principles by representing parallel storyworlds that are slightly different from each other. I however tried to underline that despite Bordwell’s effort to prove that these somewhat more complicated plot structures of ‘multiple-draft narratives’ are essentially reducible to a classical unified plot; the
narrative economy of classical Hollywood cinema is severely down-played by the time scrambling schemes of these films. And this is where television (and its possibility for serial narration) comes into the limelight. As Thompson argued; television’s distinguishing ability lies in stretching several story arcs over longer and shorter periods of time through the dispersal of narrative. This consequently allows for more complicated intertwining of plotlines, but also for long and short-term perversions of basic storytelling principles that aim for maintaining a coherent unity of time, space, and character. My analysis of Lost focused on these aspects. I tried to account for Lost’s narrative complexity by analyzing how the multi-protagonist cluster influences the narration; and how the cluster affects the large and small-scale structures in predominantly the first three seasons. In general the producers of Lost followed the basic conventions of modern classicist narrative cinema: goal-oriented protagonists whose actions are dictated by their specific bundle of character traits, psychological motivations and crisscrossing of other goal-oriented plot trajectories. The plotlines in the primary situation on the island are linear and causal; and are propelled by deadlines and appointments. The information provided by the narrative cues in the syuzhet, provide for a logical and coherent inference to construct the fabula. The redundancy of important narrative cues, through what Thompson ascribes to television’s unique possibility for dispersed exposition, mostly offer a logically motivated closure of the narrative.

But then Lost’s offbeat narrative devices come into play; the second aspect of Mittell’s notion of complex storytelling in television. As I have tried to underline, the narrative’s specific use of character-centered flashbacks, flashforwards, and flash-sideways procure a perverted narratology which has a meta-fictional quality. The devices refer to the narrative’s artificial structure; thereby downplaying the realism effect television was alleged to strive for. This is a tendency visible in contemporary cinema as well, as Bordwell showed in his treatment of multiple-draft/forking-path narratives and their ‘un-natural’ plots. Although the perverted patterning of these devices procures a delayment and thwarting of conventional story comprehension, the devices as such are no mere ‘narrative pyrotechnics’ to marvel at. As my last schematic in the final chapter tried to exemplify, those devices can be seen in an overall design-like manner as well: I proposed to see them in service of a larger scale purpose that conveys the story information in terms of ‘what has been’, ‘what is’, ‘what will be’, and ‘what could have been’. Although my proposal is what it is, it may be interesting to analyze more offbeat narrative devices in other television shows in order to see what place they take in the overall design. A good example in Lost is the use of the character-centered flash-sideways. Although their patterned intercalation with the primary situation throughout the last season seems very experimental and awe-inspiring indeed, their overall purpose is far less outlandish. The whole web of flash-sideways can be inferred as a parallel universe that functions as a proto-typical modern classicist ‘final lesson’.

I realize that these claims need further analysis and prove, but I hope that this thesis can serve as a starting point on how to approach vast narrative storytelling. Most critics and academics agree that something interesting is going on the field of serial television drama, but comprehensive in-depth analyses that honor this narrative form’s intricacies are largely absent. The fans on the blogosphere are however the grass root pioneers. I hope the better ones, like Mittell will enforce the ranks of film and television studies. There it will be their turn to marvel, and show new generations the joys and complexities of popular culture.
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