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Narrative Rising

Rachel M. Bellwoar
Arcadia University

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By Rachel Bellwoar
Arcadia University

In recent years television has become infamous for making the likes of Snooki famous. At the same time, the late twentieth century onwards has been one of television's brightest stretches, an ongoing era of narrative that consists of more than arguing about a show's romantic leads, chuckling at stereotypes played for laughs on sitcoms, and listening in awe to a wise, loner detective solve his case in the final ten minutes. All of a sudden, viewers have to remember what happens from week to week, look up charts online to keep track of characters and their allegiances, feel compelled to buy t-shirts with quotes and logos plastered on the front. New technology has made that kind of commitment viable but it is these narrative shows that deserve all the credit for generating such strong fandom responses. The industry is taking notice, too, realizing the profit and loyal audience that comes from airing programming with a little more depth than the typical standalone-episode dramas or comedies. Paid cable may have gotten there first, when the widely considered leader of the pack, The Sopranos, first premiered in 1999, but now basic cable and network channels are moving in pursuit of this growing television trend. The question is, what exactly makes up this elusive narrative format, and why does it reap so much popular and critical appeal?

Jason Mittell identifies narrative television as a multifaceted entity which emerged from its episodic and serial predecessors as a hybrid, resisting and containing elements of both. To label it as one or the other would be to reduce matters into something too clear-cut, for "…narrative complexity cannot simply be defined as prime-time episodic seriality; within the broader mode of complexity, many programs actively work against serial norms but also embrace narrative strategies to rebel against episodic conventionality." Serial norms could include the popular holding off of a game changing event until halfway through the season, while an example of episodic conventionality would be the convenient resolution of all conflicts by the end of the hour. These story decisions do not automatically indicate a bad show, and can be found in many beloved ones, but are at times cliché. Mittell considers narratives to use serial formats but in a more advanced and worthwhile way, unlike the original soap operas, where the slow panning out of information was more of a means to fill up time, when soaps could air as many as five times a week, than for any kind of real payoff of the tension generated. With narrative television, there is a reason behind what information is given out when and surprising twists on expected actions: a seemingly main character might be killed off in episode two, or a problem that appears like it will disappear never stops plaguing a show's protagonists with haunting consequences. This lack of neat and tidy conclusions adds to the realism of narratives, as well as the difficulty in writing and maintaining them. Moreover it earns them a higher reputation for excellence, a reputation that has only grown over the years as the format has changed and improved.

These transformations, including the adapting and combining of old formulas to fit new tastes, are tracked in Angela Ndalianis', chapter of the book, The Contemporary Television Series, called, "Television and the Neo-Baroque."[1] Using five prototypes defined by Italian professor, Omar Calabrese, in his book, Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times, and providing twentieth century and modern television show examples for style comparison, she delivers a classifying system that ranges from the episodic (singular episodes where the plot finishes at the end) to the more serialized show (where multiple storylines can continue throughout a season or the entire show's run).[2] She generally finds that television has followed a chronological, linear progression towards more serialization, with some overlap between the forms when the defined limits that separate them weaken. For instance, she

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[1] Ndalianis, Angela. "Television and the Neo-baroque." In The Contemporary Television Series, edited by Michael Hammond and Lucy Mazdon, 83-101. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2005.

[2] Calabrese, Omar. " Neo-baroque A Sign of the Times." In The Contemporary Television Series, edited by Michael Hammond and Lucy Mazdon, 83-101. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2005.

describes how shows from the fifties and sixties, like I Love Lucy, were designed where, "…each episode repeats the same main characters and remains self-contained…." It was after the seventies that she notes serial shows, like Dallas and Hill Street Blues, as starting, which, "… retain[ed] historicity and progress[ed] through the focus on characters that develop[ed] from episode to episode."

On the one hand, it is useful to see television formulas in structuring out delivery of information broken apart by these small variables. It certainly offers an alternative to the two extremes of episodic and serial, in which cases there is no gradual progression from one type of storytelling to the other. Where the idea of these prototypes falls apart is in the fact that it can be very difficult to decide in which group a show fits, as multiple categories seem appropriate. There are also instances where the show itself never stuck to one prototype, changing over time into something different and more complex. Ndalianis, to her credit, does not shy away from these anomalies but admits the occasional difficulty in classifying shows that can fit into more than one prototype. The up-frontness is admirable but does not prevent the complication from hurting the credibility of a dividing system that cannot divide without debate.

Still, it is a worthy effort that starts off with a strong, more original idea behind the motivation for the creation of more serialized show. Ndalianis identifies the format's ability to fend off competing media formats as a motivation to create more of them. With its cliffhangers and ability to cultivate audience attachment, serialization continues to keep viewers compelled and excited to return week after week, not to mention after long hiatuses, when a less gripping show would be forgotten. She points out that since the 1940s, when television first started, the medium adopted a pointer from comic book production, which had found success after coming up with superheroes towards the end of the 1930s, that it was common sense for television to depend on an ongoing narrative layout. By providing audiences with regular protagonists, as well as continuous plots, there was a better chance these made-up worlds would become a part of their viewers' daily lives.

For example, by working under a "cliffhanger" sense, long-form stories tactically hold off finality. In its place, the people watching or reading are hooked on a singular storyline or number of storylines which remain unanswered by the end of one episode, which motivates fans to come back for future episodes. This does not mean there are no stand-alone episodes in narratives. When they do occur they are often set around allowing viewers to have some fun seeing established characters placed in unusual situations, learning more details about their personalities which can change and adds nuance to how their decisions are perceived in past and future scenes. These episodes may not be as necessary for the long-term storyline but can be a breather for when things get too intense and a break is needed before the next big dilemma unfolds. Serialization simply means that episodic is no longer the only option. A scene's pay-off need not be immediate.

When it does finally occur, though, as Jason Mittell notes in his other essay, "Previously On: Prime Time Serials and the Mechanics of Memory," the emotion of being "surprised" by the deed of recalling is rather pleasant. [3] It gratifies the lasting fans' data gathering whilst inciting the deluge of remembering from the turning-on of such recollections. That kind of enjoyment is not easy to picture functioning in "non-serialized formats" since the condensed styles of film and literature do not permit enough "time" while ingesting the storyline to allow the practice of collecting, disregarding, and remembering again necessary to manufacture "surprise memory," defined as, "…the moment of being surprised by story information that you already know, but don't have within working memory." This works exceedingly well for television because the story is going to continue over a greater period of time. Character attachment becomes more prominent because they are more familiar, followed for years by fans on screen. Thus when they are put in danger, the storylines become direr since the repercussions

3 Mittell, Jason. "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television." The Velvet Light Trap, no. 58 (2006): 29-40. http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/vlt.2006.0032.

of injury can act out in future episodes, unlike with a film or novel where the consequences do not always need to be addressed because the story stops. Characters are killed off and/or replaced on television because the show still continues without them.

Likewise, from an economic standpoint, Ndalianis recognizes the benefits of continuing plot points in that, "Even when part of the same conglomerate, subsidiary companies must still vie for audience attention by offering their own media-specific experiences, and they [television creators, writers, etc.] attempt to ensure success and a faithful audience by relying on a serial logic." Since events are on-going, viewers' desire not to miss the next episode, for its carry-over material from those previously aired, can lead to television being prioritized over unfamiliar (and therefore not yet invested in) movies or other media when scheduling conflicts arise. Mittell mentions in his essay that viewers are inclined to welcome intricate shows with far greater ardent and devoted expressions than the majority of traditional "television," employing these programs as the foundation for strong enthusiast groups and energetic comments to the "television industry" (markedly so at times when their shows are at risk for termination).[4] From a monetary perspective, according to Mittell, the increase in the number of different channels has caused narrative television to become more desirable by allowing small cult supporters to be considered sufficient enough for continuation.[5] Since big numbers are not easy to come by when there are so many channels and programs, the trick is to look at everything as a comparison; a show's labeling as "success" depends more on how well it is doing compared to a different network's scheduled fare. Members of passionate fan groups consistently tune in and will not switch to competitors' offering during the same time slots. It is their reliability that makes a hit show in today's competitive television market, where multiple networks are fighting for the same people's attention. A dependable viewership is one of the best outcomes they can ask for, certainly preferable to the worst outcome of viewer numbers dropping.

While I want to promote narrative television found predominantly on cable networks, where limited to nonexistent commercial breaks makes narrative already something outside the norm, Michael Newman, who wrote, "From Beats to Arcs: Toward a Poetics of Television Narrative," spends his time praising the prime time serials (with their standalone episodes and character arcs) that appear frequently on network channels (NBC, ABC, CBS, and FOX).[6] He makes the statement that this is not a judgment of "quality" and that, "Programs that seem quite different from one another may still share their basic storytelling principles," with which I agree. Both cable and network shows can be fantastic and as Mittell himself contends, "Arguably, the pleasures potentially offered by complex narratives are richer and more multifaceted than conventional programming, but value judgments should be tied to individual programs rather than claiming the superiority of an entire narrational mode or genre."[7] Nonetheless, narratives hold much of the praise right now and I want to address what accounts for their likeability over the more familiar procedurals (episodic crime dramas) and serials viewers are accustomed to seeing. While narratives may be more complex and multilayered, Newman disputes, nevertheless, that a focus on "openness" falls short of a lot of what makes "television's evening serials" captivating. Every "episode" of a prime time serial cannot wrap up every plot line, but rarely at the cost of forfeiting closure and logic, rarely in a manner which encourages "textual" unsteadiness or extreme, "modernist" gaps.

Mittell asserts that how the story is told is equally important to the actual story itself, where, "…the operational aesthetic [is] at work– we want to enjoy the machine's results while also marveling at how it works."[8] In the

[4] Mittell. "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television."

[5] Ibid.

[6] Newman, Michael Z. "From Beats to Arcs: Toward a Poetics of Television Narrative." The Velvet Light Trap 58 (2006): 16-28.

[7] Mittell. "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television."

[8] Ibid.

essay, "Re(de)fining Narrative Events," Porter, Larson, Harthcock, and Nellis provide insight into how deliberate each part of an episode is with their discussion of the Scene Function Model, which considers the purpose of individual scenes within an episode or show as a whole.[9] Demonstrating how the model works with an episode of NYPD Blue, they divide the scenes into various types of satellites (character moments or setting details that add to the complexity of the narrative) and kernels (whose absence would change the entire direction of the show).

Following the same theme of analyzing television through its smallest component instead of the whole, Sean O'Sullivan, in his essay, "Broken on Purpose: Poetry, Serial Television, and the Season," explains how the rhythms of every "episode"– the broken up "scenes" occasionally no more than sixty seconds in length, which are connected in the sixty minute storyline—take viewers from one place or action thread to a different one making "parallels," language differences, and disruptions, in the style of poetry though forever making viewers observe the parts as parts, freelancers chipping in on a big production.[10] This battle, which O'Sullivan detects, causes viewers to become conscious of the cracked outer layer of the wording, causing viewers to mull over the numerous outcomes of every scene– not only its spot in a continuous narrative but its potential, inflectional, pictorial, or insular association with the previous and succeeding scenes. The scenes of "television" have contrasting storyline goals at the same time, as connections in a story thread (or narrative) and as particular representatives hitting against other scenes from different threads, similar to how poetry's words supply at the same time "meaning, numbers, and sounds." Ndalianis describes it as "episode" and complete show boundaries acting as a solution finder or maze escaper: to be able to comprehend the connotation of the complete, it is additionally prudent to put as one and comprehend the bearing of the numerous and contrasting plot portions which make up the complete show. Never is any one part allowed to be completely singular, like a poem, which is broken up into lines and rhyming pairs as much as it is interpreted for its message as a whole piece.

Meanwhile, Newman compares the format divisions of television's prime time serial to those of a feature film. Analyzing shows from different focal points (looking closely at precise scenes as well as from a distance at multiple-episode encompassing arcs), Newman explores the possibilities that this type of program offers viewers. Not only are narratives designed as smart economics for network heads, but they stand as a creative challenge for producers and writers, offering restrictions along with opportunities. One aspect he brings up is the typical procedure of dividing an episode up into quarters through commercial break placement.

There is no natural reason for the segmentation of the narrative to be in four equal portions with breaks each quarter-hour, but this formal arrangement serves a variety of interests, not least the economic one of interspersing advertisements at regular intervals during the broadcast,

But additionally, the simple reason that these pauses are expected by viewers, a comfortable routine repeated on multiple channels.

On the creative side, Newman makes the connection that in film and television the initial quarter establishes what is going on while the final quarter brings closure. The two quarters in between on a television show match up to the "second act" of a film: obstacle and advancement. "Television dramas" present issues in the initial quarter and conclude it with a revelation. "Characters" react to obstacle created by this revelation in quarter number two, observe the risk increase in quarter number three, and settle the issues in quarter number four. All of these mechanics are carefully chosen by narrative creators to generate certain reactions. In this case the enjoyment in

9 Porter, Michael J., Deborah L. Larson, Allison Harthcock, and Kelly Berg Nellis. "Re(de)fining Narrative Events." Journal of Popular Film and Television 30, no. 1 (2002): 23-30.

10 O'Sullivan, Sean. "Broken on Purpose: Poetry, Serial Television and the Season." StoryWorlds 2 (2010): 59-77.

something new forged from old tricks, unfamiliar versions of classic stories from which fresh derivatives seemed impossible.

"Television storytellers, more than their counterparts in literary, dramatic, or cinematic storytelling, are under an obligation to constantly arouse and re-arouse our interest," with a much faster release of continuing content. O'Sullivan considers how the normal amount of time given for taping an "episode" is a week and three days, with about a half a dozen pages being filmed each day; in comparison, films aspire to tape two pages at the most each day.[11] Such constraint puts forth more stress to condense and ad-lib, particularly in regards to how scenes are shot, with the consequence being a steady give and take concerning planned "meter of a scene" and the ultimate tempo. This makes sense considering movies are a one-time entity while episodes of a show recur for a weekly deadline. It is a matter of deciding where the limited time is needed to be spent most, as Newman emphasizes that not a single instant lacks a theatrical purpose, not one beat is superfluous with any of its companion senses nor deviating from the story line's advancing development. That is not to imply that all the scenes move the storyline forward in the usual manner. Many scenes are made up of responses over acts, notably on programs focused on connections between people. Nonetheless, they all have a purpose. Also, whatever cannot be focused on in an episode can be drawn out and given time to reveal itself later on.

O'Sullivan says that, "While some of the prosodic maneuvers I describe may recur, the laboratory of the thirteen-episode uninterrupted season in the last decade has played with the possibilities…." Much like the fourteen line sonnet, this constrained length of time for telling a narrative acts as a platform on which to map out the storyline accordingly, timing it out for the most entertainment value.[12] The pattern he identifies is that of the breaking up of the season into sections of 4-6-3 episodes. As he demonstrates with The Sopranos' first thirteen episodes, the season is laid out in ways, "…that correspond to, but also re-invent the motions and countermeasures of the sonnet: an initial experimental quatrain (episodes 1-4); two evenly spaced jarring interruptions, in episodes 5 and 10, each of which may be likened to a turn; and a closing tercet."

Though I had not considered this before, it's easy to recognize how relevant and frequent these divisions appear, especially where it pertains to the preliminary four episodes. On complex shows as these narratives usually are, not everything is going to necessarily make sense at first. Viewers have a lot to acclimate themselves to, and keep track of, whether it be numerous unknown characters or what is actually going on in this new environment. Each show has its own language and it can be very easy just to quit before you decipher it, out of frustration at not understanding everything from the start. That is why it is crucial to make it through the first four episodes of a show before making judgment because that fourth one is usually the sign of "now I know why everyone was raving about this show" or, "I now know what this show is about and it is not for me." When I watched The Wire for the first time, I thought it was a good show but was getting confused. Also, my adjective to describe it was "good." I was not yet convinced that it was going to be the great, revered program many television viewers and critics had branded it as. That fourth episode really confirmed what everyone else had claimed and I now utilize that viewing logic for all my shows, from Deadwood to Sons of Anarchy.

Another compelling idea that O'Sullivan puts into words is that the conclusion of an episode provides, indeed, an ending, but also a wish to go back and rewatch, because you figured something out or you know a scene you did not get the first time would make a great degree more sense with this additional knowledge.[13] It is a unique feature to narrative television, as you can truly get more or, at the least, something different out of every time

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[11] O'Sullivan. "Broken on Purpose: Poetry, Serial Television and the Season."

[12] Booth, Paul. "Memories, Temporalities, Fictions: Temporal Displacement in Contemporary Television." Television & New Media 12, no. 4 (2011): 370-88.

[13] O'Sullivan. "Broken on Purpose: Poetry, Serial Television and the Season."

you watch an episode over again. Continuing his poetry analogy, no matter whether you label it as, "…meter and rhythm, spin and drive, or measure and countermeasure, both poetry and serial television explore this dialectic prominently through the tension between circular and linear patterns" with poems people may name the movement forward to the conclusion of every "line" as a developing one, as every "word" carries readers onward in place, in storyline buildup or "lyric" supplement; however the conclusion of the "line" frequently announces a revisit, "(a spin)," to the same degree as an ending.

Mittell discusses this dual role scenes play further, in that quality and prestige of narratives allows them to garner awards and DVD sales, complexities made for multiple viewings which allow fans to catch more details and comprehension each time they watch.[14] The optimum, or most thorough, viewers watch the show long term, and catch any inside references, but newcomers can get a general understanding as well, enough to decide whether or not they would enjoy going back and looking further into earlier seasons of the series. With new technology, they are easily able to catch up if they are so inclined.

This contrasts with many sitcoms and procedurals, where it is not ultimately necessary to follow the program in chronological order. New viewers can usually grasp what is going on without seeing previous episodes, or will be accommodated for with the reiteration of any necessary continuity information from the past needed to understand what is going on currently. This makes procedurals better fit for syndication, which Newman explains has economic perks business-wise, in providing a means to make money off of old material, but can also gain more viewers for newly airing episodes of a program. This has been proven with, "…the astonishing success of Law & Order repeats on A&E and TNT…" where their, "…impressive ratings in syndication [were] to the point that the audience for original episodes on the network might increase."

One possible reason for people hesitating to create narrative stories in the past is fear of ostracizing new viewers, for it is more difficult to put a show in syndication when there is a need or high preference for fans to watch the episodes in chronological order. Long-running gags and details may make for a good show but as a business, with the goal of making money, it is all about how many people watch, not quality. Mittell provided a different motive with his essay, "Previously On: Prime Time Serials and the Mechanics of Memory," in directing attention to the value of memory devices in narratives. Not always blatant or noticed, these devices aide viewers by enabling them to jump-in at any point in a show's run and still have grasp of what is going on or at the least be entertained.[15] For example, normally, according to Mittell, "visual" indicators are more understated as compared to conversation, acting not so much to bring audience members up to speed, having not seen an "episode," than incorporating more straightforwardly into a lifelike approach of "moving image storytelling."[16] For example, a character may be shown acting moody at work but when they return home there's a camera shot on a bouquet of white flowers and condolence cards. You can then assume that someone has died recently on the show, which explains for this person's bad mood. The "who" doesn't need to be known, only the understanding that this loss has deeply affected the person and they must not be close to their coworkers, because none of them appeared concerned or brought it up. Viewers may wish to look into the preceding episodes at a later time, but they won't need to in order to enjoy and follow the program in the present.

Memory devices also ensure viewers can remember important plot points long over time. Providing examples and shows where the devices have been utilized, he looks at multiple situations in which memory was emphasized (recap), clarified (voice over) and tampered with (flashbacks that change how viewers perceive present circumstances), together with new options available for dealing with narrative confusion (online fan web-sites,

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[14] Mittell. "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television."

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

DVDs for multiple viewings, etc). By doing this he is able to envision how long-term storylines are able to keep viewers from getting overly frustrated by convoluted plots, while also ensuring they do not become bored by repeated reminders of what has already happened instead of moving forward. Mittell notes how managing a multi-season world is amply tough for "television writers" yet they must also confront noteworthy difficulties to make certain audience members can grasp what is going on without tumbling into puzzlement or monotony due to repetition.[17]

Jason Mittell's ideas crossover and complement those made by Paul Booth in his essay, "Memories, Temporalities, Fictions: Temporal Displacement in Contemporary Television."[18] Booth focuses on a specific aspect of narrative, temporal displacement, in which the typical linear format of television is replaced with time shifts (like flashbacks), alternate realities (like dreams) and character and viewer memory tampering to form more complex storylines. [19] What viewers have learned and what they have forgotten are played against them, to create interesting twists and unexpected occurrences. Using examples from American and British television shows, Booth explores how writers alter chronology to change the order in which viewers gather information about characters, learning tidbits after the fact which are enlightening and provide new perspectives. His purpose for writing was to take an in-depth examination of one appealing aspect of narrative instead of the structure as a whole, choosing a goal which would allow him to focus for a more detailed analysis of what one technique has to offer to television shows, a specialized topic on the subject.[20]

While Jason Mittell's look at flashbacks may overlap or not be as detailed as Booth's, it is when he talks about recaps and the balance between comprehension and boredom that he makes some strong points that are relevant in showing how narratives work. He describes the role of television recaps where, in only half a minute, the program prompts the viewer to recall whatever continuous storylines are necessary to be turned on into active memory to understand the "episode's" advancements. Nonetheless, the excerpts would practically be meaningless to anyone who had missed a majority of the past "episodes," as the scenes are too reduced to truly give sufficient explanation for inexperienced watchers. "Just as notable is what the recap omits, [like when a recap for the series, Veronica Mars, contains]…no reference to major characters Logan and Duncan– these characters do not appear in the episode, and thus can stay archived in long-term memory," so attention can be placed on what is pertinent. [21]

While the main action of story engrossment is understanding (where memory devices come into play), Rick Busselle and Helena Bilandzic's bring up in their article, "Measuring Narrative Engagement," that it is also helpful when viewers can identify with the characters or some feature of the storyline, since, "Narrative comprehension requires that a viewer or reader locate him or herself within the mental model of the story."[22] As Busselle and Bilandzic state, in the context of the diegesis (the show's world, including its setting, social context, and characters' views of what's normal and possible), "…a viewer should be able to understand the emotions of primary characters, even if they do not share those emotions," seeing things through their eyes and moral code.[23] If all of these are achieved, a show can gain mass appeal though it is easier said than done.

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[17] Mittell. "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television."

[18] Ibid.

[19] Booth. "Memories, Temporalities, Fictions: Temporal Displacement in Contemporary Television."

[20] Ibid.

[21] Mittell. "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television."

[22] Busselle, Rick, and Helena Bilandzic. "Measuring Narrative Engagement." Media Psychology 12, no. 4 (2009): 321-47. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15213260903287259.

[23] Ibid.

However daunting the task, basic cable channels still made a move towards that elusive perfect combination of features for the creation of shows that would position them on the production side of narrative television. Instead of comparing the opposite extremes of narratives on network television versus narratives on subscription cable channels, Anthony N. Smith looks into the middle ground of basic cable stations, where the melding of the two formats occurs. Focusing on AMC, Smith, in his essay "Putting the Premium into Basic: Slow-Burn Narratives and the Loss-Leader Function of AMC's Original Drama Series," reflects on some of the channel's new, original television dramas, like Mad Men and Breaking Bad.[24] Including quotes from directors and creators of these programs, he considers the economic benefits of this latest creative venture where plots are not rushed, in the style of HBO, but also need to include commercial breaks, like the majority of network and basic cable channels. He concludes that by building a reputation for quality programming and targeting a more wealthy, educated audience, AMC has been able to earn more money indirectly through growing advertiser interest, increasing viewership for its regularly scheduled film, and higher desirability to be included in cable provider's basic cable packages. Smith does not know, though, whether AMC's new narrative model will inspire other basic cable channels to follow suit or be temporary, as even their success has not stopped from AMC starting to branch out from their brand, throwing around the idea of adding reality shows and sitcoms to their line-up.

Jaime Weinman, too, wonders about the future of television. Having looked into the rise and growing popularity of serialized television shows over the contained, procedural format, where plots are wrapped up by the end of each episode, in his article, "Serial Storytelling," Weinman questions whether procedurals will eventually be dropped, or whether viewers will instead get tired and frustrated with serials.[25] Citing examples of various shows and providing quotes from members of both types of programs, along with a television critic, he links this trend of fan's growing interest in more realistic, drawn-out storylines to the fact that they are considered to be of a higher quality, allow for more investment in character (who are given time to develop) and can now be easily caught up on if missed.[26] However, despite this seeming preferment and appreciation of narrative, Jason Mittell concludes that intricacy has not beaten the usual style that makes up most television shows right now- typical situation comedies and dramas running currently greatly outnumber intricate stories.[27] The increasing success of narrative may have created an opening for a new norm in television line-ups to grow, but it is still unknown if stations are willing to take a financial risk by changing and committing to the format. After all, is that even what viewers want or are they content with narrative television as it is, a unique but minority format, forfeiting majority power to the still dominant television procedurals.

It is my opinion that there is a place for both in prime-time television. However, narrative needs to be allowed to have a bigger voice, especially on networks that are apt for a quick cancellation if the ratings do not immediately come in strong. It is a great time to watch television, but it is also a difficult time because, unless you are committed to a lifestyle of watching, as I am, you are going to have to choose between some great shows to watch. There are just too many to keep track of if you do not take the activity as more than an evening hobby. With new networks adding their dramas into the fray (A&E's Bate's Motel, Sundance's Rectify), the amount of shows to watch only grows higher. What cannot be allowed to happen is what is currently occurring on NBC, where many of their new dramas are failing and instead of replacing them with quality narrative shows they are resorting to reality shows and comedies that will never match the caliber of those that are now hitting their late years in the Thursday night comedy block (Parks and Recreation, The Office, etc.). Since it is often easier and cheaper to produce singing competitions or film "real" housewives in various cities, these are the shows that survive while

[24] Smith, Anthony N. "Putting the Premium into Basic: Slow-burn Narratives and the Loss-leader Function of AMC's Original Drama Series." Television & New Media 14, no. 2;(2011): 150-66.

[25] Weinman, Jaime J. "Serial Storytelling." Maclean's, December 12, 2012. http://www2.macleans.ca/2012/12/12/serial-storytelling/

[26] Ibid.

[27] Mittell. "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television."

good ones fail when they don't attract fans immediately. This should not be put up with. Even a strong cop or medical procedural, which NBC has been successful with in the past (ER, Law and Order), would be preferred. They are a common a sight on television, blending together due to similar concepts, but can at least claim to be well-made.

Like with 1970s Hollywood being known more for it ground-breaking pieces from "Altman, Scorsese, and Coppola" over the ordinary (and frequently more well-liked) typical tragedy movie, love yarn, and humor movie that stuffed movie theaters, Mittell thinks American television of the last two decades will be known as a time period of trying new stories, rebelling against the stands of what television is able to achieve. No one will remember Whitney, but they might recall the strong first season of FX's new show, The Americans. We have seen how television can be great as it has achieved time and time again. No longer is there any excuse for why it cannot only get better.

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