The ensemble sitcom, the film comedy, and narrative comedy: A study on the nature of plotting and comic tension in screen narratives.

A thesis by creative practice following the journey of two characters across three comedy narratives.

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

The following article is a result of the work arising from the thesis:

‘Caught in the Second Act: The Relationship between Film Comedy and the TV Sitcom’. In Comunicazioni Sociali: Journal of Media, Performing Arts and Cultural Studies, N3, 2019: 372-388.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis by creative practice critically examines plotting and character behaviour when reworking the TV sitcom to a feature film, and then transposing two of the characters from the film to a half-hour comedy series. It is guided by the question: How can specific elements of character and plotting be manipulated to generate comic tension in three related forms of screen comedy: the TV sitcom, the feature film and the half-hour narrative comedy? To that end, three scripts follow two characters as they journey through different, yet related, screen narratives.

Beginning with an examination of the relationship of characters in an ensemble sitcom, both between characters (inter-relational) and between the group and an external ‘reality’ (intra-relational) I find that some comic narratives are best served by a ‘discursive frame.’ I posit that a frame or story ideology maintains a certain degree of entrapment of the group, and which the characters either support, deny, or attempt to demolish, resulting in comic tension. Furthermore, I offer that the collective harbours an echo character who mirrors the fears of the group, as well as a ‘comic antihero,’ aware of the frame and its disempowering effect, yet unable to leave the situation as it affords them some degree of status and identity.

Analysing the nature of the midpoint (MP) in film comedies, this thesis posits that plots dealing with a discordant relationship necessitate that the MP initiate a ‘bind’ for the main character/s between a ‘want’ (often a tangible goal) and their ‘need’ (flaws they must face). By attempting to master the bind, rather than confront their need, the character suffers what I term ‘cognisant dissonance,’ in that they become aware of the incongruity, yet lack the cognition to confront the issue, underpinning the comic tension in the second half of Act Two. These findings are then used to analyse turning points (TPs) in the episodic narrative comedy, illustrating that, of the three TPs which enable the closed narrative structure, the middle TP operates much like a MP, triggering behaviour which alters the direction of the narrative, forcing the plot to return to the emotional stasis; such a response can now be seen as emanating from a form of bind.

Critically examining plotting and related character behaviour in short- and long-form screen comedy and then testing the hypotheses in the scripts, this thesis offers new readings for comedy screenwriters as well as theorists.
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INTRODUCTION

The research question and context

This thesis by creative practice critically examines the nature of comic tension in relation to narrative structure, which in this case uses the transposition of character between three different comedy forms, the TV sitcom, the feature film and the half-hour narrative comedy. The aim is to critically examine character behaviour when reworking a TV sitcom into a feature film and then transposing characters from a film into a half-hour narrative comedy. I set out to answer the question: How can specific elements of character and plotting be manipulated to generate comic tension in three related forms of screen comedy: the TV sitcom, the feature film and the half-hour narrative comedy? My objective is to analyse how tension is enabled through the narrative structure in screen comedy, and how that affect, or is affected by, character behaviour, resulting in comic performance. I then evaluate the findings in three screenplays. Craig Batty and Dallas Baker write:

"Screenplays as research artefacts … contribute knowledge in their very fabric and, although accompanying dissertations, exegeses or research statements explicate this research, they do so in conversation with the screenplay itself."¹

Three original scripts are written in response to theoretical arguments centred on narrative structure, genre and character, in order to test the analysis offered in the chapters. In doing so, I seek to understand the needs and affordances of narrative structure in relation to comic tension. By applying those insights as guidelines, the creative practice (CP) screenplays will assist in determining if the principles elucidated are relevant in relation to

¹ Craig Batty and Dallas J. Baker, ‘Screenwriting as a Mode of Research, and the Screenplay as a Research Artefact’ in Screen Production Research. Creative Practice as a Mode of Enquiry, Craig Batty, Susan Kerrigan (eds.) (Switzerland: Springer International, 2018) p.75.
plotting, and if such principles enable comic tension. Extending on the structuralist approach employed in the development of the framework in my book, *Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis*, I apply textual analysis to formalist readings to ascertain plot elements which underscore comic tension. These findings are then put to the service of three scripts – the CP screenplays. To that end, this thesis examines how narrative structures underscore character behaviour and change – transformational (as in the film), arrested (as in the sitcom), or evolving over a series (as in narrative comedy/comedy series), explicating consanguinity between narrative-situation and narrative-character.

I have long had an interest in the connection between theory and practice in comedy writing, beginning with how the sitcom, as a comic mode, operates, culminating in the publication of *Situation Comedy*. In addition, I have written four sitcom pilots: *Paternal Instincts, Unfinished Business, Sandwich*, and *At the Bar*, with three achieving recognition at screenwriting competitions such as the London Film Festival and the Cannes Screenplay Competition.

In 2017 Lionsgate, a major screen distribution company, announced that they were revisiting their film catalogue in search of potential sitcom spin-offs, triggering an academic interest in the approach required when migrating film characters to a half-hour comedy screen text. I began to ruminate on what research or analysis would be required that would assist in developing a comedy series from a film text, and in the process utilise screenwriting as a form of research to test analysis of comic screen narratives.

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2 The sitcom is better analysed using a structuralist approach in finding the beats that make up the story logic. A formalist approach elucidates form that enables the dénouement. D.T. Klika, *Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis: On the Couch with Lucy, Basil and Kimmie* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), Chapter 4, ‘The Tension of the (closed) Narrative.’
In the journal *New Writing* Dallas Baker argues:

Screenwriting research is aimed at producing new knowledge on every level; that of narrative detail, that of story-telling technologies or techniques, that of the social and cultural relevance of the script as text and, most significantly, that of screenwriting practice itself.³

This thesis aims to produce ‘new knowledge’ which enables applications to screenwriting practice and narrative analysis. Batty and Baker further note that “screenplays … use research to underpin creation (practice-led research); their context and form (research-informed practice); and their industrial and critical contexts (research-led practice).”⁴ Graeme Sullivan connects concepts with practice: “Conceptual practices are at the heart of the thinking and making traditions whereby artists give form to thoughts in creating artefacts that become part of the research process.”⁵ While there is increasing debate and definitions on script practice as research, scholarship on how research informs practice is more limited, with the Batty and Baker chapter ‘Screenwriting as a Mode of Research, and the Screenplay as a Research Artefact’ as noted, being the most relevant. This may be because of the trend where creative writing in the Academy has embraced the practice of writing as a form of research⁶ and thus allowing for the script, traditionally seen as a collegiate or commercial ‘blueprint,’ to now be viewed as an individual artefact, as are other forms of creative writing.⁷

Analysing narrative structures that inform script practice is the central concern of many practitioner-focussed texts on writing the screenplay, yet with limited acknowledgement of theoretical underpinnings. This thesis shifts between research as practice and practice as research in the conversation between the theoretical chapters, the

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³ Dallas Baker, ‘The screenplay as text: academic scriptwriting as creative research,’ in *New Writing* (Vol. 13, No. 1, 2016) p.75.
⁴ Baker quoted in Batty and Baker, ‘Screenwriting as a Mode of Research,’ as before, p.71.
⁶ Baker, ‘The screenplay as text: academic scriptwriting as creative research,’ as before.
⁷ Batty and Baker, ‘Screenwriting as a Mode of Research’ in *Screen Production Research,* as before.
writing of the CPs, and the critical reflections, in turn informing further research.\(^8\)

The key conceptual tools employed are those of screen comedy narrative, specifically the nature of the midpoint (MP) in film comedy and turning points (TPs) in the sitcom/narrative comedy, alongside critical examinations of ideological story frames, and how each enable comedic behaviour and tension. In doing so, this thesis and the supporting practice-based research offers new insight for comedy screenwriters as well as theorists and is one of the first screen-to-screen studies undertaken.

While the field of adaptation studies covers many aspects such as the adaptation of one form of literature to other forms such as film, television, radio, games and animation, the focus is commonly on the application of character/s and story, both of which remain relatively intact. For example, when adapting the novel to film, or a play to film, the essence of the characters and story are unchanged. This thesis examines the nature of character and narrative structure when transposing characters into a new story and thus different narrative structure. While many characters can be employed when migrating from a film to half-hour text, the narrative structure demands new storylines and, in some cases, new characters (or the loss of some) to ensure comicality as well as repeatability. Recent discourses on ‘fictional migrants’ examines the nature of characters in different fictions yet with similar behaviours, not the nature of character in different narratives within the same mode, as this thesis does.\(^9\) To that end this thesis extends the boundaries of adaptation studies to now place character in response to story or narrative structure. As such this may allow for the study of characters and their application in new forms of narrative such as games.

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\(^8\) Research as practice can carry various meanings: researching for the practice (historical, medical practices) or applying research (theory) to practice (as in utilising debates that challenge generic expectations) or, as I intend, applying theory to practice which in turn enables new research: research-led practice informing practice-led research.

In my book, *Situation Comedy, Character and Psychoanalysis* I examined the psychodynamics that exist between sitcom characters, inter- and intra-relationally within the world they inhabit (the situation) – typically an office, a home environment along with a social site such as pub, restaurant or coffee shop. Theorising the sitcom, I define this form of comedy as “a half-hour comic story involving a small group of characters premised on a struggle,” specifically a triumvirate of characters trapped in a situation (the story world) “wherein at least one character is repeatedly thwarted in achieving their goal by forces unseen and unknown to them.” As such, I argue that in the sitcom there exists three types of character caught in a power struggle. While the book is a theoretical undertaking, it offers a framework to assist in the development of a sitcom pilot. However, some critical issues central to this form of comedy remain unexamined.

As a consequence, this thesis expands on aspects developed in my book, specifically the characteristics of the ensemble sitcom, to understand how a group of characters is impacted by an ideological stance that the characters either support, deny, defy or attempt to expose. This ‘ideological world’ is what I describe as the ‘discursive frame.’ Noting how each character responds to the frame assists in determining principal elements of characterisation, especially when (and if) the group is taken out of their original situation.

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10 Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, p.7.

11 The focus of the book was primarily on single characters with the key character existing within a small group of characters. I define such sitcoms as relationship sitcoms and while originally, they were recorded in a studio in front of an audience (example being *I Love Lucy*, 1951-61), since the late nineties there has been a move to recording such forms of comedy as single camera on location, and redefined as narrative comedies such as *Fleabag* (2016-19). *I Love Lucy*, wrs. Jess Oppenheimer, Madelyn Davis, Bob Carroll Jr, Bob Schiller, Bob Weiskopf, prod. Desilu Productions (USA: CBS, 1951–1961). *Fleabag*, creator Phoebe Waller-Bridge, prod. Two Brothers Pictures (UK: BBC, 2016-19). However, in the book I argue that regardless of production, the fundamentals of the relational dynamics remain the same. Klika, as before, p.15.

such as going on a trip or holiday.\textsuperscript{13}

Discussing \textit{The Inbetweeners Movie (2011)}\textsuperscript{14} Marc Blake writes that “[e]ven though it took them out of the sitcom environment of home and school, it did not tinker with the character dynamic.”\textsuperscript{15} Furthermore, the question arises: if the characters are relocated to a new situation or environment, how do the dynamics between the characters change or, despite the new situation or story world, will they revert to the same behaviour?\textsuperscript{16}

I investigate the connection between the repeated struggle in the sitcom and the transformation required in the feature film, to deduce that if the character undergoes some change in the contemporaneous film then there can be no return to the originating situation as was the case in \textit{The Bad Education Movie (2015)}.\textsuperscript{17} Through the CPs and theoretical analyses, I critically examine the narrative structure to determine both the effect on character behaviour as well as the positioning of any subsequent screen text in relation to the originating text.

Thus, I offer when reworking a sitcom to a film it is essential to know the transformational journey the character/s will undergo and what is the relation to the ‘struggle’ they experience in the sitcom. The focus of this thesis is about how comicality works in the film comedy that has a narrative or subplot centred on a discordant relationship and which is challenged by events in the narrative. In addition, if the dynamics change in response to the

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\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Not all ensemble sitcoms are framed by a clearly identifiable ideological world, with the British ensemble sitcom \textit{Are You Being Served?} being such an example, \textit{Are You Being Served?}, creators Jeremy Lloyd, David Croft, prod. BBC (UK: BBC, 1972-1985).}
\textsuperscript{14} \textit{The Inbetweeners Movie}, wrs. Damon Beesley, Iain Morris, dir. Ben Palmer (Entertainment Film Distributors, 2011).
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Marc Blake, Writing the Comedy Movie} (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016) p.121.
\textsuperscript{16} The situation in the comedy series is limited to a few sets, whereas the ‘situation’ in a film is a story world.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{In The Bad Education Movie}, the students and teacher Alfie Vickers go to Cornwall, but instead of a completely new situation, it was a trip to his younger days and in doing so the students exposed to him that who he thought were his friends were in fact not. I regard this film example as remaining in the same locale, rather than the same situation as the sitcom. \textit{The Bad Education Movie}, wrs. Freddy Syborn, Jack Whitehall, dir. Elliot Hegarty (Entertainment Film, 2015).
\end{flushleft}
demands of the feature film narrative, can the characters return to the situation? Therefore, it is necessary to understand what change underlies the situational struggle which can then be harnessed and resolved in the related feature.

In the sitcom, the situation challenges the character by way of the narrative and, in refusing to rise to the challenge, they act in ways that the alter direction or structure of the narrative. Whereas, in the (contemporary) feature film, the narrative challenges the character to confront their need, to which they must respond. Furthermore, the narrative comedy, born of the sitcom in terms of character and relational dynamics, has emerged as a term that categorises half-hour screen comedies, often shot single camera, having a story arc which enables, and in some cases demand, sequential viewing. Identifying how the character operates in each form, and their response to the narrative is central to determining the nature of transformation by the character when migrated to film or, alternatively, from film to the half-hour narrative comedy. This thesis examines both processes to find that character and narrative are intrinsically linked by way of plotting and offers that each form affords different narrative demands on the character.

Returning to the theoretical framework in my book; in the sitcom, I argue that there are three types of psychodynamically-charged character: the narcissist who has power over a main character (which I label the key character) and who think they have power but is echoed by a character manifesting their unconscious fear often the one exposing the powerlessness of the key character. It is this relational dynamic which enables repeatability. Furthermore, I demonstrated that the key character not only attempts to alter their status or leave the situation (the site of the struggle), they are also unaware of the dynamics which enforce their repeated entrapment. While I argue that comicality in the sitcom is the result

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18 In texts such as Chris Head’s *Creating Comedy Narratives for Stage and Screen*. (London: Methuen, 2021) such characters are often referred to as the fool, but I prefer the term echo as that indicates their role – to echo the fear of the key character.
of the comedic gap between the key character and those around them, there is little reference to the dynamics within the ensemble sitcom and, as noted, is the starting point for this undertaking.

Definitions pertaining to this thesis

For the purposes of this thesis, I define the following: the ‘relationship sitcom’ as having two to four characters, while the ensemble sitcom is comprised of five or more characters, and which may encompass a relationship. I offer this delineation in terms of the power struggle between characters as noted above:

- **The relationship sitcom explores the power struggle between characters.**
  which is threatened each week by the inciting incident. Examples include *Fawlty Towers* (1975, 1979), *The Young Offenders* (2018), *Gavin & Stacey* (2007), *The Odd Couple* (1970).\(^{19}\)

- **The ensemble sitcom is informed by a ‘frame’ triggering a power struggle inter- and/or intra-relationally.** Examples include *Dad’s Army* (1968), *The Big Bang Theory* (2007), *Bad Education* (2012), *Dinnerladies* (1998).\(^{20}\)

**Inter- and intra-relational** pertains to the relationship between the characters (inter); the intra-relationship occurs between the characters (as a group) and a larger entity such as social expectation or an unseen character that affect the group as a whole.

**Narrative comedy** is the term commonly used in response to the evolution of the sitcom from traditional multicamera studio-based production to single camera location

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based-production and may involve a story arc over the series and which may demand viewing of episodes in sequential order, which the sitcom traditionally does not.

**Seriality:** In recent years both the sitcom and narrative comedy have incorporated degrees of seriality which demand viewing in sequential order; such programmes will commonly have a narrative arc across a series with a dramatic question (DQ). Once the DQ is resolved, the series comes to a satisfactory resolution. Hence, the narrative comedy has enveloped both the sitcom (a group of characters connected in some way to each other) and elements of seriality wherein the main characters resolve issues that have prevented relationships coming to fruition. Such programmes could be defined as a sitcom incorporating seriality and a label such as ‘comedy series’ would allow for encapsulating both the sitcom and narrative comedy. Thus, and for the purpose of this thesis, I offer that the **comedy series** is comprised of half-hour episodes within a limited series which may be produced as multicamera studio-based or as single camera on location and **has elements of seriality to varying degrees** (the sitcom less so and the narrative comedy is increasingly determined by a greater degree of seriality).

**Repeatability:** despite the comedy series having elements of seriality, the half-hour comic narrative demands that the **character/s undergo little to no change in how they see the world, ensuring that they repeatedly respond to challenges brought by the narrative in each episode with the same behaviour.** When the character/s do respond (as in, the DQ is answered) then the series ends.

This thesis utilises the term **film comedy** to encompass those comedies that have a narrative structure which is primarily comic, wherein the character responds to the narrative at the last possible moment (commonly the second turning point/climax), as opposed to the drama narrative wherein the character begins to respond to the narrative at the MP.
Such comedies include the romantic comedy (romcom). However, I discovered in the analysis of a number of screen texts wherein the plot was much like that of a romcom yet was not strictly about a ‘romance’ or romantic relationship. Rather, in many film comedies there is a discordant relationship of some kind (such as friends, parent-child, siblings). I utilise the term relationship comedy to describe such texts and expand on generic terms shortly as well as picking up the conversation in the Conclusion. This term is broader and incorporates the romcom (wherein the desire for love is the main plot) and the comedy romance (wherein the romance is secondary to the comic premise). Hence, I define the relationship comedy film as a comic narrative which incorporates a plot centred on a discordant relationship that is resolved at the second turning point.

Screen texts examined

The focus of the texts examined in this thesis is primarily on UK and USA programmes as these markets are the primary sites of development in the half-hour and film comic narrative. While the historical development of the sitcom and film comedy is not the subject of investigation, years of programme production from these countries is referenced after each text as a means of contextualising narrative developments.

Beginning with the ensemble sitcom, I analyse the dynamics both inter- and intra-relationally of the group with a discursive frame. I have argued that in some (relational) sitcoms the frame is defined by a discourse (such as women belong in the home), evident in I Love Lucy, (1951-61)\textsuperscript{21}—an ideology which informs either the situation or the character's outlook, or both. By analysing the ensemble in relation to the discursive frame, as well as the role of the echo character, I offer that such characters reflect the fear of the collective, not just the key character as previously argued. I posit that the ensemble sitcom must be supported by a discursive frame, particularly as it enables each character to be defined

\textsuperscript{21} Klika, \textit{Situation Comedy}, as before, see Chapters 1 and 5.
by way of a relationship to the frame and which enables comic tension. As such this thesis argues that comedic tension results by way of degrees of incongruity between the character and a discursive frame or between characters. Further, and noticing the increasing prevalence of characters with morally questionable behaviour (beginning with *Seinfeld*, 1989-98, and more recently *The Young Offenders*, 2018-) this thesis picks up Margrethe Bruun Vaage’s text on the antihero in television drama to examine how such a character might exist in the ensemble sitcom and specifically in relation to a frame. Such examination then gives insight into the existence of a comic antihero; in doing so I argue that such characters enable another layer of comedic tension by way of their attempts to expose the frame which both defines and entraps the group.

Ensemble sitcoms reworked as films are common in Britain, however in America the reverse pattern is more prevalent, with examples such as *The Odd Couple* (1968, 1970-75), *M*A*S*H* (1970, 1972-83), *9 to 5* (1980, 1982-83) and *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947, 1969-70). It is interesting to note that there have not been more recent spin-offs and may be the reason why Lionsgate was exploring its archive. Developing a sitcom from a film, I posit, is more difficult as it requires an understanding of how the contemporaneous sitcom enables the ongoing tension between characters in the film. To assist in this developmental process, I offer that such a tension can be found in the second act of the originating film, and other than my article on the association between the film and its

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relational sitcom wherein I critically examine the film *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* and its associated series, scholarship in this area is mute. To that end, this thesis critically examines the nature of plotting when developing a feature film from the ensemble sitcom, and then to ascertain which characters in the film are best suited to migrate to a half-hour comedy series as a means to assist either form of development.

Academic literature and practice-based texts on the sitcom

I have previously argued that many studies of the sitcom focus on sociological readings, and along with Brett Mills’ seminal book *TV Sitcom* and David Marc’s *Comic Visions*, Saul Austerlitz charts similar territory in a more recent study in *Sitcom. A History in 24 Episodes from I Love Lucy to Community*. However, other than the discussion in my book, there is little scholarship specifically on the ensemble sitcom, and given the numerous examples, this thesis seeks to redress that gap.

When coming to write the sitcom pilot or episode, there are various publications aimed at practitioners. Evan Smith’s *Writing Television Sitcoms*, Jurgen Wolff’s *Successful Sitcom Writing*, Ronald Wolfe’s *Writing Comedy*, Tim Ferguson’s text on writing the narrative comedy, *The Cheeky Monkey*, and more recently Chris Head’s *Creating Comedy Narratives for Stage and Screen* – are all texts that I have consulted when writing my pilot scripts and utilised in the framework for developing a sitcom. While such texts detail various approaches to writing the sitcom/narrative comedy, there is no theoretical framework which ensures the dynamics of the form: characters trapped in a situation, be it a family, workplace

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27 See Appendices for list of sitcoms developed as films and films reworked as sitcoms.
or through friendship, wherein one or more characters seek to leave, master the situation or actualise (as in *Friends*), yet fail regardless. My book set out to theorise the sitcom as a way of understanding why such entrapment exists to enable comedy writers a better understanding of the relational dynamics between characters. The texts noted offer various definitions of the type of characters required, such as the boss, striver and fool, or the process in outlining a half-hour script, yet with little or no reference to the minutiae of story beats which form the spine of the script. Pamela Douglas gives insight and guidance to writing the episodic TV Drama, specifically those that encompass the stand-alone episode (as with the original sitcom) and storylines encompassing elements of seriality across episodes.29 I have utilised Douglas in writing a chapter on developing the beats in a sitcom.30

**Theoretical studies of film comedy**

Murray Smith writes that ‘...if we wish to understand ‘identification,’ and how narrative films are ‘made intelligible,’ then I contend that character is central.... [O]ur ‘entry into’ narrative structures is mediated by character.”31 I concur with Smith, that when transposing a character from one form of screen text to another, a focus on character is essential in mediating narrative structures. In *The Comedy of Philosophy*, Lisa Trahair studies the engagement between character and narrative in film comedy. In her analysis, Trahair determines that the character attempts to alter the challenges presented by the narrative as Buster Keaton does in *The General*, and in response the character subverts the narrative.32 Alternatively the character may alter the direction of the plot in their refusal to be affected by the narrative. I discuss this

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in more detail in Chapter Three.

Scholarship pertaining to film comedy covers genres or sub-genres such as the romantic comedy (romcom), the screwball comedy, the comedy of remarriage, the buddy movie, alongside satire and parody, or through theoretical frameworks such as aspects of representation.\textsuperscript{33} Writing and Selling Romantic Comedy Screenplays by Helen Jacey and Craig Batty further differentiates sub-genres of the romantic comedy such as “gerontocoms.”\textsuperscript{34} Genre assists in categorising texts according to common tropes, comic behaviour, narrative structure, while also foregrounding mode such as satire, parody or farce. However, I offer that the romantic comedy (romcom) has suffered in being relegated to simplistic narratives focused on a character meeting ‘the one’ only to lose them and in the resolution find them again. Celestino Deleyto writes that “[i]f we accept that there are other dimensions to the [romantic comedy] apart from the happy ending then the recognition of much greater formal and ideological variety will immediately ensue.”\textsuperscript{35} Roman New Comedy promotes the ‘happy ending’ for the couple in the face of parental or societal obstacles, and the satire of Greek Old Comedy\textsuperscript{36} attacks the societal norms that prevent personal freedom or

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Gerald Mast, \textit{The Comic Mind: Comedy and the Movies} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).
\item Wes D. Gehring, \textit{Romantic vs. Screwball Comedy: Charting the Difference} (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2002).
\item Claire Mortimer, \textit{Romantic Comedy} (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).
\item Andrew Horton and Joanna E Rapf, (eds) \textit{A Companion to Film Comedy} (Chichester: Wiley, 2012).
\item Helen Jacey, Craig Batty, \textit{Writing and Selling Romantic Comedy Screenplays} (Harpenden Herts.: Kamera Books, 2014) p.28.
\item Andrew Horton, \textit{Laughing Out Loud: Writing the Comedy-Centered Screenplay} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
\end{itemize}
individuation. Blake writes that “[i]t was a social theme that made reconciliation possible and set in motion the happy ending of marriage, festival, feast or dance, which become the Hollywood Fantasy Model.”37 Combining both forms of comedy (Old and New) enable the romantic comedy as a genre to encompass, as Leger Grindon argues, ‘related cultural phenomena.’38 Deleyto further notes that “… the genre of romantic comedy has operated and continues to operate in a great variety of filmic texts, including many that cannot be defined as romantic comedies.”39

One challenge of studying film comedy, as Geoff King notes, is that “[a] term such as comedy can be used either as an adjective or as a noun. . . ,”40 thus enabling the comedy to take prime position or secondary position to the narrative. For King, the romcom “is a format in which romance is the main and foregrounded element of the narrative, rather than occupying a secondary position.”41 Grindon argues that more recent film comedies are occupying the ‘margins’42 of the romcom genre to include age, background or gender, suggesting it is a metanarrative under which sits a variety of plots which are comic. Grindon continues:

…Annie Hall marks a seismic shift in … the romantic comedy genre. … the romance sidesteps marriage and addresses the trials of partnership…. Annie Hall’s elaboration of character psychology leads to the internalization of conventional obstacles and the plot focuses on how relationships work – or fail.43

Debates around genre and what defines the romantic comedy continue, including arguments about responses to the failure in the progression of the ‘seismic shift’ offered by Annie Hall, specifically the work of Tamar McDonald, Wes Gehring and Deleyto, all of

37 Blake, Writing the Comedy Movie, as before, p.63.
39 Deleyto, The secret life of romantic comedy, as before, p.46.
41 King, as before, p.51.
42 Grindon, The Hollywood Romantic Comedy, as before, p.81.
43 Grindon, as before, p.150.
whom I pick up in Chapter Two. The work by Gehring and Deborah Jermyn interrogates comedies with discordant relationships and as such have assisted in contextualising theory and associated practice. What has become evident is the comedy film’s ability (specifically those dealing with relationships) to encompass different types of narratives. I agree with Deleyto and theorists such as McDonald and Jermyn that, within the film comedy ‘genre’ is a metanarrative that encompasses tropes, and which assist to define sub-genres. I pick up the metanarrative of film comedy in the Conclusion.

If a generic definition is required to situate the film texts I examine, then I offer the term ‘relationship comedy,’ already mentioned and derived from Jermyn, who notes Nancy Meyer’s love of “relationship comedies,” yet without defining what she means by such nomenclature. I posit that such a term allows for a more productive interface with the feature film and the half-hour narrative comedy as both have as their central concern relationships with varying degrees, or not, of resolution. Furthermore, I argue, such a term is more appropriate for numerous film comedies which do not adhere to the standard generic definition or expectation of the ubiquitous ‘romcom.’ Utilising a broader film genre term such as ‘comedies about relationships’ (“relcoms”) incorporates not only the romcom but those texts with gay relationships, friends with benefits, and even extending to include films such as Silver Linings Playbook (2012), often listed as a comedy. As stated, the focus of this thesis is about the relationship between character and plotting in film comedy, rather

44 Jermyn notes Meyer’s love of ‘relationship comedies,’ Nancy Meyers, as before, p. 24.
45 The central relationship is that of the father and son, rather than the male and female characters who get together. The healing of the father father-son relationship (evident at the MP) enables the other relationship to progress. Silver Linings Playbook, wr., dir., David O. Russell, prod. Donna Gigliotti et al. (Weinstein Co,2012).
46 This chimes with Deleyto’s and Grindon’s view of the broadening of the genre’s definition, as well as McDonald’s analysis of the romantic comedy. However, I challenge McDonald’s view that the romcom has evolved into a neo-traditional genre, and which in her view “…does not take up and twist the concerns of the previous sub-genre’s films: instead it acts as if movies like The Graduate and Annie Hall never existed. Although it keeps up the appearance, inherited from the 1970s films, of being a more realistic type of romantic comedy, it has no use for realism if this means facing up to the actual problems of forming a lasting relationship in contemporary society.” McDonald, Romantic Comedy, as before, pp.85-6.
than generic similarities or differences. However, if the comedy film encompasses generic differences and tensions, I offer, so too can the short comic narratives of the sitcom and narrative comedy, in particular when they are situated within ideological frames. There is a hinterland on the scholarship and indeed practice of finding consanguinity between a film comedy and a contemporaneous half-hour comedy.

Examining texts that focus on film narrative structure and character development, Linda Seger’s seminal text, *How to Make a Good Script Great* articulates the tension and behaviour inherent in strong screen characters having a want (their goal), yet often at odds with an unconscious need or flaw, born of an early developmental wound. Seger argues that such tension informs behaviour that either arrests or challenges the character. Christopher Vogler dissects the transformational nature of protagonists as ‘heroes,’ on a journey of twelve stages; the challenges and obstacles the character faces mirror their own unmet needs and when confronting such wounds, their transformation begins on ‘the road back home.’ I posit that when migrating characters from one form of comedic screen text to another, the psychological development or arrestment of the character/s in relation to the plotting and narrative structure of the subsequent form must be considered.

David Howard and Edward Mabley, using the fundamentals of screenwriting as posited by Frank Daniel, expand on Seger’s analysis in *The Tools of Screenwriting*, to closely examine the nature of the MP, which appears to have been largely unexamined. Along with John Yorke, Howard, and Mabley posit that the MP is the point, at which new information is delivered and the midpoint reversal (MPR) is the action by the character responding to the new information or opportunity it offers.

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Screenwriting author Dara Marks offers that at the MP theme is articulated, and for dramatist Laos Egri theme is related to premise. Ted Wilkes and Phil Hughes, in their presentation to the 2018 London Screenwriters Festival, posit that the MP is the keystone scene of the film – the one scene the film cannot do without, and which supports the narrative arc. While theorists such as Egri, and Daniel through Mabley and Howard, along with practitioners such as Yorke and Marks note the connection between theme and MP, scholarship on the MP, specifically its nature, is extremely limited. Studying various comedy films, I began to note something more was happening than new information being delivered, the scene that bridges the narrative arc, theme articulated, or as Blake notes, “the heart of the picture.” In practice-based texts there is no framework on how to develop or structure a narrative that enables a specific form of MP, moreover how the MP might underpin the comedic tension. Premise, theme and MP may be interlinked, and could be an area of further study, however this thesis focuses on the role and nature of the MP in film comedy, and which I critically examine in Chapter Two.

Practitioner-focused texts on screenwriting

Turning to texts on film screenwriting, of which there is an unlimited number, and concentrating on those about writing the film comedy, since 2000 the following texts have assisted in developing CP2, a feature film, as practice-based research.

Billy Mernit’s Writing the Romantic Comedy, 2000, details approach to theme and character development with useful exercises that assisted in the development of character and structure. Keith Giglio’s Writing the Comedy Blockbuster: The Inappropriate Goal,

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54 Blake, Writing the Comedy Movie, as before, p.46.
55 Billy Mernit, Writing the Romantic Comedy: from “cute meet” to “joyous defeat”: How to write Screenplays that will sell (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000).
2012, notes the shift in emphasis from female protagonists to male protagonists seeking an ‘inappropriate goal’ primarily those of Judd Apatow produced comedies.\(^{56}\) This text enabled me to consider both protagonists as having inappropriate goals. Marc Blake’s *Writing the Comedy Movie*, 2016, utilises Giglio’s inappropriate goal and examines how this informs dialogue. Blake further determines that the supporting characters “are extensions of his [the main character’s] central dilemma,”\(^{57}\) assisting me to ensure that supporting characters force the main character to confront certain realities. Paul Gulino’s eight sequences in *Screenwriting. The Sequence Approach. The Hidden Structure of Successful Screenplays*, 2018, explicates a framework wherein the narrative is broken down to eight fifteen-minute sequences with a beginning, middle and end, each underlined by a smaller DQ.\(^{58}\) Both Giglio and Gulino posit that each sequence has its own tone or subheading, such as Sequence #5, ‘friendship/love is in the air’ and assisted with the development of the script outline for CP2; the different sequence approaches are summarised in the Appendices.\(^{59}\) Finally, Steve Kaplan’s *The Comic Hero’s Journey*, 2018, applies the hero’s journey template designed by Vogler to the comic character, with little analysis or thematic approach to the choice of films analysed.\(^{60}\) However, this text did assist in further distilling the approach and focus of some of the sequences in CP2. These texts are primarily formalist in approach in that they determine patterns in the plotting and narrative structure of existing texts.

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57 Blake, as before, p.27.
59 See the second section in the Appendices, p. 330.
Narrative theory encompasses a broad range of study with narratologists developing various approaches with essentially two schools of theory: formalism and structuralism.  

Formalist analysis studies the form of the work, while a structuralist approach is focused on causality and story logic. For the purposes of this thesis, I take formalism as pertaining to the patterns of narrative while structuralism is focused on the specificity of narrative structure and plotting, such as TPs and climaxes born of causality.

In *The Nutshell Technique*, 2016, Jill Chamberlain utilises Aristotle’s *Poetics* to distil the two forms of feature film narrative commonly cited: ‘the comedy’ wherein the character confronts their flaw and ‘the tragedy’ wherein the character denies their flaw. (I posit ‘comedy’ includes ‘drama’). Taking a structuralist approach, Chamberlain ascertains that in each form of narrative (comedy/tragedy) the second TP, also known as the second plot point, the moment before Act Three, is a high point in tragedy, while in comedy it is a low point. In the tragedy, the protagonist think they have succeeded in getting their want whereas in the comedy it is a low point in that they realise they are about to lose everything and therefore must confront their flaw (which the tragic protagonist never does). Thus, narrative structures are delineated between comedy and tragedy based on the confrontation, or not, of character flaws.

Here, flaw encompasses need, whereas I posit that need enables the flaw, manifesting as behaviour. In the drama the character responds to information at the MP, triggering the MPR. However, I offer that the comic character is in denial of the need to alter their

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61 Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, Chapter 4.  
63 I have utilised Chatman’s satellites and kernels and their relationship in plotting the sitcom. Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, Chapter 4.  
behaviour or situation and therefore does not engage a MPR until much later in the narrative. By delineating the ‘comic’ narrative into drama (there is no funny business) and comedy (there is funny business), gives insight as to how and when the character confronts their need. In Chapter Two I analyse the MP in film comedy to argue that the comic protagonist, while confronted with their need and its associated flaw at the MP, will deny it until the second TP, whereas in drama, the character begins to confront their flaw at the MP, evidenced by their actions at the MPR. Thus, the differentiation between the protagonist in the drama and the protagonist in the comedy is that they confront their need and associated flaws at different points in the narrative.

Furthermore, for Chamberlain, the character’s flaw must be caught in a ‘catch’ which is in play at the beginning of Act Two, culminating in a crisis at the end of the act. While Chamberlain’s notion of the catch gives insight as to how tension is enabled in Act Two, she does not elucidate how comic tension is maintained, specifically in the second half of the act. This text enabled me to reflect on why the tension at the MP, which I sought to prove in CP2, did not play out as expected and I discuss this point in the critical reflection of CP2.

Discussing Tootsie (1982), which I analyse in Chapter Two, Chamberlain marries the main character’s flaw with a catch: actor and womaniser Michael Dorsey wants to raise funds for a play written by his housemate as a means of displaying his superior acting skills (his want), but the only job he can get is in a soap opera – as a woman. In doing so, Michael experiences life as a woman, and specifically the same treatment he once engaged in (his catch). When Michael falls for one of the female actors in the soap opera, he wants to stop the masquerade, yet his contract ties him to the role for another year. When Michael can no longer sustain the deceit, at the end of Act Two, he exposes his own masquerade.

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68 *Tootsie*, wr. Larry Gelbart et al., dir. Sydney Pollack (Columbia Pictures, 1982).
While having posited that the catch underpins the crisis at the end of the second act, Chamberlain is utilising formalist theory, wherein the plot reaches a climactic point and all the details of the form fall into place in the dénouement. However, in connecting character flaw specifically with a catch, she is utilising structuralism – thus formalist analysis is harnessed to decipher structure.

Critically examining the nature of the MP in various film comedies, this thesis explicates that at the MP, by way of misunderstanding, deception, masquerade, or a lie, the character becomes trapped in a ‘bind,’ enabled by both an attachment to a want (goal) and need (flaw) that they not only deny, they continue to deny in the face of exposition. I contend that the catch creates a bind in the film comedy, and which becomes most intense at the MP, yet the bind also underpins comic tension in the second half of Act Two, giving insight into how comic tension is maintained. I pick up this point up at the end of Chapter Two.

Methodology

In my book I analysed the sitcom narrative utilising a structuralist approach, and I now examine the narrative and plotting of the sitcom, film comedy and narrative comedy series primarily through formalist theory to determine patterns which enable the dénouement. I set out to ascertain if there are specific structuralist elements to consider. To that end, I employ textual analysis of character behaviour to discern the elements that underpin formalist patterns playing out in the narrative, informing the practice of screenwriting texts by way of research-led practice.

69 Klika, Situation Comedy, as before, p.168.
Analysing the nature of discursive frames in ensemble comedies, I deduce that such texts enable tension between characters as well as between the group and the frame. The situation challenges the character/s who subvert the narrative, to return to the emotional stasis, known as the re-situation; tension is enabled by way of the relationship between narrative and situation – a formalist pattern. Critically examining the MP in film comedy, I shift to structural analysis and specificity of plotting, that informs character behaviour. As noted, in feature film the narrative challenges the character to confront their need and flaw while a structuralist approach illuminates those difficult moments. Such an approach enables explication of the relationship between plotting, character behaviour and comic tension.

CP1 is informed by reading the effect of the framing discourse on characters in the ensemble sitcom. CP2 set out to apply practice-based frameworks (such as the sequence approach) and textual reading of film comedies (specifically the MP) only to find that in the development of the script outline, informed by research on the MP, the practice then informed the research. In the writing of the first draft of CP3 (a narrative comedy), the scene bearing the middle TP (TP2) was weak and noted as too “deux ex machina.” In re-writing the scene, practice as research (the nature of the MP in film comedy) informed a structural/plotting element of the second TP as being much like a MP, as well as elucidating previous research (as to why the narrative turned at ninety-degrees). Thus, while each of the CPs is underpinned by theoretical approaches – research-led practice – all three texts became examples of practice-led research by attempting to analyse aspects not previously explored: the comic antihero in the ensemble sitcom and their relationship to a framing discourse, the nature of the MP in film comedy, and the TP also being a MP in episodic narrative comedy.

70 Feedback from script editor.
Overview of the thesis

The thesis is divided into three sections, each with a theoretical chapter, a CP and a critical reflection of the CP script. The reflection further considers how the CPs inform each other.

Section One considers the ensemble sitcom and the characters that inhabit a world defined by a discursive frame. Section Two considers the bind of the MP in the film comedy, specifically those with discordant relationships, examining what needs to be taken into consideration when developing a feature film from an ensemble sitcom. Section Three analyses the development of a comedy series from a feature film and the nature of TPs in an episode of a half-hour comedy series.

Looking at the detail of each section, Chapter One analyses the ensemble sitcom *Dad’s Army* (1968-77)\(^{71}\) to elucidate a principle that a group of characters is best served by being situated in a world governed by a discursive frame and story ideology (that of fighting WWII). This chapter further examines the echo character within the group to find that such characters mirror the fears of the main character/s as well as the collective, and specifically the role of the antihero, which Bruun Vaage defines as complex characters displaying morally questionable behaviour.\(^{72}\) Applying the notion of such characters in the sitcom, I argue that the comic antihero is aware of a frame that seeks to confine the group, yet they, and the gang, remain trapped in its ‘gaze.’

This sets up the hypothetical to be explored in CP1: the ensemble sitcom is not only able to harbour the comic antihero, this form of comedy is also best served when the collective is defined and trapped by a frame which disempowers the characters to varying degrees. The critical reflection discusses the challenges of developing a comic antihero to find that they are a marriage of consciousness (of the frame) and unconsciousness (of why

\(^{71}\) *Dads Army*, creator Jimmy Perry, as before (1968-1977).

\(^{72}\) Bruun Vaage, *The Antihero in American Television*, as before.
they remain). Furthermore, CP1 explores the principle that the frame assists in delivering comic tension, as well as analysing how the echo character operates in the ensemble.

CP1 is a studio-based ensemble sitcom, *It’s Academic* centred on a group of academics framed by the marketisation of Higher Education (HE). The pilot script introduces the main characters who work in a media department of a university desperate to halt its slide down the league table. The comic antihero, Rachel, is echoed by Brianna, the keen new lecturer, with Ben, the key character, an out of work film director who now finds himself in this strange new world. The head of department, Henry, thrives in this world, and along with truth-teller Luciana, these characters complete the ensemble. The critical reflection enabled insight into how the narrative structure in a subsequent film script could incorporate the characters from CP1.

Chapter Two critically examines the comedy film, specifically the MP of such narratives to find that at the MP, the point when the protagonist/s is confronted by their need, in denying it they become caught in a bind. In developing CP2, specifically the outline, the work on the MP in the theoretical chapter informed, and in turn was informed by the practice in the development stage. CP2, a feature film screenplay, sought to test that the MP in a comedy film with a subplot of a discordant relationship, is the point wherein the main character is trapped in a bind between their want and need. I offer that the bind enables the comedic tension in the second half of Act Two. However, at the MP in CP2 the bind shifts from one main character to the other, which weakens the tension in Act Two. The reflection discusses why this might be so, further informing theoretical discussion.

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73 This is a different psychological construct of the key character that is unconscious of the frame, underscored by an unconscious echoism – the root of their comic degradation.
CP2, *The Accidental Academic*, explores the relationship between Rachel and Ben, and how he comes to be at the academy and where Rachel teaches. CP2 transposes some characters from CP1, with the main characters, Ben and Rachel undergoing transformation in the face of the narrative. It was the nature of transformation of characters when migrating to a film narrative that was of interest in developing CP2. While secrets are exposed and past decisions confronted, the future between these two characters is inconclusive. This CP was tasked with determining which characters from this story world would subsequently migrate to a situation that triggered unresolved issues, in particular between Ben and Rachel.

Chapter Three analyses the comedy series developed from a feature film, and using two examples from different eras, elucidates a principle that a comedy series often sits within the second act of the feature film; in doing so elucidates a principle that characters transposed from the film must have unresolved issues which arise either in Act Two or remain at the end of the film’s narrative. I also find that the second TP in an episode of a series operates much like a MP, yet the character acts in ways that alter the direction of the narrative, subverting it rather than responding to its challenge. This also explains why the closed narrative structure is enabled.

CP3, a comedy series, *Have You Fed the Cat?* is set a few years after the film. As the protagonists from CP2, Ben and Rachel had gone their separate ways, I was confronted with considering what situation would enable dynamics that would force these characters to confront unresolved feelings, and which surfaced in CP2. As noted, narrative comedy has evolved through a combination of seriality and repeatability as found in the sitcom. Thus, it seemed that a comedy series with a DQ which governed the narrative arc (of the series) was the appropriate vehicle. In doing so, CP3 illustrates that a half-hour comedy post the film text requires an understanding of relational issues which will enable repeatability and seriality. Furthermore, CP3 explicates the need for the second TP to contain information which will
prompt one of the characters to act in a way that alters the direction of the narrative and re-establish the emotional stasis. The critical reflection considers practice-based research in the development of the script when writing scenes that encompass both a MP and TP. Finally, and if there is no clear story ideology or frame that governs the ‘situation,’ CP3 validates the principle that the comedy series is best served by a DQ.

The three CPs map the journey and evolution of two characters from one story world and its ideological frame to another narrative structure that demands transformation and onto a new situation wherein unfinished business is challenged. All three CPs explore narrative tension as a means of enabling comicality: the discursive frame in ensemble sitcoms, the bind in relationship comedies, the second TP (of three) in the closed narrative of episodic comedy series, as well as ascertaining the emotional tension in Act Two of the comedy feature film.

To that end, this thesis examines how narrative structures underscore character behaviour and change – as transformational (as in the film), arrested, (as in the sitcom) or evolving over a series (as in narrative comedy/comedy series), explicating consanguinity between narrative-situation and narrative-character. Critically examining the nature of plotting and character behaviour in short- and long-form screen comedy, specifically the TV sitcom, the feature film and the half-hour narrative comedy series, this thesis offers new readings and frameworks for the comedy screenwriter as well as theorists.
SECTION ONE

THE ENSEMBLE SITCOM

CHAPTER ONE – THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR ‘FRAME’ IN ENSEMBLE COMEDIES

CREATIVE PRACTICE 1 – IT’S ACADEMIC – AN ENSEMBLE SITCOM

CRITICAL REFLECTION ON CREATIVE PRACTICE 1

28
CHAPTER ONE
THE CHARACTERS AND THEIR ‘FRAME’ IN ENSEMBLE COMEDIES

Umberto Eco writes: “In comedy we laugh at the character, in humor we smile because of the contradiction between the character and the frame the character cannot comply with.”¹ This chapter examines the dynamics between characters trapped in the gaze of a ‘discursive’ frame to offer that the ensemble, as an entity, is a ‘key’ character that attempts to survive within a frame and which some characters ‘cannot comply with.’ Jane Feuer writes, “[t]he sitcom has been the perfect format for illustrating current ideological conflicts while entertaining an audience.”² I extend on my work in Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis to critically examine the ensemble sitcom, commonly those sitcoms which have five or more characters, offering diverse views and experiences of life, as opposed to the ‘relationship’ sitcom which focusses on relationships between characters, commonly of similar age and background. This chapter poses the question: What is the nature of characters in relation to the frame in ensemble comedies?

By closely analysing the frame in the ensemble sitcom, and utilising my screenwriting experience as well as practice-based texts for the short form narrative, I explore how the frame affects individual behaviour within the ensemble, yet how it also defines the group.³ Eco continues “…humor works in the interstices between narrative and discursive structures….”⁴ Based on the analysis undertaken in this chapter, it is my contention that the ensemble sitcom elucidates a trend in which a frame enables another layer of comicality that defines the group

beyond the situation; such a principle would enable both the inter- and intra-relational dynamics of the collective and is exemplified by the medical personnel based at the remote army hospital in *M*A*S*H* (1972-1983). Other examples of story ideology framing a collective include *Dad’s Army* (1968-1977), a British sitcom set against the threat of Nazi invasion in WWII and *The Big Bang Theory* (2007-2019) (*TBBT*) situated in the world of scientific research. These examples exist within a discursive frame which grants to the characters membership of a group as well as status or tension in relation to the frame.

Applying Margrethe Bruun Vaage’s notion of the antihero to the sitcom, this chapter further analyses the existence of a comic antihero within the ensemble. I posit that such characters are aware of the frame yet unable to escape its entrapment. Finally, this chapter interrogates the role of the echo comic character to ascertain their role within the group dynamic.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND APPLICATION

**Ensemble comedies**

Zara Waldeback and Craig Batty write that

> Ensemble films or TV series explore a theme from different perspectives, allowing a world to form where each person’s understanding is of roughly equal value. By placing characters in relation to each other in this marked way, the story is told through their alliances and allegiances.

Though Waldeback and Batty do not necessarily apply their insights specifically to the sitcom, the point that the story is told ‘through ... alliances and allegiances’ underscores examples of sitcoms where “[t]he whole thus created can explore a theme or situation in a different way...”

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10 Waldeback and Batty, as before, p. 66.
We’re Doomed! The Dad’s Army Story,\(^\text{11}\) reimages the story of the making of Dad’s Army (1968-1977), in which writer David Croft notes that “the gang must work for the show to survive.” While WWII enables this group to exist, it also gives each character an identity and recognition for individual achievement as well as contribution to the group effort.\(^\text{12}\) Thus, the ensemble must work to serve both individual needs as well as work together – often as a means of surviving. As such, I posit that the ensemble sitcom enables greater diversity in exploring characters from different backgrounds and view of their ‘world.’ Having defined the sitcom as “a half-hour comic story involving a small group of characters premised on a struggle,”\(^\text{13}\) (and this struggle centres on what I have labelled as the key character), it would appear that there is little academic work which examines groups of more than four characters in order to “explore a theme from different perspectives.”


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\(^{11}\) We’re Doomed! The Dad’s Army Story (UK: BBC, 2015).

\(^{12}\) Such as to get that next stripe, to be appointed a captain or to be free of a mother’s domination.


While these examples cover a fifty-four-year time span, the fundamentals of the operation of the sitcom remain consistent, in that the group seeks to achieve a goal or idealisation, only to repeatedly fail or be undermined by way of a relational dynamic rooted in an ideological tension and which I have argued is the case for a key character. Picking up Waldeback and Batty’s point, this chapter establishes that in the ensemble comedy the diversity and range of characters in relation to a frame enables inter- and intra-relational tensions, which, it will be argued, underpin the comicality. As such there must be some opposition from the ‘outside’ for the ensemble to be bound together by a common ‘enemy.’

The Frame

Critically examining the notion of containment within a discursive frame, specifically the 1950s policy of ‘containment,’ Patricia Mellencamp uses psychoanalytic theory to analyse the American sitcom I Love Lucy (1951–1961),16 to argue that comicality emanates from the tension inherent in the social and which then plays out in the personal.17 Extending on Mellencamp, I analyse how comic performance is enabled to posit that the key character is at odds with a discursive frame; in their failure to master or escape its entrapment, they suffer comic degradation.

However, if the audience is aware of a frame that is limiting, then there must be at least one character who feels those limitations yet is unable to articulate such experiences. I offer that the audience feels what the character is acting out, but is unable to articulate the genesis

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of the feeling. However, when the character is aware of the limitations and rails against such containment (as do the characters in *Seinfeld*, 1989-1998), then I offer that the character is reflecting the audience's desire in a comparable situation. Thus, I contend that sitcoms can both reflect and reveal experiences which may be known and conscious or, alternatively, covertly felt, but which I posit are experienced as disempowering. However, as I have argued, what defines the key character in a sitcom is that they are conscious of their goal, while simultaneously unconscious of the disempowering dynamics in which they exist. Furthermore, while the gang is bound by the frame, each character within the collective has a relationship with the frame that results in some degree of psychological tension. In short, some characters are unaware of the frame, and which may be felt as disempowering, while there are those that are conscious of the frame, yet unable to subvert or escape its effects. I offer that the gang, as a form of key character, and in response to having their desires thwarted, repeatedly butts up against a frame or ideology in their refusal to adhere to social conventions, with *Seinfeld* a good example. However, and as I will argue, there are some examples where characters within the frame have different responses. It is the frame and its role in enabling comicality that is of interest, as well as the dynamics within the group, and further each character’s relationship to the frame.

*The Big Bang Theory* (*TBBT*) (2007-2019) is centred on four male scientists (Leonard, Sheldon, Raj, and Howard) and one female scientist (Amy) working at the prestigious California Institute of Technology (Caltech). Two further characters make up the ensemble: Bernadette (who quickly becomes Howard’s wife) and Penny (who becomes Leonard’s wife in a later series). The importance of the scientific institution in defining characters’ identity and self-worth is brought to the fore by way of competitive colleagues,

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sexual rivals, and institutional superiors who explain, particularly to the men, that they cannot own the fruit of their labours (patents) produced within the institution. The setting of Caltech provides the scientists a frame that not only defines them, but it can also trigger fears of irrelevance. In contrast to the rarefied world of academic endeavours, Bernadette’s research in a pharmaceutical company reflects the commercialisation of science, along with Penny, having given up her dream of acting and takes up as a pharmaceutical salesperson, both view science as a means to an end. Each character has a relationship to the frame of science – from academic theory and research to the benefits of commercialisation. Thus, this ensemble sitcom, is able to harbour characters with differing relationships to the frame, which is clearly defined.

If the comicality is created by way of the tension within the ensemble and between the ensemble and the frame, within the gang there can reside a character who challenges the frame, even exposes it. In the case of TBBT Sheldon plays this role – a character aware of the frame who seeks to have power by way of his superior intellect over what he sees as a limiting discourse. Such characters do not try to achieve personal actualisation, as is the nature of the key character, they know, or unconsciously understand, the frame is disempowering, and rather than seek to leave it, they rail against it in order to preserve their status within the group.

I now offer that in the ensemble comedy there is greater allowance for at least one character to be aware of the disempowering dynamic, yet such characters remain trapped in the situation. While I pick up the notion of the character caught in a bind between ‘knowing’ and refusal to accept certain realities in the next chapter, I now offer that at least one character in the ensemble sitcom attempts to alter, expose, or defy a frame; their comicality emanating from both an external force, now seen as a ‘discursive frame,’ and the internal tension it generates in that the frame limits their desires, yet they do not leave the situation. I view such characters as a type of ‘comic antihero.’
The Antihero

Jason Mittell writes:

Complex comedies have also embraced antiheroic protagonists, as with Larry David’s misanthropic self-portrait on *Curb Your Enthusiasm* or the ensemble of horrid losers populating *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia*. Television features a longer history of comedies centred on unlikable protagonists, including Archie Bunker on *All in the Family*, Seinfeld’s core ensemble, ... with even more prominence on British comedies such as *Fawlty Towers, Absolutely Fabulous, Blackadder*, and *The Office*.20

Mittell’s examples all have one thing in common: the characters rail against the world in which they exist. They are frustrated, angry, duplicitous characters, suffering from a false sense of superiority. These characters may even transgress social and moral codes, and in some instances the law, yet these characters are convinced that those around them should accede to their needs and desires. They may be racist, narcissistic, entitled, even emotionally stunted, yet they believe they know how the world works or should work. Tension arises in the situations in which these characters find themselves struggling against the frame in order to try to achieve their desires.

Critically analysing the drama series, Margrethe Bruun Vaage explores the notion of the antihero as those characters which transgress the law, such as Walter White (*Breaking Bad*) and Tony Soprano (*The Sopranos*).21 It is my assertion that Bruun Vaage uses the term narrowly as a descriptor for those characters which break legal or specifically moral codes. While transgressions against state or moral authorities may vicariously be enjoyable to the audience, I posit that the antihero’s struggle against the frame is more than merely transgressive. Mittell writes: “Antihero narratives regularly invoke relative morality, in which an ethically questionable character is juxtaposed with more explicitly villainous and

unsympathetic characters to highlight the antihero’s more redeeming qualities.”

Mittell continues, that “[t]he complexity of Walter White’s characterisation stems in large part from the disjunction between how we see his actions and how he sees himself.”

Bruun Vaage makes the point that “[t]he intended effect of engaging with an antihero story is to both like and dislike the antihero.”

Defining the antihero as a protagonist which seeks power by way of transgressing some law that is known, Bruun Vaage also offers a more general definition of the antihero as having “humdrum and all-too-human flaws,” citing the example of Carrie Bradshaw in Sex in the City. I would argue that Carrie and her friends in Sex and the City (1998-2004) do not transgress such laws but rather question and explore the moral codes that govern sex and love in modern times. This exploration results in confusion rather than morally questionable behaviour. Maybe it is the shifting of women’s expectations and experiences of sex that Bruun Vaage sees as transgressive.

I offer that the depiction of the antihero character as being uniquely talented and highly skilled engenders sympathy and even admiration from the audience and other characters, not their morality or lack of it. As noted, Sheldon (TBBT, 2007-2019) epitomises the antihero’s skill, despite his awareness of the frame.

Hence, the antihero character may be amoral, it is their skill, (occasionally undermined by their behavioural traits), when at odds with the frame or the rest of the ensemble that produces tension. Such characters show us the existence of a frame, and in a nod to Freud’s theory of humour, for them it is nothing more than a game.

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22 Mittell, Complex TV, as before, p.143.
23 Mittell, as before, p.160.
24 Bruun Vaage, The Antihero in American Television, as before, p. 91.
25 Mittell, as before, p.171.
27 The Big Bang Theory, creators Chuck Lorre, Bill Prady, as before (2007-2019).
Characters such as David Brent from *The Office* (2001, 2002), Basil Fawlty (*Fawlty Towers*, 1975, 1979) and George Costanza (*Seinfeld*, 1989-1998), while failing to achieve an idealisation, do not break the law, rather it is codes of social behaviour that they believe they have mastered, or which they challenge, and, in doing so, fail. An example is George’s attitude to the death of his fiancée by way of poisoning with cheap glue on their wedding invitation envelopes because George is too stingy to buy quality ones, culminating in any lack of empathy at her death. George transgresses both moral and social codes while Basil Fawlty seeks to attain social status, and in the process fails because he thinks he knows the codes to be accepted by a certain class of people. Alf Garnett (*Til Death us Do Part*, 1988–1998) is not deliberately being racist, he is racist and thinks he is right. David Brent in *The Office* (2001, 2002), on the other hand tries to curry favour with his employees by being cool—or believing he is cool. Such characters are unaware or are in denial of accepted/expected social conventions or how others see them.

Regardless, the antihero in drama (or narrative comedy/drama such as *Sex in the City*) is the one who attempts to break the frame that they believe is containing or restricting their desires. However, I argue that in the sitcom the ‘antihero’ cannot remain ‘morally bad.’ In situations where they fail to redeem themselves, they are punished – as was the gang of four in *Seinfeld* (1989-98). Giving them “all too human flaws” such as an obsessive-compulsive disorder that Sheldon displays, enables the comedic “gap” between them and those around them.

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32 This gives some explanation of the backlash from fans of *Seinfeld* that the final episodes broke their expectations, as described in Saul Austerlitz: “Seinfeld is setting up a belated reckoning for its criminally negligent protagonists, allowing the real world to have its revenge on these clinicians of narcissism… Audiences were furious, and Larry David’s next series, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, would devote an entire season to, in effect apologizing for having left fans in the lurch.” *Sitcom. A History in 24 Episodes from I Love Lucy to Community* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2014) p. 240.
33 Steve Kaplan offers that the comedic gap is enabled between characters who are wavy-liners and straight-liners; the latter similar to echo characters who see the world in a different way. *The Hidden Tools of Comedy: The Serious Business of Being Funny* (Studio City CA: Michael Weise Productions, 2013).
them. Thus, the comic antihero can be transgressive, yet their containment is maintained by human flaws (many to which we relate).

I take Bruun Vaage’s broader definition of the antihero as fallible humans who may transgress moral codes, to posit that such characters are responding to what they feel is the disempowerment of the world in which they live; they are either passionate about what they do (and achieve their want), or they are in denial of the forces that keep them trapped. While the key character may seek to break from, or shift the frame that defines them, I argue that the comic antihero attempts to defy social codes and behaviour and, for some, as a means to expose the true nature of the (disempowering) frame. The antihero in the sitcom is at odds with some frame (of expectation) – and despite the feelings of disempowerment they remain in the situation as it delivers to them relationships or an identity that they do not have elsewhere. Thus, I offer that the antihero is aware of some frame while the key character is not.

*Murphy Brown* (1988-1998)\(^{34}\) is a studio-based ensemble sitcom set in a television newsroom, and home to a current affairs programme hosted by the prickly and bombastic investigative journalist, forty-something Murphy Brown, a recovering alcoholic. Murphy is rude, impatient, demanding, patronising, yet she gets the job done, giving the current affairs show, *FYI*, a reputation for ‘hard journalism.’ The executive producer, Miles, at twenty-five years old, is significantly younger than Murphy, adding to her bad temper with the world. Set in the decade spanning the late eighties to the late nineties, the show is a satirical commentary on politics during the Reagan, Bush, and Clinton presidential years in America. *Murphy* explores the tension between the desire to produce accurate and insightful reporting and the commercial demands of an industry increasingly measured by ratings and sensational reporting. Frank, Jim, Corky and even Miles are Murphy’s surrogate family of father, brother, annoying little sister, with an upstart, desperate nerd from down the street attempting to have

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\(^{34}\) *Murphy Brown*, creator Diane English, as before (1988-1998).
power over the others. While Murphy may transgress moral codes to achieve an outcome that supports her sense of moral superiority, it is Corky, a former Miss America, who echoes aspects back to Murphy what she denies in herself, such as the need to win – like all good pageant entrants. I analyse Murphy in the textual analysis section of this chapter.

The challenge with the antihero is that they can veer into being negative, demanding, bossy and even manipulative. Characters such as Murphy and Sheldon must have aspects that engender empathy in the viewer; they may want to expose the frame for those who (they believe) are suffering in its entrapment (most commonly themselves). Such characters are complex, in having both light and dark, ambition and humility, and heroic deeds in exposing ideologies which disempower. Codes can be questioned, and disempowering discourses exposed, these characters attempt to do so by believing that “they know best.” Thus, I posit that the comic antihero never breaks the frame that they seek to expose, although they know, at some level, they are trapped in its gaze. It is this tension that I offer enables comicality.

Saul Austerlitz defines the character of Hawkeye in \textit{M*A*S*H} (1972-1983)\footnote{\textit{M*A*S*H}, creators Larry Gelbart, Gene Reynolds, as before (1972-1983).} as “…the spirit of the show personified its paragon of waggish, humane cynicism. He is the military hero with no interest whatsoever in military formality.”\footnote{Austerlitz, \textit{Sitcom. A History in 24 Episodes from I Love Lucy to Community}, as before, p.136.} I discuss this programme in more detail shortly but note now that Murphy, Hawkeye, George, Alf, and Archie Bunker from \textit{All in the Family} (1971-79)\footnote{\textit{All in the Family}, creator Johnny Speight, devs. Norman Lear, Bud Yorkin, prod. Tandem Productions (USA: CBS, 1971-79). This programme was a US version of the British \textit{Til Death Us Do Part} (1966–1968, 1972-1975).} butt up against a frame that limits their political views, desires, or expectations. The humour stems from the incongruity between how these characters see themselves and how they see the world bearing down on them, most commonly at odds with a dominant political ideology.\footnote{Commonly the liberal democratic values of the late 60s infused the sitcoms of the 70s and 80s, particularly in America, a point made by David Marc, in \textit{Comic Visions} (Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell Pub.,1997).} Thus, I posit that the ensemble is best served by
being situated within a discursive frame wherein each character either supports, challenges, or submits to the frame, and furthermore the antihero within rails the hardest against its limitations. I now ask: Why do such characters seek to expose the frame? Do they wish to save the group from the disempowerment they witness, or to save themselves from being rendered powerless? Before answering such questions, I analyse the character which reflects back to the group what they fear or deny in themselves.

The Echo within

Having argued that the echo character manifests the unconscious fear of the key character I now examine how the echo character might operate in the ensemble sitcom.39

*M*A*S*H (1972-1983),40 a satirical comedy-drama series spawned from the 1970 film of the same name,41 is set at the time of a war long finished (the 1950s Korean war) to make commentary on a contemporary war (Vietnam). This series satirises the discourse of the warmongering approach by the USA to dominate and influence the ideologies of countries that have a different governing system to its own. Defined as a comedy-drama by Derek Kompare,42 this programme has many of the hallmarks of the sitcom, and in particular the ensemble sitcom as a group trapped in a situation in which they must work together for the greater good, yet within the group there resides differing responses to the situation. Pleasure-seeking doctors, Captains Hawkeye, and McIntyre are at odds with patriot Major Frank Burns and his mistress, head nurse Major Margaret Houlihan. Hawkeye and McIntyre uphold liberal democratic values yet transgress the codes of sexual conduct that the sex-crazed Burns and Houlihan hypocritically profess. Attempting to maintain the frame, and the moral conflict it brings, is Lieutenant Colonel Henry Blake with Corporal Radar, voicing the dilemmas faced by Blake. Each character either supports the ideology, opposes it, or behaves in contradiction

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39 Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, Chapter 3.
to the expectation or declared norms. However, this ensemble has an echo that manifests the psychological tensions between the main characters and the frame, Corporal Klinger. Klinger dresses in women’s clothes in an attempt to get discharged for being mad (or at least looking mad). In Situation Comedy I argue that:

> It is the gap between what Klinger wants … and the reality of the situation … where the comedy emerges. … the echo character needs to personify what the group, or at least one character within the group, denies or represses.\(^{43}\)

This character was not in the originating film\(^{44}\) and does not make an appearance until episode four in the series.\(^{45}\) I argue that it became necessary to introduce a character that may, on the surface, be funny, yet the cleverness lay in creating a character which, by his actions, reflect the fears of the collective: that this war will send them all mad. Each of the characters deal with such a fear in different ways (partying, having affairs, or fooling around in surgery).

Thus, the echo character in the ensemble can mirror either the desires of the gang or their fear, or both, as does Stuart, the lonesome struggling comic bookstore owner in TBBT (2007-2019).

In this ensemble sitcom Howard initially was the echo, and once he coupled with Bernadette,\(^{46}\) the focus shifted to Raj, who rides the roller coaster of love in contrast to the stable couples of Howard and Bernadette and then Penny and Leonard followed by Amy and Sheldon. As each potential coupling occurs the focus for comedic tension must shift. Stuart epitomises the collective’s fear of failure both commercially as well as in personal relationships and is brought to the fore once Amy and Sheldon marry at the end of season eleven.\(^{47}\)

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Analysing Dad’s Army (1968-1977), Murphy Brown (1988-1998) and Dinnerladies (1998-2000)\(^{48}\) assists in determining the nature and relationship between the main characters, the echo

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\(^{43}\) Klika, Situation Comedy, as before, p.104.


\(^{45}\) “Chief Surgeon Who?” wr Larry Gelbart, S1E4, M*A*S*H, as before, first transmitted October 8, 1972.


\(^{47}\) “The Bow Tie Asymmetry,” story Chuck Lorre, Steven Molaro, Maria Ferrari wrs. Steve Holland, Eric Kaplan, Tara Hernandez, S11E24, The Big Bang Theory, as before. The finale was transmitted on May 16, 2019.

within, and, in two examples, a frame that limits the desires of the gang, enabling certain principles to be derived.

In “The Making of Private Pike,” (Dad’s Army, 1977) Captain Mainwaring has been lent a staff car in order that he can umpire an important army cricket match. When Pike borrows the car the night before to take a servicewoman to the cinema, it runs out of petrol and Pike must push the car back to barracks. Having arrived late, and after being admonished by Mainwaring for keeping him waiting, Jones, Mainwaring, Wilson, and Pike set off to the match; on the way Mainwaring parks the car, to check on some detail with Jones, leaving Wilson and Pike alone in the back seat of the car. Wilson lights a cigarette.

WILSON: Oh, sorry Frank would you like one of these?
PIKE: No thank you.
WILSON: Oh.
PIKE: Yeah, why not.
Now Frank about last night.
PIKE: I know we shouldn’t have taken it. But we didn’t do the car no harm.
WILSON: Well, I’m not talking about the car. I’m talking about the girl. A lot of people will know that you spent the night together. And a lot of people will tell you that what you did was wrong.
PIKE: I was pushing. She was steering it.
WILSON: (Mumbles) But to my way of thinking what you both did wasn’t evil.
Pike looks bewildered
WILSON: You follow me?
PIKE: It was nine miles!
WILSON: (Mumbles) Our sort of society has a rather rigid framework and if we’d have stayed within it, people point the finger at us.
PIKE: It was hard up Grant’s Hill. Twenty yards at a time.
WILSON: Yes, well just remember this, I understand. Now we haven’t been too close I know just recently but now I feel (pause)
WILSON (cont.): You know what I mean. Kindred spirits …. You know, men of the world. (Pause) You feel like that too?

PIKE: Yeah … Kindred spirits … Men of the world.

WILSON: Good lad (pats Pike on the knee). 49

Within the subtext of sharing a ‘post-coital’ cigarette, Pike has no idea that Wilson is talking about his relationship with Pike’s mother. Wilson uses Pike’s mishap as a ruse to win Pike over by implying that having illicit sex (in 1940s Britain) is not evil. Pike manifests and reflects back to the gang the fear that they are either impotent or naïve about the rules that govern relationships (at that time) or indeed the war. It is the gap between how Pike sees the world and Wilson’s relationship with Pike’s mother that enables Steve Kaplan’s paradigm of comedy to occur in the gap between the straight- and wavy-line view of the world. 50 As such, Pike is both the straight-line character and, as an echo character, personifies the gang’s fear of impotence and stupidity in their attempts to stop the Nazis.

Murphy Brown is a comic antihero who simply wants to get on with exposing the truth. To confirm her sense of grandeur, in “It’s How You Play the Game” (Murphy Brown, 1989), Murphy has received a message from Walter Cronkite, a famous broadcast journalist:


MURPHY: Want to hear something great, Jim? Walter Cronkite called. He said he saw my story on the Greenhouse Effect and he (reading note) “enjoyed it immensely.”

JIM: Wonderful. I hope the ratings are up.

MURPHY: Jim. You, too? They’re just a bunch of meaningless numbers.

JIM: Yes, you’re right. But why don’t they like us in Denver?


50 Kaplan, The Hidden Tools of Comedy, as before.
Miles enters.

MURPHY: Hi there Miles. Let’s have our little meeting so we can get back to writing stories that journalistic giants like Walter Cronkite can “enjoy immensely.” (Dangles message). What’s wrong with you?

MILES: We took it in the shorts. If the ratings get any lower, I’ll be hosing down the produce at Food World.

FRANK: Who got the audience? As if I didn’t know.

Frank takes sheet from Miles.

MILES: Jerry Gold and his “Headline News” show.

JIM: News? The man spent an hour exploring the tragic plight of sex-crazed registered nurses.

MILES: Well, it may not be our idea of news, but it sure has the public’s attention. We got a thirteen share; Gold pulled a forty-two.

Murphy grabs sheet.

MURPHY: He’s stomping us in the cities, it’s the third week in a row we’ve slipped in Denver, and our eighteen to forty-nine demographics dropped right off the page! What’s the matter with these people?!

CORKY: Murphy, I thought you said it was the quality of the work that counts.

MURPHY: Didn’t you hear him Corky? We’re losing! 51

Murphy now wanting to master the game, devises a plan to increase ratings. Predictably, it goes horribly wrong when she attempts to negotiate a debate between Homemakers Against Gratuitous Sex (H.A.G.S) and the Hookers Organization for American Rights (H.O.A.R) which unleashes into a cat fight on live television. Returning home, Murphy’s fastidious house painter Eldin attempts to resign because “I mean when you come right down to it, how many really appreciate a well-painted wall… it’s probably not your fault. We’re surrounded by bad walls. We get numb. And before you know it, visible tape joints are acceptable.” The metaphor is not

lost on Murphy. Despite attempting to survive in a world which lives or dies by viewers’ fidelities, this ensemble fight to keep their job because it gives them an identity and status, especially with important people. While Murphy butts up against the frame of ratings, she does not leave her job, as Eldin attempts to do. Thus, the echo character can represent or reflect what the comic antihero is afraid to confront in themselves.

*Dinnerladies* (1998-2000), a BBC comedy written by Victoria Wood, is set in Northern England. This ‘world’ is governed by working class life, harking back to a time when factories supported both work and community. However, while this series is set in a milieu, it has no clear frame or story ideology other than the life of northern working class, yet it harbours an echo character that epitomises the fear of the group. The five core characters are canteen workers, Bren, Jean, Dolly, Twinkle and Anita along with Tony (canteen manager), Philippa (the Human Resources manager, providing a middle-class contrast), Petula (Bren’s mother, providing the wild mother contrast) and Stan (the handyman). In “Christmas” (1999), a worker waits in queue.

WORKER: Is there no bacon?
ANITA: Bacon? Can you ask me that again?
WORKER: Have you not got any bacon?
ANITA: Have I not got any or have I got any?
WORKER: Look I’m not from the News of the bloody World, I’m only trying to get meself a bit of priggin’ protein. (Calls over) Bren, for the love of God have you got any bacon?
BREN: Can you hang on I’m just doing it now.
WORKER: (to Bren) Are you short staffed?
BREN: Yes, Twink’s off sick and where’s Jean, Dolly?
DOLLY: Still in toilet.
BREN: She’s taking a long time.

DOLLY She’s wearing her new all in one body shaper. It’s a complicated gusset when you won’t wear specs.

WORKER: Oh, I know.

DOLLY: I’m sure it’s very alluring in bedroom but you can’t be fiddling with your crutch when there’s a queue building.

WORKER: Don’t look at me. I’ve got both hands on the tray.

Jean enters.

WORKER (cont.): You got your underwear sorted then Jean?

After Jean comes to terms with the fact that, in her absence, her underwear has been discussed, she offers to strip off, “Would that help?” The worker responds: “Not if it’s going to hold up the bacon.” At which point Anita chips in:

ANITA: You know how you were asking about bacon. Well, we haven’t got any at the moment, but Bren’s just doing some.

WORKER: What are you on, a two-minute delay? She’s just told me that.

ANITA: I was going to say it before, but then I started thinking about Michael Aspel.  

Anita, whilst delivering the funniest line, also echoes the gang’s fear of not being engaged in the real world. Jean and Dolly, fulfil the role of competitive and argumentative friends delivering caustic barbs towards each other, while Bren walks the tightrope between being the leader as well as one of the group, where they support each other no matter how caustic their barbs or messy their lives. Yet the lines of work and private lives begin to blur with the burgeoning relationship between Bren and canteen manager, Tony, creating a meta-narrative governed by a dramatic question (DQ): “Will they get together?” As this relationship develops over the series, the fundamental rule of the sitcom is under challenge,

wherein characters, or their relationships, do not change. Once they do (fall in love or move away), the DQ, which has enabled elements of seriality, has been resolved. While this ensemble sitcom has an echo character and a mix of relationships, I offer that Dinnerladies was limited to two series due to the absence of an overt discursive frame, and having a DQ that governs only one relationship (and which is resolved).

CREATIVE PRACTICE 1

Creative Practice 1 (CP1) is an ensemble sitcom, titled It’s Academic, set in the world of Higher Education (HE), wherein the frame of marketisation bears down on a group of academics who believe in developing minds rather than just skills and competencies as a neo-liberal agenda demands. CP1 is a pilot script that establishes the ensemble of academics, managers and support staff in a media department (the situation) in a university cascading down the league table. The series is underscored by the tension of HE as a business looking to cut costs, with the lecturers under pressure to deliver higher recruitment, progression, and graduate employability in order to keep their jobs. Like the writer Richard Curtis seeking to have a conversation about women vicars in The Vicar of Dibley, this CP sets out to have a conversation about the effects of marketisation on teaching, learning, and working in HE. The proposal for the series is in the Appendix.

Overview

The pilot episode, “The Kilo Merger,” introduces the characters who inhabit this story world. The narrative structure mirrors traditional multicamera sitcoms, with an inciting incident and turning points which ensure the return to the emotional stasis of the characters.

The character of Rachel, as the comic antihero, is aware of the frame, and while seeking

54 Friends is a good example of a series ending of a DQ being resolved when Ross and Rachel get together. Friends, creators David Crane, Marta Kauffman, as before (1994-2004).
to expose it, does not leave the situation, rather she attempts to ‘save the gang.’ The key character, Ben, is unaware of the disempowering effects of the frame, despite the protestations by Rachel whose own fear of not being respected for her expertise, and when triggered, causes her to act in more extreme measures. The echo character, Brianna, attempts to survive in this world, reflecting to the gang that they are simply pawns in a game of shifting goal posts.

This half-hour script begins the journey of two characters, Ben, and Rachel, across three related screen narratives. The critical reflection discusses the challenges of positioning the comic antihero within a group as well as in relation to the frame.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has offered that the comic antihero is both conscious (of the frame) and unconscious (of why they are trapped), giving insight into comic characters who find themselves caught in a sort of psychological bind, the central concern of Chapter Two. By way of textual analysis and critical examination I have argued that the ensemble is best defined by a discursive frame which entraps characters, reinforcing the collective, as well as the repeated individual struggle for identity. Within the frame each character has a relationship to it – they support it, defy it, or deny it. The textual analysis has explicated the principle that the relationship each of the characters has to the frame and its ‘ideology' may assist in enabling comic tension, both inter- and intra-relationally. I have argued that one character, the echo, reflects the fear of the group (that they are doomed, impotent, or just off in another world), often in contrast to the comic antihero who attempts to expose the frame as a means to save themselves or others from its disempowering effects, yet such antiheroes find that they too are trapped in its gaze.
It has been said...
if you can't do, then teach...
But if you can't teach then...

IT'S ACADEMIC

A studio-based ensemble sitcom set in a university sliding down the league table

PILOT
"It's the Kilo Merger"

Written by

Deborah Klika

Creative Practice 1

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.
It's Academic centres on TV lecturer Rachel Kozlowski, recovering from a bad divorce and Ben Baxter, a once successful film director recovering from a breakdown. Running away from life, these two come face to face in the media department of a university struggling to survive the onslaught of marketisation of HE. Rachel and Ben's past relationship now rises like a phoenix from ashes buried long ago. Or so they thought.

Rachel and Ben share an open-plan office with the grumpy and long-term career documentary director Jack, the idealistic novice lecturer Brianna, the passive-aggressive departmental administrator Luciana, and the eccentric Stefan, obsessed with all things technological. The department is overseen by the Machiavellian self-serving head of department, Henry, busy brown-nosing the never seen Dean Fiona Willoughby-Baxter whose shadow hovers over the department like a Ringwraith.

This series is about life in higher education, where dreams are made and lost and where lecturers can behave worse than their students - when survival is the name of the game.

Audience: Anyone who has worked in an open-plan office fraught or survived higher education as a student, academic or administrator.

Characters

Rachel Kozlowski, 52, likes to be needed. Gives a lot to her students, loyal and determined. Closet writer. Dream is to have one of her scripts produced. Hates waste but loves winning more. Documents must have a number of words ending in 0 or 5. Denies her feelings for...

Benjamin (Ben/Benji) Baxter, 48, recovering from a breakdown after a career disaster; fears he is a one-trick pony, his dream is to direct a feature. A dreamer, he avoids conflict - and commitment. One of the 'boys', he is kind, empathetic, knowledgeable, and loved by the students. Looked after by ...

Luciana Fonseca 35, departmental administrator, knows how the game is played and plays some games herself. Dream is to work in marketing. Hard working, yet passive aggressive, the kitchen area is her battle ground and the stationery cupboard she guards like the jewel crowns especially from the stationery addicted...

Henry Upton, 50, Head of Department. Had some success as a playwright in his 30s. His dream is to have a play produced at the national theatre. Drops names like confetti; self-serving and views students as a source of income, much to the consternation of ...

Jack Kerr, 59, Successful TV documentary producer frustrated at washing up on the shores of HE. Dreams of writing a book. Needs to be right, especially about grammar and provenance of programmes. Although constantly grumpy, he goes to extreme lengths to help his students get jobs.
Brianna Williams, 29, Lecturer in Journalism. First real job. Dreams of getting a job in journalism. Idealistic with a love of romcoms and the power of spreadsheets. Always trying new things such as quizzes, team building exercises, apps to inspire the students, much like...

Hans Winkler 39, lecturer in digital media and all that is internet. Eccentric Eastern European from a holocaust surviving family. Loud and abrasive, lives at the cutting edge of digital media. Dream is to win an Ada Lovelace award.

Extra: Angela, cafe worker who rules the cafe like a sergeant major yet constantly gets the orders wrong.
TEASER. INT. CLASSROOM CORRIDOR. DAY.

Students stream out of class. BEN, at the vending machine, looks anxious. RACHEL charges out of the classroom, sees Ben, wearing a caste on his arm. A chocolate bar drops in the machine, Ben struggles to grab it. He scurries off to hide behind a pillar. Peeling off the wrapper with difficulty, he is about to take a bite. Rachel appears.

RACHEL

Ben!

With mouth open, Ben tries to hide the bar in the caste.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
What is that?

BEN
Nothing.

Ben shows one hand, it is clean then the other, it has chocolate on it.

BEN (CONT'D)
See.

The wrapper is on the floor. Rachel picks it up.

RACHEL
You know what I hate Ben.

BEN
Waste?

RACHEL
We are paired in the kilo challenge..and...

BEN
(resigned)
You like to win Rachel.

RACHEL
That’s right. I like to win more than I hate waste - of any kind. Can you stick at it Ben?

BEN
Being stuck has become a speciality of mine Rachel.

RACHEL
Good. See you at the meeting.
Henry’s trying to shave off time in the studio for the TV course. Again. You look better.
BEN
Thanks.

RACHEL
The students missed you. (Beat) I think.

Rachel walks off.

BEN
And I missed...

Ben looks at the chocolate bar. He pauses before taking a bite. A student comes up to him.

OSCAR
Hey Ben. (Beat) You okay?

BEN
Yes Oscar just thinking about a Douglas Sirk film. And waste.

OSCAR
Oh. Never heard of him. Can I show you my film I made over the break.

BEN
Sure Oscar, I’ll pop by later.

Oscar saunters off. Ben takes a bite then throws the rest of the chocolate bar into the bin.

BEN (CONT'D)
There. I can say no. To her. But not to Sirk.

CUT TO:

TITLES: IT’S ACADEMIC

FADE IN:

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY. LATER.

Luciana is pinning a tree of ‘pairs’ under the title ‘Kilo Challenge’. Rachel storms in followed by the grumpy Jack and cheery Brianna.

RACHEL
What the hell was that about?

JACK
It was an ambush. There goes the television degree. It’s the beginning of the end.
RACHEL
Did you know about this Luciana?

LUCIANA
I’m putting together the kilo challenge. You’re with..

RACHEL
Yes I know. Ben. (Looking around) Where is he hiding now?

LUCIANA
And can we please not mention Ben’s recent...

RACHEL
Absence.

LUCIANA
Especially you Rachel. After all...We need to be respectful of people with...

RACHEL
Commitment issues.

LUCIANA
And that too. Jack you’re with Brianna.

BRIANNA
I’ll do a spreadsheet to calculate our daily weights.

JACK
As I said it’s the beginning of the end.

RACHEL
A management consultant telling us we need to innovate. Seriously? Why are they all called Nigel?

BRIANNA
I once went out with a Nigel.

JACK
Who no doubt was as irrelevant as that one.

BRIANNA
He didn’t use big words like that. Actually he didn’t use any words.

JACK
And that ladder about our tolerance for change....
BRIANNA
Sometimes change is good.

JACK
Not if you fall off the ladder. I’m writing to the union.

LUCIANA
It’s just a merger. What’s the big deal?

JACK
Constructive dismissal is a big deal.

LUCIANA
I think you are being paranoid.

RACHEL
Luciana, did you tidy up that course outline for me?

LUCIANA
I gave it to the new assistant.

RACHEL
Hope the word count ended with a zero or five. You know how I like a tidy document.

LUCIANA
(to herself)
White text is so useful.

Jack goes to his computer and starts bashing it. The eccentric Hans enters with a go pro on his head.

RACHEL
And here comes the human gogglebox.

HANS
It’s for my digital immersion class. Giving my students an insight into my life.

BRIANNA
So innovative Hans. That’s what Henry was talking about.

RACHEL
No Brianna he was talking about cutting our degree.

JACK
(shouting from his desk)
The only one that gets the students jobs.

(MORE)
JACK (CONT'D)
We’ve worked so hard to drag TV studies out of the accusation of being...

RACHEL AND JACK
A Donald Duck degree.

BRIANNA
How about I do a spreadsheet that shows options for Henry to consider.

JACK
There’s only one option he will consider. Death by a thousand cuts.

LUCIANA
Or quacks.

Hans goes over to Jack’s desk and is pointing his camera at Jack’s computer.

RACHEL
Luciana did you know a Nigel was called in to bamboozle us into ...

LUCIANA
Hans you are with Henry.

HANS
No I’m with Jack here.

JACK
(turns)
Hans what are you doing?

HANS
Immersive experiential and blended learning.

JACK
I’ll blend you if you don’t turn that bug eye contraption off.

HANS
It’s for the Ada Lovelace award.

JACK
It’ll be more like Linda Lovelace.

RACHEL
Watch Henry, Hans. He’ll cheat on the kilo count, blame you when you drop down the table and then attempt to merge weights. Luciana I asked about that Nigel.
LUCIANA
(feigning ignorance)
I don’t have him on the board.

JACK
(shouting from his desk)
This is that quack VC’s people programme.

Jack turns around and realises Hans is still filming him.

JACK (CONT’D)
Erase that. Now.

Hans does an impression of a Dalek.

HANS
Eradicate. Eradicate.

Ben wanders in.

RACHEL
And here is Johnny or rather Ben come lately. Where have you been hiding this time? It’s the end of the freaking world and you go …

BEN
I went to ask the techs if they knew about this merger.

RACHEL
And what news from the navel-gazing kinder pit?

BEN
Henry had already got to them saying it would be …

Spivvy dressed Henry enters, looks nervous. Goes to Jack’s desk.

HENRY
A very productive meeting don’t you think Jack?

JACK
If you mean being shown your own noose Henry then it was a roaring success.

HENRY
Ah Hans, I see you are using the go pro.

JACK
So you gave it to him Henry?
RACHEL
Henry, is this merger part of the
VC's efficiency drive?

HENRY
No no, no, (Beat) Not at all.

BEN
The techs said it would save space.

RACHEL
I knew it. The studio.

HENRY
(patting his stomach)
Are we ready for the kilo
challenge?

HANS
Do you want me to film the progress
Henry?

HENRY
(looks at his phone)
Need to go. The VC has asked to
meet me. Probably about having the
third highest recruitment in the
university. Thanks to the film team
and Ben. Good to have you back.

JACK
Film school is what art school was
in the sixties.

BEN
Only they talk.

JACK
Who?

BEN
The pictures.

JACK
We’ve had the talkies since the
twenties. Has no one read my book?

HENRY
Luciana, thanks for finding Nigel,
he was perfect.

Henry exits.

HANS
Henry can we talk about my
computer.

Hans exits.
LUCIANA
So everyone ready for the kilo challenge?

Rachel mimes ‘I’ve got eyes on you’ to Luciana.

BEN
Rachel maybe ... we could discuss the kilo challenge... or something?

RACHEL

JACK
You’re safe Ben, you’re the favourite.

BEN
But I want us to do ...

Rachel and Jack exit.

BEN (CONT'D)
Something together?

Luciana looks at Ben who looks bereft.

INT. UNIVERSITY CAFÉ. DAY. LATER.

Rachel and Jack at a table. Jack bashes on the computer.

RACHEL
Do you think saying this is an example of neo-liberalism gone mad is the right phrase? Not sure the union guy would get it. (points at screen) Make sure the word count ends in a zero or a five.

JACK
You need to get over your WCO.

RACHEL
WCO?

JACK
Word count obsession.

RACHEL
My WCO? What about your WCO? Word correct obsession.

Brianna appears with computer in hand and open.

BRIANNA
I’ve been thinking.
JACK
That’s a dangerous thing Brianna.

RACHEL
Ignore him Brianna he’s just grumpy. Can’t hit the word count.

JACK
Well you would be too if you were standing on the cliff edge of redundancy with a mortgage still to pay off.

BRIANNA
I’ve done this spreadsheet with some options for the merger.

Brianna flashes the spreadsheet in front of them. Jack looks like ‘the scream’ and Rachel tries to be diplomatic.

RACHEL
My my Brianna that’s a big set of options you have there.

BRIANNA
That’s what is so great about spreadsheets they can offer so many options.

JACK
All the better to bamboozle us with...

RACHEL
And all those colours....

BRIANNA
That’s to help see a multitude of..

JACK
Ways to shove us off the cliff.

BRIANNA
Not at all. Look here. The number of seminar groups increases ...

JACK
There’s some very big words Brianna. Not sure Henry will understand it.

RACHEL
This is very impressive Brianna, but I think you might need to simplify it. Spreadsheets are like using a Ferrari to go to the shops when you only need a Skoda.
BRIANNA
I can’t drive.

RACHEL
I think what Mr Subtle here is trying to say is that you need to drive that spreadsheet into something simpler. Think of your audience, unlike Jack here, who can’t be bothered to get a well rounded word count.

JACK
Well at least I have a well rounded number of awards.

Jack goes back to bashing the computer. Brianna walks off.

RACHEL
That spreadsheet looks dangerous. You probably shouldn’t have called Henry infantile.

JACK
But he is.

RACHEL
Time to use constructive dismissal.

JACK
I’m on it.

INT. MEDIA OFFICE. DAY.

Luciana is putting up a sign on the stationery cupboard: KEEP OUT. REQUEST FORMS AVAILABLE 4-6 PM EACH DAY FOR COLLECTION THE NEXT DAY. Hans is hovering with his go pro. Staff are arriving. Rachel is at her desk. Ben walks in wearing gym clothes, the caste is gone. Ben goes over to Rachel’s desk.

RACHEL
Pfuff. What is that smell?

Rachel turns around to see Ben standing there.

RACHEL (CONT’D)
What on earth do you smell like ... I mean dressed like that Ben?

BEN
I’ve started going to the gym. (He puts up his arm) To strengthen it.

RACHEL
Strong is the word. Stick to Yoga Ben. Less smelly.
BEN
I thought you wanted to win.

RACHEL
I do but not the stinky race.

Rachel leaves. Luciana wanders over to Ben. Hans follows.

LUCIANA
I think it is good you are spending time with Rachel Ben.

BEN
Not sure she likes me.

LUCIANA
That officious manner is a cover. She asked after you every day...

BEN
She did?

Luciana realises Hans is standing behind her.

LUCIANA
Have you not got anything better to do Hans?

HANS
I need to show the fullness of my life. For Ada. And Henry has connections.

LUCIANA
I’m sure he has. I have paired you with ...

BEN
I thought you pulled the names out of a hat.

LUCIANA
Ah yes I do. Hans you got pulled out with Henry. With his Ada Lovelace connections and all. Did you ask him about the computer?

HANS
(to Ben)
You see the last one ...

LUCIANA
He’s got a meeting in ten.

Hans is out of the office in a flash.
INT. CORRIDOR OUTSIDE HENRY'S OFFICE. DAY.

Henry is slamming his door as Hans walks up.

HANS
Henry, I need to see you.

HENRY
Can't you see I'm in the middle of something important Hans?

Hans points the camera towards Henry.

HANS
I can see that you have a problem with your door.

Point of view of the camera. Henry looks bug eyed, in wide angle.

HENRY
The lock won't work. I've reported it to facilities weeks ago.

HANS (O.S.)
I was planning on being home marking today and only because my computer needed charging did I come in and decide to hit two tadpoles with one stone.

HENRY
It's two birds Hans.

HANS (O.S.)
Birds fly away. We say two tadpoles. Don't you think it's easier to hit two tadpoles than two birds?

HENRY
Couldn't you do that at home?

HANS (O.S.)
I don't have any tadpoles at home.

HENRY
I meant the marking. Can't you do the marking at home. In fact can't you just stay at home?

At some point we cut to two shot.

HANS
But I left my charger in the office so I came in and decided to film everything I do. You see I'm doing this immersive, blended..
HENRY
What has teaching got to do with
the charger, or you filming
everything in your life?

HANS
The computer then exploded. And I
want to win the Ada Lovelace award.

HENRY
Exploded? But weren’t you marking
at home? That’s my favourite film.

HANS
Yes. The marking is nearly done.
It’s Ada not Linda.

HENRY
That’s good Hans but I’m still not
sure why you had to come in.

HANS
To get the charger. And your
meeting which you asked me...

Henry looks around nervously.

HENRY
As I said Hans, this project needs
to be done on the quiet. That’s
what my contacts at...

HANS
The Ada Lovelace award.

HENRY
That’s right. Let me check what you
have done so far.

HANS
But the go pro needs to talk to the
computer.

HENRY
Talk to the computer?

Hans takes the go pro off his head.

HANS
See this Bluetooth here, it talks
to the ….

Henry takes the go pro.

HENRY
Send me the details of the
computer.
HANS
Thank you Henry. I will be happy.
And we are paired on the kilo challenge. I won’t let you down.

Hans leaves.

HENRY
And my life continues down the rabbit hole.

Henry puts the go pro on his head as he starts slamming the door again as Brianna arrives carrying a basket, inside is a computer.

BRIANNA
Ah Henry. I’ve got something to show you.

HENRY
(to himself)
And just when I thought I was out of the woods.

From POV of Go Pro, bug eyed view of...

BRIANNA
I see you have a problem with your door. I can go to facilities and ask them to fix it for you.

HENRY (O.S.)
I’ve logged it on the system.

BRIANNA
But the guys down there don’t look at the system.

HENRY (O.S.)
They don’t?

BRIANNA
That’s right no one showed them how to get the list of requests from the computer log.

HENRY (O.S.)
So what to do they do all day?

BRIANNA
I’m not sure. But if I go and see them and take my famous cookies … I can do that for you Henry. Here would you like a cookie now? I’ve got something to show you.

Cut to two shot. Henry looks resigned.
HENRY
Thank you Brianna that would be good if you could go to facilities and yes I will have a cookie.

They go into the office.

INT. HENRY’S OFFICE. DAY.

Brianna sits down and opens her computer as Henry eats the cookie with the go pro on his head.

BRIANNA
I’ve done this spreadsheet with all the options for the merger. You might want to take that go pro off Henry.

HENRY
Yes Brianna.

Henry takes off the go pro and puts it on his desk.

BRIANNA
So what I have done is ….

HENRY
That’s very interesting Brianna, can you email it to me. I’ve got to go and give this to Hans, something about blended and experiential learning.

BRIANNA
Hans is so innovative.

HENRY
Yes. He has redefined innovative.

Brianna sees that Henry has a spreadsheet on his computer.

BRIANNA
Oh Henry you have a spreadsheet!

Henry puts the go pro on the desk.

HENRY
All the better to figure out what’s going on.

Henry closes down the spreadsheet.

BRIANNA
Can I show you my spreadsheet?
HENRY
(resigned)
If you must. (Looks at his watch). Is that the time? I have a meeting.

Henry leaves. Brianna follows. The go pro sits there blinking.

BRIANNA (O.S.)
So I should email you the spreadsheet?

Close up on the go pro, as we hear

HENRY (O.S.)
Anything everything Brianna.

INT. MEDIA OFFICE. LATER THAT DAY.

Luciana is at her desk, she keeps looking at the door. Rachel bursts in.

RACHEL
Those third years will be the end of me.

LUCIANA
Rachel.

RACHEL
They’ve just asked Warwick Thornton if being black has been an advantage in his career. What planet are they living on?

LUCIANA
Denial. Speaking of which I wanted to chat about...

RACHEL
How can we teach our privileged white students that being black is anything but an advantage...there’s so much unfinished business when it comes to.

LUCIANA
Ben.

RACHEL
Sorry?

LUCIANA
How can you expect anyone to appreciate unfinished business when you run from it like a cat on a hot..
RACHEL
Tin roof. Tennessee Williams. What are you implying Luciana?

LUCIANA
I think you need to face some truths. Like Ben.

RACHEL
Ben and I have history. And there it stays, in the past.

LUCIANA
I think it’s out of the cage.

RACHEL
Has something happened? Is there another Nigel lurking somewhere?

LUCIANA
Will you at least talk to him?

Jack enters and storms to his desk.

JACK
Those second years are too much. None of them managed to get a guest for the interview exercise.

RACHEL
Jack I need to talk to you.

Rachel follows Jack.

LUCIANA
Running away won’t keep the cage locked Rachel.

INT. UNIVERSITY CAFÉ. DAY.

Ben and Brianna are waiting for their coffee orders. Brianna looks despondent.

BEN
You okay Brianna?

BRIANNA
Is this what you imagined teaching would be like?

BEN
Apparently I imagine too much. That’s what my, I mean... I’m learning not to be... too imaginative.
BRIANNA
If you had your life again would you do things differently?

BEN
Can’t figure my life out as it is so not sure how to do things differently.

Angela the café worker plonks two coffees down.

ANGELA
(shouts)
Two hot chocolates. (turns to Ben)
What do you two want?

BEN
Coffee? We ordered it.

ANGELA
Oh that’s right.

Angela shouts with the same cups on the bench.

ANGELA (CONT’D)
One flat whit. One Cappuccino.

Ben and Brianna look confused but resigned.

BEN AND BRIANNA
That’s mine.

ANGELA
Are you sure?

They take the coffees. They take a sip. Both screw up their noses.

BEN AND BRIANNA
I’ve got yours.

They swap coffees. There is a moment (for Brianna).

BRIANNA
You had me at coffee.

BEN
Jerry Maguire.

BRIANNA
You like Rom coms?

BEN
I like anything that is interesting. Cameron Crowe challenged the form. Not sure Jerry Maguire is a romcom.

(MORE)
BEN (CONT'D)
I like melodramas. Douglas Sirk is the master.

BRIANNA
Oh I love him.

BEN
Imitation of Life. Amazing isn’t it.

BRIANNA
(pretending she has seen it)
Yes you, I mean it is amazing. How they ... imitate life.

BEN
Who’d have thought that melodrama could deal with race so subtlety.

BRIANNA
Can I show you something?

BEN
Sure.

They sit and Brianna opens the computer. They are peering at the computer when Rachel appears.

RACHEL
Ben.

BEN
Yes Rachel.

RACHEL
What are you doing?

BEN
Brianna was showing me her spreadsheet.

RACHEL
I mean what are you drinking?

BEN
Flat white.

RACHEL
No sugar?

BEN
No Rachel.

RACHEL
Good. Hope the spreadsheet doesn’t drive you to sugar.
Rachel leaves.

BEN
It won’t Rachel. (turns to
Brianna). I think this is very good
Brianna, you should show Henry.

BRIANNA
I did. I mean I will...Ben.

Ben walks off.

BRIANNA (CONT’D)
(swooning)
He likes my spreadsheet. You had me
at good. Very Good.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY.

Luciana, is pinning up results of the kilo challenge on the
tally board. Ben and Rachel are top of the table.

Brianna skips into the office.

LUCIANA
Well look who is full of beans
today.

BRIANNA
It’s a beautiful day Luciana.

LUCIANA
It always is Brianna.

BRIANNA
But today is especially beautiful.
Do you believe in signs Luciana?

LUCIANA
What’s happened?

BRIANNA
I think someone is keen on me. It
was straight out of a rom com. The
meet cute moment, when eyes meet
and there is...

LUCIANA
Oh and who might that be this week.
Not that student. You know it’s not
good to fraternise with...

Brianna points to Ben’s photo on the wall.

LUCIANA (CONT’D)
(starts coughing)
Ben! The one who has just had a ...
(MORE)
LUCIANA (CONT'D)
I mean come back from... leave.
Special leave.

BRIANNA
I think he sees me differently
after his ...

LUCIANA
Break ... me ... down.

Ben enters with a dog, sashays up to his desk.

BEN
Good morning Ladies.

LUCIANA
Ben we have fought two feminist
wars not to be called ladies. We
are women.

BRIANNA
(flirting)
I don’t mind being called a lady
Ben. After all that’s what Adam
Sandler called Drew Barrymore in...

BEN
Sandler doesn’t understand the
genre. He manipulates his plot
around the character.

BRIANNA
Oh I agree. (to Luciana) See? We
speak the same language.

LUCIANA
Oh look Brianna, Ben’s brought his
dog. Aren’t you afraid of dogs?

BRIANNA
Oh no. I love dogs. I grew up on a
farm.

LUCIANA
Wasn’t it a fruit farm?

Brianna goes to pat the dog which growls at her.

BEN
I also grew up on a farm.

Ben goes to his desk. Brianna looks at Luciana as if to say
‘see!’ Rachel enters and goes straight to the league table.

RACHEL
Good. Number one. Only another two
weeks to go. Oh Morning Luciana.
LUCIANA
Morning Rachel. Ben’s brought...

RACHEL
Not chocolate I hope.

LUCIANA
No. It’s... Never mind.

Rachel goes over to Ben’s desk, she spies a chocolate bar on his desk. As she gets close she screams. Rachel jumps on a chair.

RACHEL
What is that?

BEN
Oscar. He was feeling lonely at home. I thought it might help us exercise this week.

RACHEL
We don’t need a dog to lose weight Ben. There’s jogging,

BEN
Which you can do with a dog.

RACHEL
Well there’s swimming, which you can’t do with a dog.

Oscar begins chewing a sock under Ben’s desk.

BEN
Isn’t that just adorable. He likes to litter all my socks around the flat, so I brought this in for him as a comforter.

RACHEL
Chewing socks? No fear of him getting fat on that diet. And don’t you dare touch that chocolate bar for another week, remember fat lag takes a week and we need to keep that weight down,

BEN
I got it because Angela gave me the wrong lunch and I was too scared to tell her. I promise I won’t touch it, till...

Ben goes off to the photocopier. Rachel is still on the chair with her feet up on the seat. Oscar starts to lick her feet. Rachel tries to stop Oscar licking her, takes out a piece of chocolate from Ben’s desk and gives it to the dog.
RACHEL
Now Shoo.

BRIANNA
Luciana what should I do?

LUCIANA
About what Brianna?

BRIANNA
This connection.

LUCIANA
It’s not a connection Brianna, I can assure you.

BRIANNA
Oh but it is.

LUCIANA
I’ve got bigger problems Brianna. For one, Henry seems to have intel on Jack’s letter to the union.

BRIANNA
Probably the go pro.

LUCIANA
You mean that go proey thing on Stefan’s head.

BRIANNA
I saw it in Henry’s office.

LUCIANA
Well we need to get that thing back.

BRIANNA
But how?

LUCIANA
(pretending to think aloud)
How could we get the go pro back? I wonder. That reminds me I need to report Henry’s broken door lock. Again.

BRIANNA
Facilities need to have it logged before they will come up. (beat) I’ve just had an idea Luciana.

LUCIANA
Have you?
BRIANNA
I could go to Henry’s office and get the go pro. Before you book facilities.

LUCIANA
What a good idea Brianna.

BRIANNA
But you need to tell me when Henry won’t be in the office.

LUCIANA
Let me look at his diary. (pretends to look) Oh yes today he has his hair appointment, I mean appointment with the Dean. He is leaving early.

BRIANNA
I could go in then. Aren’t we a great team Luciana.

LUCIANA
Yes. Brilliant. Don’t know what I would do without you Brianna.

BRIANNA
You’re my sidekick in the romcom that is my life.

LUCIANA
Lucky me. A role I’ve always wanted.

INT. UNIVERSITY CAFÉ. DAY.

Rachel is walking through the café. Jack has just picked up his coffee, holding an open computer, sees Rachel and rushes towards her trying to balance coffee and computer.

JACK
Rachel I need to speak to you.

RACHEL
Speak great one.

JACK
Luciana just told me that Henry knows about the letter to the union. And even what it says.

RACHEL
I told you not to write that Henry is a sociopath who gets his kicks out of making everyone miserable.
JACK
She said something about incriminating footage.

RACHEL
What footage?

JACK AND RACHEL
The go pro! Hans!

JACK
Where is that Springtime prancer. I’ll kill the little Hitler.

RACHEL
Don’t think you can call him that. Besides it won’t solve anything. Henry has his weekly meeting with the dean this afternoon.

JACK
What has that to do with anything?

RACHEL
It’s probably on his desk.

JACK
What if he has backed up the footage?

RACHEL
That would require intelligence Jack.

INT. HENRY’S OFFICE. LATER THAT DAY. INTERCUT WITH NEXT SCENE AS HENRY COMES INTO THE MEDIA OFFICE.

The Go Pro sits on Henry’s desk. A fishing line drops down from the window. Pan up to the window and we see Rachel’s face peering in as she tries to get the fishing line to catch on the go pro. She begins to climb in through the window and is half way in when Brianna walks into the room.

BRIANNA
Rachel.

Rachel is stuck in the window.

RACHEL
Oh hello Brianna.

BRIANNA AND RACHEL
What are you doing here?
BRIANNA
Why are you coming in through the window.

RACHEL
I was going to ask you the same thing Brianna.

BRIANNA
But I came in through the door.

RACHEL
And who gave you permission to come into Henry’s office?

BRIANNA
The lock on the door ...

RACHEL
Oh really. The lock gave you permission?

BRIANNA
Well if you must know, but only if you can keep a secret.

Rachel is still hanging in through the window.

RACHEL
You can trust me Brianna.

BRIANNA
(conspiratorial)
Well. Henry has footage of ...

RACHEL
I’ve got an idea Brianna.

BRIANNA
Yes Rachel?

RACHEL
Why don’t you take the go pro to Luciana.

BRIANNA
Oh I can do that Rachel. But do you need help getting out?

Rachel has managed to get in through the window. She crashes down onto the floor.

RACHEL
No I’m fine. Thanks Brianna, just take the evide.. I mean go pro.

Brianna leaves with the go pro.
INT. MEDIA OFFICE. SAME TIME.

Luciana is at her desk. Henry walks in.

LUCIANA  
(screaming)  
Ahhhh. Henry.

HENRY  
Yes Luciana. It’s me.

LUCIANA  
Wha wha what are you doing here?

HENRY  
I need some stationery.

LUCIANA  
What for?

HENRY  
To do some work. I promise only to take what I need.

LUCIANA  
Let me get that for you. (gets key from drawer) What exactly would you like?

HENRY  
(looking at the sign)  
Pencils. I like the sign. Very ... catching.

Luciana walks slowly towards the cupboard.

LUCIANA  
It’s for my marketing assignment. Would you like some rubbers with that?

HENRY  
You mean erasers?

LUCIANA  
Yes erasers.

HENRY  
No I don’t think so.

LUCIANA  
I think you should take some.

HENRY  
If I’ve gone over my monthly allocation Luciana I am sure I have some in my office.
LUCIANA
NO! Here I have pencils for you.
Lots of them. And rubbers.

HENRY
I don’t need the rubb, I mean erasers. Thanks now I’ll put them in my ...

LUCIANA
Wait. I think you need some pencil sharpeners.

HENRY
Do I?

LUCIANA
Yes to keep you on ... point.. so to speak.

HENRY
(looks at his watch)
I’m running late. And I need to get something from my ...

LUCIANA
Fa... fa...

Brianna walks in with go pro under her coat. She makes a sign to Luciana.

LUCIANA (CONT'D)
Fa... fa...cilities. I’ve logged your door with facilities.

HENRY
Brianna what is that you have under your coat?

BRIANNA
A ... a.... New....

LUCIANA
Game console. Brianna managed to get it from UCS.

HENRY
Well done Brianna. Let me see.

LUCIANA
Aren’t you late Henry?

HENRY
Oh yes.

Rachel enters covered in bush leaves as Henry opens the door.
HENRY (CONT'D)
Rachel you look like you’ve been rolling around in the bushes.

RACHEL
Testing out a new writing exercise for the second years Henry. It’s called ...

BRIANNA
Fishing for... ideas... in... nature.

EXT. UNIVERSITY GROUNDS. A FEW DAYS LATER.

Ben sits alone in contemplation. Rachel walks up, he sees her and puts something under him, we see it is a chocolate wrapper.

RACHEL
Ben.

BEN
(avoiding eye contact)
Yes Rachel.

RACHEL
You okay?

BEN
(he shuffles)
Umm. Yes.

RACHEL
Are you sitting on something?

BEN
No. Nothing.

RACHEL
You haven’t broken our fast?

BEN
No. No. Definitely not.

RACHEL
Only three days to go till fat lag can begin.

Ben sniffs. Rachel sits down next to him.

RACHEL (CONT’D)
Three days isn’t that long Ben. We’re kilo challenge pals.

BEN
It’s Oscar.
RACHEL
The second year who never goes to class? I reckon he is still smoking joints behind the studio. Remember when we...

BEN
Not that Oscar.

RACHEL
(thinking aloud)
That reminds me I might need to write to progression and support about him.

BEN
(sniffing)
It’s... my dog ... Oscar.

RACHEL
Oh that’s a relief, I thought it was a progression issue..

BEN
He passed.

RACHEL
Passed what? The sock?

BEN
He died.

RACHEL
From the sock?

BEN
The vet said it was chocolate poisoning. Who would give a dog chocolate?

RACHEL
(anxious)
Someone who thinks the dog would go away?

BEN
Everyone knows that chocolate is poison for dogs.

RACHEL
Do they?

BEN
He was my best friend.

RACHEL
Yes they say that about dogs. Never got it myself.
BEN
I’m not sure what I will do without him.

RACHEL
Well just don’t be tempted by the chocolate - it’s the devil’s food you know. Look what it did to Oscar. Could be poison for us, I mean you. (Struggling) Maybe you could frame a photo of him. A memory that gives you comfort.

Rachel gives Ben a chocolate bar.

BEN
You’re a good friend Rachel.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY. A FEW DAYS LATER.

Ben enters with a stuffed dog on wheels. He goes up to Rachel. Rachel turns from her desk.

RACHEL
What is that?

BEN
Oscar.

RACHEL
I thought he was...

BEN
I wasn’t ready to let go. I thought it would help both of us. Help you get over your fear of dogs.

RACHEL
Thanks Ben but I can deal with my fears all by myself, it’s my own little world of Monsters Inc.

BEN
As your partner Rachel I want to help you (beat) ... as you helped me.

Rachel shuffles, looking uncomfortable.

RACHEL
Oh that is very very very I mean very sweet of you Ben.

Oscar the stuffed dog has a weird expression on his face.

RACHEL (CONT’D)
What is that look?
BEN
The taxidermist asked what expression I wanted, and I said something to remind me of him with a sock in his mouth.

RACHEL
It looks like something bigger than a sock. Like an arm.

BEN
Come let’s take Oscar for a walk. See he has wheels.

RACHEL
(looking mortified)
Yes. I see.

EXT. UNIVERSITY GROUNDS. DAY.
Ben and Rachel are walking with Oscar being pulled along.

RACHEL
It happened when I was in third grade. And I’ve never really got over it.

BEN
Well maybe the dog was as scared of you as you were of it.

RACHEL
It bit me!

BEN
Maybe he didn’t like witches.

RACHEL
Or that I was the lead in the school play. I think he was sent by the Delaney dogs. They hated me. Called me a wog.

Rachel begins to tear up. Ben lets go of the lead on which he has been pulling stuffed dog and goes to hug Rachel. In the background we see a large dog approach stuffed Oscar, which it begins to maul. Rachel sees it.

RACHEL (CONT’D)
Um Ben...

BEN
Yes Rachel?

RACHEL
I think...
BEN
We should take it easy. I agree.

RACHEL
What? No. The dog.

BEN
Still a bad memory?

Ben hugs her again.

RACHEL
It’s a new one actually.

Ben pulls back. Rachel motions to look in the direction of the dog now mauling Oscar.

BEN
(screaming)
Oh my God. Stop you beast.

Ben grabs the lead and a tug of war begins between the big dog and Ben with Oscar being ripped into pieces.

BEN (CONT'D)
(yelling)

A lanky, unkempt student rushes out from behind the building holding a spliff.

OSCAR
What? (Seeing the carnage) Man that’s strong.

RACHEL
Oscar. I knew you were still at it.

The big dog has run off and stuffed Oscar is in pieces. Ben goes to pick them up.

BEN
How am I going to live without you?

OSCAR
(holding out the joint)
Here. You look like you could do with it.

RACHEL
Ben! Oscar is still smoking weed.

Ben is sobbing. Rachel softens.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Ben, get a grip.
BEN
He was my best friend.

RACHEL
Weeell. Technically he was a ... stuffed.... friend.

Oscar hands Ben a chocolate bar.

OSCAR
Would you like this. I keep it for the ...

RACHEL
I think you should go inside Oscar before I report you.

Ben takes the chocolate bar.

BEN
Thanks Oscar.

RACHEL
Ben, remember I gave you a choco..

BEN
I’ve just lost my best friend. Twice. Once when...

RACHEL
Yes, yes, I know but one more day...

OSCAR
Jeez its guts are all over the place.

Ben sobs more and begins to eat the chocolate bar.

RACHEL
(panicked)
Ben, want to go for a run later today? To lose... I mean get over the tragic loss of Oscar.

BEN
Thanks Rachel. That might help. For now I’ll just pick up ...

Ben picks up what is left of Oscar the dog, holding his collar, taking a bite of the chocolate.

RACHEL
(resigned)
Oh well, losing isn’t everything.
OSCAR
I think you mean winning isn’t everything Rachel.

RACHEL
Says the student with a joint. Get inside Oscar.

Rachel helps pick up the pieces. Oscar the student goes inside.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
He was a good friend. (Beat) As are you Ben.

TAG. INT. UNIVERSITY CAFE. DAY.

Ben is sitting at a table watching something on a computer and laughing. Rachel appears.

RACHEL
Nice to see you laughing. I wish I could.

BEN
Sorry that we didn’t win.

RACHEL
Winning isn’t everything.

BEN
To you it is.

RACHEL
I can lose in a fair fight. But Henry doesn’t play fair. What are you laughing at?

BEN
(crying with laughter)
Stefan’s day in the life video ...

He turns the computer around. We see Rachel climbing in through the window.

BEN (CONT'D)
He uploaded it to his YouTube channel.

RACHEL
Wait till I get my hands on that little...Hitler.

Ben hands her a chocolate bar.

BEN
Maybe I can have a word to Hans.
Rachel rips into the chocolate bar.

RACHEL
Okay what will it cost me?

BEN
To clean the slate?

RACHEL
Yes. To clean the slate. And get that video taken down.

BEN
I was using subtext.

RACHEL
Yes I know Ben. I teach the stuff. Just do it.

Rachel leaves. Ben smiles to himself. He takes out the USB stick from the computer and pockets it.

FADE OUT.

END OF EPISODE
CRITICAL REFLECTION ON CREATIVE PRACTICE 1:

IT’S ACADEMIC – A STUDIO-BASED ENSEMBLE SITUATION COMEDY

The aim of this creative practice

Drawing on the analyses and ideas pertaining to the ensemble sitcom, the aim of Creative Practice 1 (CP1) was to explore the principle that an ensemble comedy is best served by a story ideology that frames and entraps certain characters in behaviour which undermine their goals. While the frame is the marketisation of Higher Education (HE) (and which Henry supports as the Head of Department) the gang is trapped by the fear of being rendered irrelevant or unemployed. The objective was to explore the comic tension both inter- and intra-relationally of the characters within this frame, including the comic antihero and the echo within.

Developing this creative practice

Each of the characters in CP1 has a different relationship to the frame. Ben attempts to attain status in this world, whilst unaware of the dynamics that prevent him succeeding. Rachel, as the comic antihero, is aware of the frame, yet she does not leave it; instead, this character attempts to expose the frame in a misguided attempt to ‘rescue’ those who suffer under its weight and expose its impact on values that once defined academia. Jack, senior lecturer and documentary warhorse, is Rachel’s father figure and though frustrated by the frame and its neo-liberal effects or those who represent it, such as Henry, does not take action to demolish it. Henry thrives in such a world and uses its tools to manipulate and exploit those under his management. Fergal and Brianna, junior accolades, are unaware of the effects of this ideology and its agenda, which ensures they remain subservient to its demands. Hans, the pedantic technology wizard, simply operates on a different level, completely unaware of the dynamics at play, and along with Fergal and Brianna these characters echo the fears of Rachel, Ben, and Jack. Luciana, the departmental administrator, is the truth-teller who knows how the games are played and plays some herself.
Considering the “most” of each of the main characters in It’s Academic, I sought to explore the potential comedic gap between the characters:

- Rachel is the most vociferous in exposing the hypocrisy and exploitation of the marketisation of HE whilst also being the most competitive teacher; her integrity is often undermined by her competitiveness.
- Ben is the most fearful of commitment whilst also the most knowledgeable film director.
- Henry is the most Machiavellian Head of Department looking out for his career.
- Brianna is the most social media savvy wannabe academic.
- Jack is the most cynical ex-documentarian warhorse, yet is impotent in acting to expose the frame.
- Luciana is the most conscientious administrator who speaks her mind.
- Fergal is the most naïve graduate academic assistant.
- Angela is the most dictatorial café owner.
- Hans is the most pedantic teacher.

From this exercise I was able to discern that the nature of the relationship each character has with the frame; it enables power, it disempowers, or it simply refuses to yield power. The underlying tension is driven by unconscious fears that these characters will fail in mastering the oppressive effects of the frame and its story ideology. CP1 demonstrates the principle that the ensemble comedy works best when the gang is framed by a story ideology, and which underscore intra- and inter-relational tension.

Defining the ensemble, their frame and the story ideology, along with the echo, I had great difficulty in finding the essence of the comic antihero. This was because I initially thought Rachel was the key character as well as the comic antihero, but it soon became apparent that the antihero cannot be a key character if they are conscious of the frame, which I had previously argued that the key character is not.
Insights gleaned from this creative practice

Reflecting on the analysis of the antihero in Chapter One, I realised that such comic characters are aware of those that thwart their goals, even if those goals contravene legal, moral and social laws (as discussed with the characters of Walter White and Tony Soprano). I posit that while the comic antihero may not challenge social laws and expectations, they are antiheroes in that they challenge structures that limit what they see as the greater good; in the case of CP1, Rachel wants to teach students how to think and not simply treat them as a number. Thus, the comicality of the comic antihero arises in the failure of such characters in attempting to shift the limitations of the frame. As such the comic antihero is caught between consciousness (of the frame) and some degree of unconsciousness about the power dynamics in play. As noted, and argued in Situation Comedy, the key character is conscious of the goal yet unconscious of any frame that prevents them achieving their goal, typically by way of fears that ultimately trigger their comic degradation. This may have been the reason I not only thought the comic antihero was a form of key character, but why I had difficulty in manifesting the comicality of Rachel; her conscious goal is socially focused, yet she is unconscious of the power dynamics at play. Summarising how each character represents/reflects an attitude to the frame by way of power gives insight to how they respond when their sense of self, status or identity is under threat:

- Jack is afraid he will never have power again.
- Rachel believes she is empowered, yet despite three waves of feminism finds herself in a patriarchy operating by different rules which still disempower.
- Ben is confused as to what happened to his power, and while he abhors the business model of HE, it gives him an identity in the social.
- Luciana, as truth-teller, is the Black woman no longer putting up with bad behaviour or abuse of power.
- Henry, on the other hand, has achieved power and seeks to maintain it by any means.

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• Brianna has no power and does not know it.
• Fergal is afraid he is not seen in this world, needs to be liked and will do anything to achieve some power, yet is unaware that he has no power.

Once I realised that Ben was the (only) key character, and Rachel’s characteristics are more akin to that of an antihero in that she is fully aware of the frame, I was then able to position each character in relation to the frame. Considering the analysis in Chapter One along with the characteristics of echoism within the key character, it needs to be asked why Rachel, not being a key character, stays in a situation she knows is disempowering. Furthermore, developing Rachel became challenging in another way: by being too aggressive the character is not likeable, by being too nice the character has little agency.

Reflecting on this point and the analysis of characters in Chapter One, it became evident that Rachel has a sense of loyalty to the gang (a characteristic of echoism as discussed in my book) alongside her role, as a senior lecturer, which gives her status (a characteristic of narcissism). I have argued that the key character harbours both echoistic and narcissistic characteristics and this would be the reason I initially thought Rachel was a key character. Reflecting on the discussion of the antihero, I realised Rachel’s echoism and narcissism play out in different ways: Rachel harbours a conscious fear of being disempowered by the frame, coupled with an unconscious loyalty to a gang that is unwilling or unable to challenge the frame that entraps them. The analysis enabled me to develop this character in relation to the frame as aware of its effects but unaware to its entrapment (of her). Rachel is attempting to alter a situation in which the participants are not fully engaged with her project. As such in attempting to position Rachel in relation to the frame, practice was informed by the research undertaken, while the resulting practice further informed research.

Implications for practice
Summarising the role of each of the character/s in terms of aspects explicated in Chapter One:
The academic teaching team represents the gang that is defined and contained by the marketisation of HE.

The frame of HE as a business is represented by Henry the Head of department.

The echoes are represented by Fergal (echoing Ben), Hans (echoing Jack) and Brianna (echoing Rachel). Luciana is the truth-teller.

Rachel is the comic antihero – her need to save the gang stems from her desire to be recognised as the most competent in this struggle.

Each aspect and character role are developed by way of understanding the relation between each character and the frame in terms of power dynamics. Furthermore, the nature and degree of tension between conscious goals and unconscious behaviour assists in developing and positioning the comic antihero in relation to a discursive frame.

What are the implications of insights gained from the theoretical chapter and writing creative practice 1 to be applied to creative practice 2?

CP1 presents characters who exist in the gaze of a frame, enabling an opportunity to choose characters who will “escape” the entrapment or at the least actualise in a way where they are no longer “trapped.” CP2 is tasked with enabling some characters to escape that entrapment by way of actualisation. CP2 will be a feature film which sets out to explore the elements that need to be considered when reworking a short form narrative, such as the episodic sitcom series, to a feature film, wherein the character/s undergo some consciousness about who they are or the world around them. To that end, it needs to be ascertained which character/s and which aspects of their behaviour will undergo transformation in the long form narrative of the feature film. In short, which character/s are best suited to undertake the transformational journey? CP2 bridges the period of CP1, beginning with Ben first arriving at the media department, only to find that Rachel, his one-time love, works there. Ben and Rachel will undergo a journey that exposes the misunderstandings in their previous relationship. Further, CP2 explores the notion that a related sitcom or comedy series can be found within the second act of a film, a point I expand on in Chapter Three.
SECTION TWO

THE BIND IN FILM COMEDY

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CHAPTER TWO

THE MIDPOINT AND ITS BIND IN FILM COMEDIES

Picking up from the last chapter, I now consider the narrative structure and its impact on character behaviour when a sitcom is reworked to a feature film. I analyse plot structure, and in particular the midpoint (MP), wherein the character is confronted with a need that will enable change. This chapter asks: What is the role of the MP in film comedies? While I discuss and analyse primarily film comedies that focus on relationships, I closely examine the two films based on the sitcom, Dad’s Army, discussed in Chapter One. To that end, I explore the challenge of determining which protagonist/s in the ensemble comedy are best suited in the migration to an associated film, and the transformation that its narrative demands.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND APPLICATION

Implications for character and narrative structure when reworking an ensemble sitcom to film

In Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis, I argue that, in the sitcom, the key character never faces their need, born of an unconscious fear, the root of repeated comic degradation. While the sitcom character may have a goal that is prompted by an episodic incident, their super objective (idealisation) is undermined by an unconscious fear, manifesting as behavioural flaws and which underpin their comic degradation.

By considering the elements required for the long form narrative film, screenwriting theorists David Howard and Edward Mabley write: “The most rudimentary plan for a screenplay should contain the following elements: who the central character is (if the unity of action is used…) and what he or she wants; who the other principle characters are and what

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they each want...”

Thus, it is the interrelation between character and plot which enables unity of action. Further distilling character motivation, Howard and Mabley write that “[i]t was Frank Daniel who first formulated a deceptively simple delineation of the basic dramatic circumstance: Somebody wants something badly and is having difficulty getting it.”

Daniel developed a framework, expanded by Howard and Mabley, to offer that the long form film narrative is shaped by a character’s wants, needs, wound/fear and associated fatal flaw. The need is what the character must do to nullify the flaw. Script analysts Paul Gulino and Linda Seger further observe that while the (physical) goal is not always achieved, the character must confront their need for there to be the transformation that the film narrative demands.

Christopher Vogler also advocates in his twelve stages of the ‘hero’s journey’ that screen narratives are shaped by a character’s wants, needs, wound/fear and fatal flaw (behaviour) – all backgrounded by motivation.

However, in the sitcom, the character never faces their need; they might have a super objective, and while each episode brings a new goal that may progress that idealisation, when their unconscious fear is triggered, they fail in both the immediate goal and the super objective. Hence, the key character is shaped by conscious desires/wants coupled with unconscious fears. While it is not possible to reveal the unconscious of the fictional character, psychoanalytic theory enables an examination of behaviour by fictional characters, elucidating the gap between their conscious goal and behaviour. It is essential to know the character’s (unconscious) motivation and the resultant behaviour that drives them to achieve an external,

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4 Howard and Mabley, as before, p.22.
5 For example, if a character needs to see through people’s charm and see true intentions, their flaw might be that they are seduced/blinded by charm.
7 While transformation is essentially a western, even Hollywood approach to screenwriting, story demands some form of change through the narrative in order to maintain audience engagement.
9 Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, Chapter 2.
conscious, goal, causing them to fail week after week. I argue that the gap between the key character’s conscious goal and unconscious entrapment enables the struggle (in the sitcom), and which underpins the comic performance.\textsuperscript{10} However, commercial film narratives demand that the character must confront their need and/or fear to enable the transformation of their view of the world and themselves. Tabling each form of narrative assists in ascertaining character goals and behaviours:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SITCOM</th>
<th>FILM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Super objective (series) with a lesser goal triggered in each episode by an inciting incident</td>
<td>Wants – goal – often stated in response to a feeling of lack or loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need – avoided (unconscious)</td>
<td>Need – to transform (brought to consciousness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrapment – situation developed by relational dynamics sited in a physical, confined setting</td>
<td>Fear, born of ego wounding that will be brought to consciousness through the course of the narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour/incident that triggers the fear and, as long as it remains unconscious, enables repeatability</td>
<td>Fatal Flaw/behaviour undermines the goal/want that, when brought to consciousness, enables transformation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: The comic character in the sitcom and the film.

Table 2.1 shows that then reworking a sitcom to film the character/s must learn something about themselves in order to undergo some degree of psychological transformation. Thus, in the migration of characters from the sitcom to the film it is necessary to understand which characters harbour fears and flaws that are able to be affected by the narrative and will enable their transformation of how they see the world.

Sara Khalili\textsuperscript{11} uses Syd Field’s three act structure to demonstrate that the climax of a film narrative is the turning point (TP) into Act Three, rather than the MP which has become

\textsuperscript{10} Klika, Situation Comedy, as before, Chapter 5.

regarded as the climax by practitioner theorists such as Howard and Mabley.\textsuperscript{12} Noting the discussion so far, I posit that, in drama, the protagonist faces their need at the MP, triggering the midpoint reversal (MPR), whereas in comedy they deny it until the last possible moment. Hence, I agree with Khalili’s positioning of the climax occurring at the end of Act Two – when all seems lost. However, I ascertain that the MP is affecting the comic character in different ways to the dramatic character.

The comedy character is comic precisely because they are at odds with the world around them and they utilise certain behaviours, such as lying, masquerade, or deceit, to achieve a goal or maintain an idealisation that gives them some degree of power or status. I offer that in the comedy film the protagonists refuse to accept or even acknowledge their need (they remain stubborn or unconscious) until the stakes are too high for them to continue in their denial. As such, the comic character attempts to maintain both their want and need, creating the tension that drives the comicality, and which becomes evident at the MP. Hence, it is essential to understand the nature of the tension that drives the comicality, whilst also understanding if the main character/s will change in the face of the narrative, or if the narrative is subverted – by way of a change of direction in which the character does not confront the need to change – as Lisa Trahair argues with Buster Keaton’s \textit{The General}\textsuperscript{13} – or if both character and narrative are subverted, as in \textit{Some Like It Hot} (1959),\textsuperscript{14} where the guy gets the girl but because of deception – narrative put to the service of the goal in order that the character does not have to change.

As discussed in the last chapter, the ensemble sitcom operates more effectively by having both inter- and intra-relationships with the frame. Picking up Chapter One, when the


\textsuperscript{13} Lisa Trahair, \textit{The Comedy of Philosophy: Sense and Nonsense in Early Cinematic Slapstick} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007). Trahair analyses Buster Keaton’s \textit{The General} to demonstrate that in pursuit of a goal (the pleasure principle) by denying the reality (principle) the character subverts the narrative.

ensemble is taken out of the situation the frame is altered, while also consolidating the
dynamics at play. When the sitcom is reworked as a film, where the gang go on holiday or to a
new destination, as is common in Britain, their environment both challenges and fortifies the
group dynamic, yet they do not change in any significant manner. Examples include *Are You
Being Served?* (1977) (AYBS) and *On the Buses* (1971), wherein the characters respond to
the environment in sometimes more extreme ways than they would ‘back home,’ yet do not
undergo any significant change in how they see and engage with the world. This may be
because such films are made at the same time the series is going to air. However, and central to
this argument if, and when, transformation does occur (as in the film *The Bad Education
Movie*, 2015), a return to the originating sitcom and premise is not possible. *Dad’s Army*, an
ensemble sitcom that spawned two films, one in 1971 and one in 2016, each with different
narrative structures and, more significantly, differing relationships to the sitcom. I critically
analyse the narrative structure of each iteration in the textual analysis but note here that, in
terms of story, the 1971 film is a prequel to the series, while the latter film (2016), and set in
the same milieu as the sitcom, offers little change in the characters or their situation and as such
is neither a prequel nor a resolution to the world of the series.

Categorising ensemble sitcoms, such as *Are You Being Served?* (AYBS), *Dad’s Army*
and *Bad Education*, reworked to film narratives, and delineating between those that undergo
change elucidates the following:

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16 See Appendix with list of sitcoms developed as films and films reworked as sitcoms and the countries produced.
18 The main character’s view of his friends is radically altered by the group of students, thus transforming how
he sees the world *The Bad Education Movie*, wrs. Freddy Syborn, Jack Whitehall, dir. Elliot Hegarty
(Entertainment Film, 2015).
I. **No change in character** in the ensemble sitcom or film
   
a. change in situation, *AYBS* (1977) film\(^{20}\)
   
b. same situation *Dad’s Army* (1971)\(^{21}\)

II. **(Some) Change in character**, in the film.
   
a. No change in situation, *Dad’s Army* (2016)\(^{22}\)
   

Or to put it another way:

III. **No change in situation** from ensemble sitcom to film
   
a. No change in characters *Dad’s Army* (1971)
   
b. Desired/promised change in character/s *Dad’s Army* (2016)

IV. **Change in situation** from ensemble sitcom to film
   
a. no change in character, *AYBS* film (1977)
   

It is evident that character and situation are intrinsically linked – the narrative either supports change or reinforces established behaviour in a new situation. As such, I posit that it is necessary to understand which characters undergo change, and why, or if, the characters do not change, determine how the narrative reinforces the dynamics at play in the originating situation. Hence, it is useful to know how the narrative of the film will enable, or not, transformation in those character/s. If the characters do not change, as in the case of *AYBS* (1977) and *On the Buses* (1971), I suggest that those characters subvert the narrative in denying the reality that challenges them and their view of the world, as I will discuss occurs in *Some Like It Hot* (1959). I now examine the comedy film in order to determine how its generic tropes inform narrative and plot.

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\(^{21}\) *Dad’s Army*, wrs. Jerry Perry, David Croft, as before (1971).

\(^{22}\) *Dad’s Army*, wr. Hamish McColl, as before (2016). I will argue in the textual analysis that this film did not succeed in character transformation.
The comedy film: its conventions in terms of narrative and character

For Stuart Voytilla and Scott Petri there are two types of romantic comedy narratives:

1. The search for one’s true love (sweet romance) – the hero and/or heroine are wounded without love ... 
2. The recommitment to love (marriage comedy) – a relationship (marriage, engagement, or other promise of commitment) is fractured, and the lovers part seeking new love only to come back and recommit to the original relationship ...

In both these examples Voytilla and Petri cover relationships which undergo some degree of discord – ‘wounded without love’ or ‘fractured.’ They further note that *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993)²⁴ use both structures, writing that “Annie’s story is a search for true love. Sam’s story is a recommitment to the power of love.”²⁵ For Marc Blake, the comedy in romantic comedy “comes in the gap between image and reality, between hope and expectation and between fear and commitment.”²⁶ Further differentiating between a romantic comedy (romcom) and comedy romances in the romcom, the character primarily wants/desires love and is conscious of that desire by the end of Act One, whereas in the comedy romance the character needs love and this remains so at the end of Act One. In other words, the character’s need for love is unconscious and at some point, this comes to consciousness. While the romantic comedy is governed by the pursuit for ‘the one’ – where love will fulfil some lack – the need is centred on some change in the character in order for them to recognise, accept or find that love. The comedy romance character discovers love accidentally, but I offer that the ‘discovery’ is related to their need.

²⁵ Voytilla & Petri, as before, p.96. However not all romantic comedies, including *Sleepless*, begin with the search for love (Annie is already engaged).
Turning now to generic debates centred on the romantic comedy, Tamar Jeffers McDonald critically examines the ‘radical’ comedies of the 70s, such as *Annie Hall* (1977), writing that

Whereas both screwball and sex comedy made use of ideas of disguise and masquerade, and inversions of the norm, the radical romantic comedies choose to inflect these more literally …. However, when a character does make use of masquerade, it is generally the male, as in sex comedy, but the radical romantic comedy withholds the exploding of the scheming male’s plot which was such a necessary part of the sex comedy’s narrative structure and humour. By withholding the revelation of the man’s deceit, the radical romantic comedy can be seen as suggesting both that everyone lives a lie, and that the liar, in the end, is the one who suffers most.  27

Deborah Jermyn delineates between those (radical) comedies where the protagonists do not end up coupling, with examples such as *Annie Hall, 500 days of Summer* and *The Break-Up*.  28 Jermyn argues that

…if this cultural hierarchy is to be challenged, a more constructive and flexible approach to understanding the territory occupied by romantic comedy is needed to revise our enduringly simplistic notions of how genre works and what romcom actually is.  29

Jermyn further notes that the films of Nancy Meyers offer a hopeful future to the older woman, with examples of her films, *It's Complicated* (2009) and *Something's Gotta Give* (2003), while Celestino Deleyto broadens the definition and application of the genre as “the intersection of three, closely interrelated elements: a narrative that articulates historically and culturally specific views of love, desire, sexuality and gender relationships…”  30, as such I offer that the radicalness of the 1970s offerings have shifted focus. *It’s Complicated* (2009) and

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indeed, comedy films such as *Bridesmaids* (2011) and *Tootsie* (1982), with their overt discussion of sex, bodily fluids and gender issues are ripe examples of McDonald’s radical comedies.

Deleyto further attempts to broaden the limitations of the genre to include those comedies, often seen as what Leger Grindon defines as ‘marginal,’ as explorations of the discourse of love and relationships rather than edicts in the search for ‘love.’ Deleyto continues:

> It has been my contention that only a more flexible and less deterministic approach to the genre’s main characteristics, one that moves beyond compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy and the happy ending, ...

Such a view underpins Jermyn’s analysis of Meyers’ *It’s Complicated*: [the] romcom had to keep bringing new inflections to bear to avoid becoming stale, and that *It’s Complicated* (Meyers, 2009) was a good example of this for the way it had centred on an older ‘love-triangle’, where a middle-aged divorced couple rekindle their relationship and have an affair.

Hiding within the debates of genre is the exploration of relationships – regardless of background, gender, race, age, or sexuality – and as such I offer that film comedies are essentially narratives about relationships – of all kinds, not just about heterogeneous love, and sex. I argue that the narrative drive in such comedies is underpinned by conflict and confusion, as opposed to coupling. Thus, it could be said that the narratives of both the comedy romance and the romantic comedy are related by the dramatic question (DQ): will they accept each other?

However, while this study is concerned with how comicality works in film comedy rather than the delineation in the various genres of comedy, generic debates assist to contextualise the type of film comedy I seek to analyse – those with a discordant relationship as a central plot.

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32 Deleyto, as before, p.175.
34 Jermyn, *Nancy Meyers*, as before, p. xii.
Analysing the plotting of film comedies, Steve Kaplan appropriates Vogler’s twelve stages of the Hero’s Journey to comic film narrative, shoehorning them into seven plot points:

1. The Normal World – with the protagonist unaware that they are “damaged, broken people living in a damaged, broken world. Only they don’t know it.”
2. WTF? – chaos breaks loose and there is a desperate attempt to return to the normal world.
3. Reactions – tries to put the world back together.
4. Connections – new friends taking the protagonist off in …
5. New Directions – this leads to Discovered Goals, which is an important step as it may change the protagonist’s want to a realisation of their need, and thus transformation.
6. Disconnection – when all looks lost the protagonist becomes “recommitted to achieving the discovered goal…”
7. Race to the Finish – the girl chases the guy…35

Kaplan’s analysis elucidates that the comic hero realises the old world is not coming back, when all looks lost (Vogler’s ‘Ordeal’), and they must now commit to changing. Dara Marks36 stretches out the circular Hero’s Journey apropos Vogler, in Inside Story, illustrating the transformational arc as a linear narrative in three acts delivering a visual connection between the circular ‘journey’ and the sequential plot.

Keith Giglio turns his focus to the character: “Comedy is inherently a fool’s journey to discovery or growth. Someone is foolish or misguided in his inappropriate goal, goes on a journey, and matures, or discovers who he really is.”37 Howard and Mabley write: “[i]n dramatic writing, the very essence of character is change. The character at the end is not the same as he was at the beginning. He’s changed – psychologically, maybe even physically.”38

38 Howard and Mabley, The Tools of Screenwriting, as before, quoting Robert Towne, p. 52. My italics.
Returning to Kaplan, in closely examining *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005) and *Groundhog Day* (1993), he determines that the character’s forced acceptance of change has made the(ir) world better by facing a need (to grow up, to commit, to leave, to confront a situation, to change). Having defined the hero as someone who confronts their fatal flaw, Kaplan offers that “though there is growth, the personal growth that happens is accidental, inadvertent, or unheroic.” The world is not necessarily saved, the protagonist is not necessarily a superhero or even a great person, they are still flawed individuals – “the reason for that is the simple fact that no one is perfect.” Thus, Kaplan determines that such transformation is not as absolute in the comic hero as we find in the traditional heroic journey. Furthermore, while the character’s transformation may be incidental to their flaws, such change offers the audience promise of “a more hopeful world,” they are non-heroes, or possibly antiheroes.

Wes D. Gehring cites certain films as having antiheroes: *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (1994), *Notting Hill* (1999), *Bridget Jones’ Diary* (2001) and *A Fish Called Wanda* (1988). However, Gehring never fully defines what he means by an antihero other than to say that “[w]hile Cleese is the most tightly wound of the three male principals addressed here, the other two (befuddled Hugh Grant of *Four Weddings*, and the ever-so-rigid Colin Firth of

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40 Kaplan, *The Comic Hero’s Journey*, as before, p.131.
41 Kaplan, as before, p. 132.
42 Kaplan, as before, p. 138.
43 Miranda Priestley in *The Devil Wears Prada* could be an antihero. While she treats her staff with disdain, she awakens in Andie, the protagonist, the realisation that she does not want to be like Miranda or Miranda’s assistant, Emily. Despite Andie leaving the hallowed halls of the fashion magazine, *Runway*, Miranda writes a begrudging reference for Andie’s dream job, a journalist at a paper that does ‘issue’ based stories. Thus, while the antihero may (or may not) have moral misgiving, they can force change for other characters. *The Devil Wears Prada*, wr. Aline Brosh McKenna, dir. David Frankel (20th Century Fox, 2006).
Bridget) are both in need of screwball revitalization."³⁴⁵ What means would such revitalization take? Gehring goes on: “…Renee Zellweger playing even more of an antihero than the aforementioned Colin Firth,”³⁴⁶ without saying how. One can only assume that, in this context, the antihero is portrayed as not being ‘heroic’ – that is, they do not rescue an ‘other,’ rather it is they that needs rescuing – and often by their own actions. This notion resonates with the comic antihero discussed in Chapter One, wherein the character, in an attempt to alter the frame for the other (as they are conscious of the frame) yet needs to find a way to leave the frame for their own sake. Further, it can be deduced that such characters, while not necessarily active protagonists, might change in response to other characters, as Bridget triggers in Mark Darcy.

When the character’s need is based on love (of self, or other), and in denying such a need, the character attempts to cling to both need and want, thus precipitating a tension between opposing outcomes. I offer that in those film comedies that have a narrative focused on the nature of relationships, the protagonist is seeking to fulfil some lack, and, regardless of the initial goal, find themselves in a psychological tension between an external want and an internal need and lack that may be fulfilled by way of a relationship.³⁴⁷ As with the comic antihero, such characters are caught between a conscious want and an unconscious need.

Jason Mittell posits that there is a requirement (by the writer) to not only understand the need of the character but how their resultant fatal flaw is resolved.³⁴⁸ Thus the nature of the comic protagonist as not only unheroic, they can also be an accidental hero – they did not set out on a journey of transformation, often they avoid it until confronted with some truth or reality that they can no longer deny, resulting in some change in them or others– but not

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³⁴⁶ Gehring, as before, p.146.
³⁴⁷ It may be that the comedy romance offers greater opportunity for tension between the initial goal, and the need for love as these aspects of character have greater opportunity to be at odds with each other.
completely as ‘they are still flawed.’ Blake notes: “… the action and plots come from these flawed characters.”

*Tootsie* (1982)\(^{50}\) has a protagonist, Michael Dorsey, a womaniser, and self-described “serious” actor, wants to raise $8000 to produce a play written by his housemate, and promising a role to his friend, Sandy, an actress on the roller coaster ride of auditions. Giglio writes: “[i]n *Tootsie*, the “something that happens” moment happens when Michael learns about Sandy’s audition for the role of Emily Brewster… Michael agrees to accompany her to the audition. Going to that audition changes his life forever.”\(^{51}\) Having helped Sandy prepare for a role on the soap opera, Michael is incensed that she does not get an audition, and more so when he discovers that another actor has been given a part and which he claims to be his in the upcoming play *The Iceman Cometh*.

Now determined to raise the funds for the play, Michael auditions for the part of hospital administrator Emily Brewster as Dorothy Michaels and lands the role; no one can know Dorothy’s identity other than his housemate along with his long-suffering agent. Winning the role over Sandy sets up the first layer of deceit. The complications increase when Michael meets and slowly falls in love with Julie, one of the stars on the soap, and who believes Dorothy/ Michael is a woman. The character of Michael is caught between the need to respect women while also masquerading as a woman. Success with the character of Emily Brewster brings Michael a stream of mail and a legion of fans, sharing their secrets and desires. Michael now believes he has something to say to women (“you have nothing to say” retorts his agent).

In *The Nutshell Technique* Jill Chamberlain developed a framework in delineating the character's flaw with a catch. Chamberlain writes that enabling “a catch . . . can provide a relentless assault against your protagonist due to their Flaw…”\(^{52}\) Chamberlain determines
that Michael Dorsey’s flaw is that he needs to respect women and is challenged in that by having to pretend to be a woman. Paul Gulino notes that “[m]idway through Tootsie (1982), Michael Dorsey reaches a pinnacle of career success, but he is living a lie and doesn’t have a romantic relationship with Julie….” Undeterred, Michael takes a chance when he bumps into her at a party he repeats the line that she has told Dorothy, in wishing men were honest with what they want: “You know, I could lay a big line on you, and we could do a lot of role-playing, but the simple truth is that I find you very interesting and I’d really like to make love to you,” whereupon Julie throws a drink in his face. Michael’s want (to showcase his talents as a serious actor) has shifted from the play to dating Julie. Blake writes: “[The protagonist] is moving toward the girl, the job, the new life and here, by the midpoint, there will also be a hint of that ending.” For the character of Michael his want is at odds with his need and as such I posit that some degree of tension between the want and need must occur at the MP in the comedy film.

The Midpoint and its ‘Bind’ in film comedies

Giglio writes “…. at the midpoint of the story something will happen … that is going to get [the character] on the path to becoming whole, and repairing whatever is really wrong with them emotionally, inside.” Marks offers that the MP is when the protagonist begins to face their obstacle, be it an internal or external fatal flaw:

At the midpoint of the A story something happens that shifts the external action out of resistance and points the protagonist toward resolving the conflict of the plot…It is not the physical action but the internal reaction to the midpoint that opens up the new idea or new thought that allows the protagonist to move forward toward resolving the conflict….This new self-awareness, or enlightenment, comes about because the protagonist has begun to see how his or her own behaviour (fatal flaw) impacts resolving the conflict.

54 Blake, Writing the Comedy Movie, as before, p. 45.
55 Giglio, Writing the Comedy Blockbuster, as before, pp. 157-8.
56 Marks, Inside Story, as before, p. 235.
Ted Wilkes and Phil Hughes define the MP as the ‘keystone’ scene – the scene that the film cannot do without. It may be the high point or the low point, it may reveal some information or emotional truth, but it is the scene around which the film hinges; often there is an admission or revelation that enables the second half of Act Two to be sustained. The keystone scene in *Tootsie* is when Michael uses the very line on Julie that she had confided to Dorothy as it challenges Michael to stop the masquerade, and which he finds increasingly difficult to do.

John Yorke posits that the MP “… is the moment when each protagonist embraces for the first time the quality they will need to become complete in order to finish their story.” Furthermore, Yorke writes: “the midpoint is when the character’s need will overcome their want for the first time.” As we have seen, the MP is the point when the protagonist thinks they are close to getting their want (the girl in Michael Dorsey’s case), yet in the scenes surrounding this moment the characters may also be presented with their need; it is by attempting to hold both aspects that a form of ‘bind’ is created. The attempt to hold onto the want (to raise funds or have the girl) while simultaneously denying the need (to be honest, or to respect women truthfully), results in actions that impair behaviour, prompting the character to act in more extreme measures until the inevitable demise at the end of Act Two.

Script consultant Marks writes “[s]ince the fatal flaw of character comes directly out of the writer’s thematic point of view, it is that thematic content that is specifically expressed at the midpoint. This is the truth that the protagonist begins to understand.” Closely examining the relationship between tension and theme, Mabley and Howard offer that the theme of *Some

59 Yorke, as before, p.138.
60 Marks, *Inside Story*, as before, p. 235.
*Like It Hot* (1959) is masquerade where the protagonists (Joe and Gerry) dress as girls to “hide” in an all-female band enroute to Florida. Claire Mortimer writes that “[t]he nature of incongruity of the situation, the exaggerated nature of the mix-up, hinging on the narrative devices of coincidence and misunderstandings, add resonance to the comedy.”

Returning to *Tootsie* (1982), the high point of the film is the celebrity status of “Tootsie,” the diminutive name for Dorothy Michaels. The photo shoot for the cover of *Time* brings Michael/Dorothy fame and wealth, the original goal (money for the play). Masquerading as a woman in a TV Soap is also a subversion of being a serious actor, thus creating both comic discrepancy and dramatic irony. Michael’s secondary need is to stop living a lie and until he faces his flaw (to love another without deceit) whilst harbouring feelings for Julie, he is caught in a bind of ironic tension. Utilising the sequence approach, in sequence #5 (labelled as ‘friendship or love is in the air’), Dorothy/Michael accepts an invitation to spend Thanksgiving weekend at Julie’s father’s farm. Instead of facing up to his need, Dorothy/Michael not only becomes closer to Julie (and therefore falling more in love with her as Michael), but Julie’s father also falls for Dorothy. The bind is now operating on multiple levels. Gulino notes that the “resolution at the end of *Tootsie*, [Michael’s] situation is the mirror opposite: he has lost his career but is no longer living a lie and has a tentative romantic relationship with Julie.” The resolution plays out the irony that Michael became a better man by being a woman.

In *Some Like It Hot*, at the MP, Joe has adopted a new disguise as the wealthy son of an oil baron to attract Sugar, one of the band members, who in turn lies about her family history to secure what she believes is a millionaire. Deceit and masquerade underscore the scene as they each try to impress the other – he with his ‘wealth’ and boat and she with her

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63 Gulino, as before, p. 16.
musical attributes – culminating with the film’s title:

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

JOE: Does that mean you play that very fast music…

Jazz?

SUGAR: Yeah. Real Hot.

JOE: Oh. I guess some like it hot….

Both characters are being deceptive to get what they want. Taking Frank Daniel’s approach that theme is reflected at the MP, I posit that the theme of Some Like it Hot is ‘nobody’s perfect’ – none of the characters are who they say they are except for Osgood the ageing tycoon. The narrative utilises masquerade as a mean to an end. This film is a good example of a comedy wherein the goal shifts from needing money to escaping the mob after witnessing the Valentine’s Day Massacre to love – in its various guises. By the time the masquerade is exposed, Sugar has fallen in love with the ‘wealthy’ Joe, and his buddy, Gerry, has captured the heart of an ageing tycoon; the guy gets his girl, the deceit is exposed, and the fool has completed their journey. As Joe has subverted the narrative, he also has been subverted in his masquerade, in not being who he really is, whereas Gerry has been subverted by the narrative – his masquerade entrapped him in Osgood’s gaze.

Consider now the Nancy Meyers film It’s Complicated (2009). A night of passion occurs between two ex-partners after they both get drunk while visiting New York to attend their son’s graduation. Jane, the ex-wife of Jake Adler, needs assurance as to whether to continue with the affair and consults her therapist who encourages her to “let go.” The next sequence begins with Jake at the fertility clinic (under pressure from his younger wife to produce more productive semen), when Jane calls to invite him for lunch and “room service” at an upmarket hotel – the theme of complication is established. By the conclusion of the

64 Some Like It Hot, as before. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I0EUKhO7vk (accessed 26.10.21).
66 Because of her curiosity Jane is receptive to Jake’s advances after the first night and is the keystone scene as it delivers information that the narrative post that point is dependent on.
keystone scenes, Jake has fainted from taking too much Flomax, a doctor is called, and it is revealed that he is taking another medication to increase his sperm count. The doctor, looking quizzically at Jane, and presuming she is the wife, responds with a shrug: “I like a lot of semen.” Interspersed in these scenes is their future son-in-law, Harley, in the hotel lobby with his bride for wedding consultations, witnessing each of the lovers entering the hotel, kissing in the lift, a doctor arriving, asking for Mr. Adler, then leaving, indicating to the receptionist that all is well. During this sequence the hapless Harley is in a state of anxiety about whether to tell the bride-to-be that he has just witnessed the possible death of one of her parents.

Jake’s health scare brings the adulterous couple closer and though Jake had left their marriage ten years before, Jane confesses that she believes he had never given up on them. The confession (the MP) exposes Jane’s curiosity as to whether there is some unfinished business, in addition to foreshadowing the final scene between the two protagonists where they resolve past and current misdemeanours. The affair becomes established at the MPR when Jane turns down an invitation from her architect, and potential love-interest, to have dinner with Jake who then fails to attend due to his wife’s change of plans. By the MPR both Jane and her future son-in-law are caught in a bind, creating a double layer of ironic tension. The scenes that set up the MP, the actual MP and MPR together comprise the keystone/bridge scenes. As such, I take the view, and supporting Wilkes and Hughes, that the MP forms part of the keystone scenes that hold up the narrative. The MP tells us much about the character’s fatal flaws and the needs they must face as well as the behaviour that will dictate the falling action of Act Two. To face the MPR is for the character to become aware of the need which now confronts them, as such the MP is the scene that exposes the truth about something, either by the protagonist, or as a result of an event that happens to them. The MPR triggers the falling action, whilst giving insight to the flaw that the protagonist must face, yet which I posit they deny.

67 Ted Wilkes and Phil Hughes, ‘Mastering the Midpoint’, as before.
In *The Proposal* (2009), Andrew, the co-protagonist, a put-upon assistant to an alpha female head editor, Margaret, has a goal to become an editor, and in a deal with Margaret agrees to marry her as her Canadian visa has expired. The couple are in a self-imposed bind of faking their relationship as they go to visit Andrew’s family in Alaska for his grandmother’s 90th birthday. Towards the MP an eagle swoops down in the manicured lawn when Margaret is taking a call on her phone and takes the new family puppy which Margaret has accidentally let out of the house; she saves the dog, but the eagle takes her phone, wherein she offers up the dog in exchange for the phone – to no avail. At the MP Andrew is challenged by his father to give up his dream of writing and come back to their town and run the numerous businesses that the family own. Margaret’s MP is when she sees Andrew with his ex-girlfriend and realises he is a good person and how much Andrew’s family love him. In the sequence following the MP, after a series of misadventures around the bathroom, they run into each other naked and ‘love is in the air.’ However, as the wedding is about to take place, Margaret exposes the deception – the bind for them both (how to lie about love) now becomes his (how to face his family when the lie is exposed) and which he is forced to confront, while Margaret accepts that she will be deported back to Canada. The twist is that Andrew realises he actually does love Margaret and she realises he and his family have opened up feelings in her, long repressed after the loss of her parents at sixteen. While both characters have clear goals, Andrew’s need is to stand up to his father and pursue his dream of writing, and Margaret’s need is to tap into emotions that have been dormant for many years as well as let go of her original goal of getting a visa – which she does and in doing so undergoes a greater transformation.

However, in *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), another text with two protagonists where both characters have a want, only one character, Harry, must face his need – that he is in

69 Sequence #5 is labelled as the ‘love’ sequence in romantic comedies and ‘friendship sequence’ in comedy romances. See Appendix for summary of sequences.
love with the woman who is also his best friend. This relationship tests Harry’s own assumption (and the film’s theme), that women and men cannot be friends “as sex always gets in the way,” which is exactly what happens. At the MP, Sally’s performs an orgasm in the diner to prove to Harry that women ‘fake it.’ This humiliating display exposes, in a very public way, Harry’s own confidence in his ability to satisfy a woman; his flaw is his hubris in believing he always gives women what they want (not what they need, and in this case, friendship). The MP is the point when the bind of the main character is at its most intense and threatens to expose the character’s deepest fears. While Sally and Harry both confront their fears, only Harry is caught in a bind between his want (to satisfy women) and need to love a woman fully, who is also his best friend.

While in relationship comedies there is a need for both parties to undergo some change to find that ‘happy’ middle ground, yet one or both characters are caught in a bind between their want and need. I now argue that the bind is not only the result of a want and need at odds with each other, but also made more intense when the want shifts from a tangible goal to a relationship.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

By critically examining and comparing two different feature length versions of Dad’s Army I find that the unity of action, wherein character and plot are intertwined, is maintained in the first version but split in the latter film resulting in there not being a bind for the protagonist at the MP. First, I discuss various film comedies and the bind.

In The 40-Year-Old Virgin (2005), Andy, the protagonist, has been discovered by his co-workers at a Tech store that he is a virgin. The MP comes when Andy asks Trish, the e-bay store owner across the street, out on a date after his colleagues set him up with a transvestite

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prostitute which horrifies him. Andy and Trish go on a date and later that night they are in a passionate embrace when Trish says she will go to the bathroom and for Andy to help himself to the condoms in the side drawer. Anxiety sets in as Andy has not learnt how to put on a condom, let alone master sex. While Trish is in the bathroom, Andy attempts to practice the slip on when Trish’s daughter bursts into the room and sees the multiple condoms strewn across the bed, bringing the (potential) events to a screaming and embarrassing halt. Andy is now confronted by both his want (to have sex with the woman he loves) and his need (to admit his virginal state). Trish throws Andy a lifeline at the MPR about sex not being the most important thing in a relationship and she would be happy to take it slow. This is when Andy should confront his secret (flaw) yet does not. The couple agree on dating for twenty dates with no sex. During that time, Andy attempts to address his lack of experience by offering to take Trish’s daughter to a sex education class, resulting in more comical moments and exposing his lack of knowledge about basic human anatomy. Having spent time with Andy and seeing that he makes her mother happy, the daughter has figured out Andy is a virgin and confronts him; he begs her not to tell Trish – the bind is verbalised. Here the need for Andy to admit he is a virgin manifests as behavioural flaws exposed in the sex education class and subsequent events when Trish finds a stack of pornographic videos in his flat (on loan from one of his co-workers trying to educate him). Trish now thinks Andy is some sort of sexual deviant and drives off. Andy pursues Trish on his bicycle, resulting in a collision with a billboard (advertising ‘Eruption’ perfume). Trish, sees the crash, is panicked and rushes to help Andy; lying on the road Andy finally confesses that he is a virgin. This is the crisis (when the comic protagonist fears he will lose all) and the TP into Act Three. By not verbalising his need to admit he is a virgin when he had the chance at the MPR, Andy’s bind drives the comic tension in the second half of Act Two.
Critically examining the ensemble film comedy *Bridesmaids* (2011), the bridal party are forced off a flight due to the chief bridesmaid, Annie’s antics. In the bus back home, Lillian, the bride, tells Annie that maybe Helen (Annie’s antagonist) should now organise the bridal shower and pre-wedding events. The truth-teller, often portrayed as best-friend, sibling, or mentor, forces the protagonist to face a truth and is often the flashpoint of the emotional tension for the protagonist. Without this scene the falling action in the second half of Act Two cannot happen. While I have argued that the echo character is essential for the comedy in the sitcom, the truth-teller (such as Lillian) is essential for giving the audience a moral centre from which all the other characters deviate. When Helen throws a Parisian-themed bridal shower (a suggestion by Annie in the opening scenes) along with the gift of a trip to Paris for Lillian’s dress fitting, Annie trashes the party in a fit of jealous rage. While this MPR is Annie’s response to the MP, it also manifests her anger at losing her friendship, yet without any remorse or acceptance of her actions in causing the situation. Annie not only denies accepting or responding to the moment of truth, but she falls into a slump and treats the love-interest (local policeman) with disdain, despite indicating the desire for a relationship with an ill-suited lothario; her bind and its cognitive dissonance affects her relationship with both Lillian and a potential suitor.

In the Australian film, *Muriel’s Wedding* (1994) Muriel’s friend, Rhonda, discovers she has a tumour after a fall fooling around with a guy. Rhonda asks Muriel to promise that she will not be sent back to Porpoise Spit in small town Queensland, a state in northern Australia. Muriel, convinced Rhonda will walk again, confesses that since moving to Sydney from

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73 The sitcom character suffers cognitive dissonance because the MPR never appears and if it does (as in the on-off relationship of Rachel and Ross in *Friends*) then it is avoided or side-tracked by events, thus enabling repeatability. *Friends*, creators David Crane, Marta Kauffman, prods. Bright/Kauffman/Crane Productions, Warner Bros. Television (USA: NBC, 1994-2004).

Porpoise Spit and living with Rhonda, she no longer listens to ABBA songs because her life is as good as *Dancing Queen*, declaring that she will not let Rhonda go back to Porpoise Spit. However, Muriel continues in an addiction to wedding attire as a means of fantasy-based escapism; she visits different bridal shops with stories of sick or dying relatives so that she can have her photo taken in her wedding dress of choice. In the scenes leading up to the MP, Muriel is in another bridal shop delivering a new lie, intercut with wheelchair-bound Rhonda discovering a photo album displaying Muriel’s array of bridal outfits. Muriel’s bind is her conviction that Rhonda will walk (thereby absolving her of any responsibility if Rhonda does not walk again) with a dream (goal) to get married. This character denies any responsibility to her friend, Rhonda or herself as to who is suitable to marry. Muriel’s flaw is that she denies the truth about herself and her life; the manifestation of this flaw is set up at the end of Act One when she cashes a blank cheque given to her by her hapless mother in an effort to get Muriel a ‘real job’ selling beauty products.

Rhonda goes to the bridal shop and confronts Muriel, demanding why Muriel has kept her impending wedding to Tim Sims secret (Muriel’s first lie of being engaged). Rhonda mistakenly believes this is the reason for the photo album stuffed with polaroid photos. Muriel, trapped in the fitting room like a caged animal, declares that there is no Tim Sims. Rhonda asks: “Why the wedding album?” Muriel decries “Because I want to get married. I’ve always wanted to get married, if I can get married, it means I’ve changed, I’m a new person.” “How?” asks Rhonda. “Because who’d want to marry me?” wails Muriel, going on “…in Porpoise Spit no one would even look at me, but when I came to Sydney and became Marial [her new name], Bryce asked me out and that proves that I’m already different than who I was, and if someone wants to marry me, I’m not her anymore, I’m me.”75 This character believes that by getting married she will be a new person – her goal is clear. Muriel’s need is to accept who she is and

75 *Muriel’s Wedding*, as before (1994) 52’30”.

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not force change by way of her name, stealing, lying or by getting married and to acknowledge
that she has a good and loyal friend staring at her in the form of the wheelchair bound Rhonda.
Refusing to acknowledge her need, Muriel agrees to marry a South African swimmer who
requires Australian citizenship to compete in the next Olympics. Muriel gets married with the
local girls from Porpoise Spit who made her life hell, now sycophantic bridesmaids; she loses
the friendship with Rhonda, who is now forced back to Porpoise Spit to be cared for by her
mother. When Muriel’s mother dies (suspected suicide), at the funeral Muriel realises she has
become like her father, an attention-seeking fake; she leaves the sham marriage and rescues
Rhonda from the clutches of her mother and false friends.

Turning now to a sitcom reworked as a film to closely examine the nature of the MP.

*Dad’s Army: The Movie*, produced in 1971 during the series, maintains the same characters
and actors; the narrative is the backstory for the series and how each of these characters came
to join the Home Guard. The story is a traditional three act structure with the inciting incident
triggered by a government call to sign up; these scenes are intercut with the German plan to
invade England, underpinned by the incongruity of the capabilities of this band of men
underpinned by music signalling that the film is a comedy. After a series of mishaps which
include driving a steam roller through the training camp, flattening the tents and cooking
utensils, this bunch of comic fools still manage to rescue the local mayor who has been
kidnapped by the Germans. In the 1971 film, at the MP Wilson and Mainwaring are silhouetted
in a wide shot of a sunset:

WILSON: It’s a beautiful sunset Sir.

MAINWARING: It’s a beautiful land Wilson. They’re not going to get it, you know. They’re not going to get their hands on it. We shall fight
to the last. We’ll keep firing until we have one round each. We shall then save that for ourselves. By the way how much ammunition have
we got?

WILSON: One round each Sir.?”

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76 *Dad’s Army*, wrs. Jerry Perry, David Croft, as before (1971).

77 *Dad’s Army*, as before (1971), 47’02.”
This last line epitomises both the comic incongruity of what the group can achieve and the theme of the film: the odds are stacked against this band of delusional fools – an army of dads.

In the scene prior to the MP, the men build a barricade of household furniture in response to the bell ringing from the church that is mistaken for an invasion warning. The comedy emerges from the character’s motivation, in opposition to the reality of the situation: they want to save the country but are incapable of even gathering simple intelligence, such as the Vicar wanting to have ‘one last ring.’ This ensemble’s desire to serve their country overrides any acceptance of reality in their capacity to do so, in turn denying their ability, skill and even age to achieve their goal of defeating the enemy. Their real need – to accept their limitations – remains unconscious. Furthermore, as the 1971 film of Dad’s Army was produced during the series run (1968-77), the characters did not, and could not, undergo any significant transformation as that would alter how the audience subsequently viewed the characters in the sitcom. However, the group’s bind between a desire to defeat the Germans and their capacity to do so becomes evident at the MP (with one last round). By the conclusion, the ensemble is established and their transformation from individuals feeling impotent to a collective ready to fight is complete – however incapable.

In 2016 a new film based on Dad’s Army,78 was released, almost forty years after the series concluded, and offers a different narrative and character arc. This film has new actors playing the roles, each introduced in the title sequence as to which characters they are emulating from the original series. As the ensemble is already established, the plot centres on the men becoming enamoured by the arrival of the beautiful Rose Winters, an ex-tutee of Wilson and, little do we know (initially), is a German spy. The 1971 film asks the question:

78 Dad’s Army, wr. Hamish McColl, as before (2016).
‘How did this band of misfits come to be?’, whereas the 2016 film asks the question: ‘Can this group detect a German spy, and one in the attractive form of Catherine Zeta-Jones as Rose Winters’? The enemy was, until now, external, and very visible in German uniforms, but now is hiding in plain sight. However, while it is clear who the main characters are, it is not evident which characters are the protagonists and which affect the plot or be affected by the narrative.

Closely analysing the MP, Sissy and Dolly, Mr. Godfrey’s sisters, with their “wild” imaginations and keen ability to solve puzzles, are suspicious that the new arrival is not who she says she is. The sisters confront Miss Rose Winters about her intentions. While Rose is taken aback she manages to divert the outwardly dotty women by confiding that she is doing a story for the fashion magazine *Vanity Fair*. Dolly and Sissy are not so easily deterred; they discover that Rose lives in Berlin, orders expensive clothes, and her story does not stack up. The men, on the other hand, are, by now, smitten, with Wilson falling the hardest, as the two have history. While the MP indicates the theme of the 2016 film – ‘beauty hides the truth’ – it does not create a bind for any of the main characters, instead it prompts Sissy and Dolly, as supporting characters, to solve the mystery.

Gulino writes that “[s]killful storytellers employ hierarchies of knowledge in the use of dramatic irony, between not only the audience and the characters but between the characters themselves.”79 Each of the love-struck men try to ‘court’ Rose in the most bumbling of ways, like little boys showing off to mummy their cleverness, but she has the upper hand at every turn. While comic, such actions do not reveal any truth about the characters other than their fragile ego in the face of a beautiful woman. The wives and girlfriends, on the other hand, are not so blind; they see the effect Rose is having on the men and storm an evening meeting where they know Rose is in attendance. The formidable Mrs. Mainwaring stares Rose down: “I

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believe in crushing the enemy underfoot.” This scene is not only ironic, as the men are incredulous that the women do not like Rose, it also foreshadows the climax. While the 2016 film uses dramatic irony for the comedy, the tension is driven by the supporting characters, not any protagonist/s with a specific objective. The super objective of the ensemble is to defeat the Germans, and this is made ironic by the men’s continued blind attraction to Rose and delusion that they are in charge.

At the climax, the men are outnumbered on the beach by Germans. The women, atop the cliff, shoot a barrage of gunfire at the U-Boats floating offshore, forcing the invaders to retreat. While Jones shoots a man for the first time: “cometh the hour, cometh the man” and Walker, the chancer, finds the courage to “be crazy” drives a truck into the Germans on the beach, Mainwaring and Wilson do not change. Although Mainwaring sees that Mavis might be an equal and Wilson realises that his life is with Mavis and Frank, these two characters have not changed in any significant way. In the final scene Wilson and Mainwaring march down the high street along with the women officers:

MAINWARING: Had my suspicions about Miss Winters from the start.

Wilson looks at him.

MAINWARING: I couldn’t tell anyone of course. Price of leadership.

.............

Mid shot of Mainwaring and Wilson.

MAINWARING: Touch and go for a while, old friend, but we got there in the end.

WILSON: Friend, sir?

MAINWARING: Eyes, front, shoulders back. Sergeant in the Home Guard, not a sack of potatoes.

WILSON: Thank you, sir. You really are most awfully kind.80

80 Dad’s Army, wr. Hamish McColl, as before (2016).
Wide shot of the parade. Roll credits.

This final scene taps into the incongruity of the men’s actual ability and the reality of the events that occurred, whilst the dialogue is both inter- and intra-ironic. The 2016 film of *Dad’s Army* is torn between trying to remain true to the sitcom form (the characters do not change) and create a narrative that has some transformative aspect. The characters may develop new respect for the women and possibly each other but the closing line reasserts the emotional stasis of the series. As this ‘fighting machine’ group of men unwittingly accept that love and friendship is what is important they still march on in their delusion. This lack of significant change in any of the characters (including Sissy and Dolly) results in both a sense of unfulfillment and confusion as to where this film sits in relation to the originating series.

Further, I offer that the 2016 *Dad’s Army* felt incomplete because the unity of action has been split between protagonists and supporting characters, raising the question as to the premise of the film, which currently reads as ‘women see women for who they really are while men are blind to beauty.’ Additionally, the film restricts opportunity for further ‘repeatable’ episodes as the Germans (the frame) have been well and truly expelled, Pike has ‘grown up’ (as the echo within the group) and while the relational dynamics within the gang have changed, the main characters of Wilson and Mainwaring have not. The 2016 film fails in carrying any emotional tension for the main characters, which is the task of the protagonist/s, and as such I argue that the unity of action has been split – plot points related by cause and effect. To maintain the unity of action in a comedy film I argue that the protagonist/s must be caught in a bind by the MP. Thus, when reworking a sitcom to film, understanding the journey of the characters (literally or figuratively) will inform the narrative structure and plotting, including the nature of (permanent) transformative change and their relationships.
A note about the bind and its catch

The focus of this chapter is the MP and its bind in film comedies. Looking briefly at Chamberlain’s framework which posits the protagonist must be placed in a situation wherein they find themselves in a ‘catch’ at the beginning of Act Two, I posit that this is what puts pressure on the character’s need, and therefore enables the bind. While Chamberlain’s technique is useful as a diagnostic tool rather than a theoretical approach, I argue that if the protagonist/s want and need are not clearly defined then enabling a catch becomes more difficult. In doing so, it is essential to know character motivation, their goal (want), as well as the flaws that prevent the goal being attained, which are then tested by a catch at the beginning of Act Two.

Considering the examples in the textual analysis, the catch for Muriel (Muriel’s Wedding) is that she has stolen money to flee to Sydney – her life in Sydney is based on theft and lies which will inevitably be exposed. The bind comes when she is confronted with the first lie and its subsequent actions, which she denies until the funereal of her mother. The catch for Andy (40-Year-Old Virgin) is that his friends have discovered he is a virgin and set about getting him some action, but he only wants to have sex with the woman he loves – except he does not know how to do that. The catch for Annie (Bridesmaids) is that broke and single, she is afraid that she has been replaced by (wealthy and beautiful) Helen as best friend, creating a bind centred on giving up on her love of baking (and which gave her an income) and a fear of being single and friendless, all put under pressure by Helen. The catch for Michael Dorsey (Tootsie) is that he is in love with a woman while masquerading as a woman; his flaw, his lack of respect towards women, is tested in the first half of Act Two, and his bind (the masquerade and lie), increases the comic tension after the MP. In the 1976 film of Dad’s Army the catch is that a disparate group of men must protect England from the Germans but do not have the skill or equipment to fight. In the 2016 film, the catch is delivered by way of dramatic irony – the
sisters have discovered the true nature of Rose – and as such does not test the flaws of the men, in particular the main characters, other than their lack of intelligence in determining when there is an actual invasion. And while the men are blind to Rose as a spy (which may be viewed as a form of bind), there is no catch that tests a flaw of any of the characters. Thus, the catch (and its associated bind) must be related to the flaw and need of the protagonist/s – the catch puts the need under pressure, culminating in a bind.

CREATIVE PRACTICE 2

Creative Practice 2 (CP2) is set in the same world as CP1 and illustrates that when reworking an ensemble sitcom to a film it must be clear as to where the film sits in relation to the sitcom – as a prequel, sequel or span the time of the “situation.” CP2 bridges the timeline of CP1 and as such gives credence to the principle that the sitcom often sits in the second act of the film, where it replays the refusal by the main characters to confront their need. CP2 aims to explore the principle of the bind and how it plays out in a narrative centred on a discordant relationship. The focus of CP2 is to apply the principle elucidated in the analysis by writing a script that intentionally creates a bind. CP2 tests the nature of the MP, as a means of developing the comedic tension in the second half of Act Two. However, and considering Deleyto seeking to broaden the limitations of the romantic comedy, he writes that the genre must move “… beyond compulsory heterosexuality and monogamy and the happy ending”.

I decided to apply such a challenge by not having the ‘happy ending.’

Overview

CP2 is a feature film titled The Accidental Academic, and begins before CP1, concluding after the period in which CP1 is set. CP2 validates that some sitcoms such as CP1 sit within Act Two of the associated film.

Many of the characters from CP1 remain with some additions such as the Dean, Fiona

Willoughby-Baxter, while Henry (Head of Department) is on sabbatical. Henry plays the role in substantiating the frame in CP1, whereas in the feature film the antagonist primarily plays such roles.\(^8\) Thus, Fiona as the ex-wife of Ben’s brother Simon, enables both a relational as well as the work-based antagonist, particularly in relation to the gang from CP1, and in the end to Ben.

When considering transposing characters from a short form narrative such as the sitcom defined by its narrative entrapment, to the long form narrative such as the feature film, it is necessary to consider the ‘need’ of each of the characters that can undergo emotional transformation:

- Rachel (needs to face her competitiveness),
- Ben (needs to learn to handle relationships),
- Jack (needs to be less cynical),
- Brianna (needs to be less naïve) and
- Hans (needs to be less pedantic)

I used Paul Gulino’s sequence approach and mapping Daniel’s eight sequences along with Giglio’s, and Mernit’s seven key beats I was able to develop and edit the early drafts of the outline.\(^8\) In addition, I created subcategories in the framework, ‘the keystone scenes,’ that hold up the narrative arc within sequence #4 and #5 as per Wilkes and Hughes.\(^8\) The sequences are labelled in the script and relate to those headings in the list of sequences in the Appendix. Considering Chapter Two and the discussion on film comedies about relationships, I felt the protagonists most suited to such a narrative would be Ben and Rachel, as these two have history and needs that can undergo transformation in more overt ways.

\(^8\) This is the reason why antagonists in comedy series do not work, as their role is to maintain a frame not simply be an antagonist to the main character/s.


CONCLUSION

This chapter has determined, by way of elucidating a trend in film comedies, the existence of a bind at the MP for the protagonist/s.\textsuperscript{85} The bind is born of a tension that exists between a desired goal (want), a need at odds with the goal, and is manifested by an associated flaw triggering cognitive and narrative tension. Such tension is maintained by some form of lie, deception, misunderstanding, secret, or extreme denial; it is not unlike that created by the frame in the ensemble sitcom. I argue that the bind is evident at the MP to either the protagonist(s), the audience (creating dramatic irony) or both.

Further, it has been argued that if the film is set in the same environment as the sitcom, then it must be situated either before the sitcom (a prequel), as a sequel that resolves the emotional or psychological arrestment or span the sitcom’s time frame by employing the set up for the situation and resolution for some characters, in which case it becomes difficult to return to the originating situation.

However, when developing a feature film from a sitcom (regardless of the amount of time that has passed since the original programme) it assists in knowing which characters undergo transformation over the course of the narrative, and in what way. Finally, this chapter has elucidated a principle that the bind in some film comedies becomes clear by the MP, enabling the comic tension in the second half of Act Two, and must be in play by way of a catch at the beginning of the Act; these plot points appear most evident in comedies with a storyline focussed on a relationship. As such, the bind is an essential plot point in the narrative structure of film comedies, specifically those comedies with a discordant relationship or one that is yet to be realised.

\textsuperscript{85} In contrast to farcical comedies such as Meet the Parents, where relationships are established, the characters are put under pressure yet survive. There has been no split. Meet the Parents, wrs. Jim Herzfeld, John Hamburg, dir. Jay Roach, prods. Nancy Tenenbaum, Jay Roach, et al. (DreamWorks Pictures, 2000).
THE ACCIDENTAL ACADEMIC

A comedy about accidents, love and confusion in middle age.

Written by

Deborah Klika

Creative practice 2

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Supervisors and Script Editors:
Simon van der Borgh
Kristyn Gorton
CHARACTERS

BENJAMIN BAXTER, 48
RACHEL KOZLOWSKI, 52
SIMON BAXTER, 54
FIONA WILLOUGHBY-BAXTER, 50
LUCIANA FONSECA, 35
MERYL STREET, 55
FERGAL DEMPSEY, 32
JACK KERR, 59
BRIANNA WILLIAMS, 28
CHELSEA CHUNG-BAXTER, 39
LANDLADY, GILLIAN PATerson, 65
NEIGHBOUR, LINDSAY LONG, 45
MAX, STUDENT, 19
ANGELA, CAFE OWNER, 60+

STUDENTS

FILM TECHNICIANS (IN THE CLUB)
ACT ONE

SEQUENCE #1 (THE (COMEDIC) WORLD)

Opening titles: A sweeping shot of the Sydney coastline. On the ocean:

The Accidental Academic

Pull out from image of ocean, morphs to what looks like a set (green screen) with Lego figures. A hand begins to move the figures as the shot widens to...

INT. APARTMENT. DAY

BEN BAXTER, 48, moves Lego figures around on the ‘set’. There is a script with notes and shots on it. Pan around the room the bookshelf is stacked with books about emotional intelligence, directing actors. There are awards on the walls. Back to the ‘set’ and a Lego character sits hunched over. Sound of whimpering can be heard.

BEN gets up. Whimpering sound continues. BEN opens the door. A DOG stands there looking up at him.

BEN
So Toby we meet again.

LINDSAY, 44, appears.

LINDSAY
I just can’t keep him away.

INT. APARTMENT. DAY. A SHORT TIME LATER.

TOBY the dog looks up to see LINDSAY and BEN beginning to embrace.

LINDSAY
(looking at a piece of furniture)
I like that dresser, very retro.
Might borrow it for my next film.

BEN
From my father’s estate.

LINDSAY leaves. BEN looks at the DOG. The DOG looks towards the kitchen. BEN feeds the DOG.
INT. CLUB. NIGHT

BEN saunters into the club. Lots of people from the film industry, mainly men, some with grey hair in ponytails, leather jackets. SIMON BAXTER, 54, is at the bar chatting to a weathered film person, RUSSELL, (DoP) in his fifties and as BEN approaches SIMON cuts the conversation.

SIMON
I’ll be in touch Rus.

RUSSELL
Sounds like a great gig.

SIMON
Not certain yet.

RUSSELL wanders off.

BEN
Why is Russell talking to you?

SIMON
Catch up I guess.

BEN
Russell does not catch up. Russell only comes over when a gig is confirmed. Till then you go to him. Since he got the Oscar.

SIMON
Well people change.

BEN
Not in this industry. You got the gig?

SIMON
No. I mean yes. Sort of. Dates not confirmed.

RUSSELL waddles over.

RUSSELL
My agent’s locked in the dates. I’ll start crewing.

SIMON
Thanks.

BEN
Got the director?
SIMON
No. I mean...sort of. Drink?

SIMON signals to the bartender who nods back. BEN fidgets with his keys. Another film tech type wanders past, DEAN, on his way to the toilet.

DEAN
Well done Simon.

SIMON
(to BEN)
There’s a lot of green screen.

BEN
I don’t want to do that anymore.

SIMON
You’re the best in the business Ben.

BEN
I’m not in that business anymore. I want to depict authentic experiences, real emotions like Sirk.

SIMON
Well here in the real world, Fiona needs someone to teach green screen at the academy. They’re real people. The Future of the industry.

BEN
What a bleak future when even fiction stops portraying reality.

The door flies open and a woman stands there silhouetted. CHELSEA CHANG-BAXTER, 41, flicks her hair and strolls in like a model on a catwalk.

SIMON
On cue.

CHELSEA
Benjamin.

SIMON
Cat woman on the loose.

BEN straightens up.

BEN
Hello Chelsea.
CHELSEA
Simon, you going to get me a drink.
It’s the least you could do after what I did.

SIMON
Of course Chelsea. (Signals to barman) A bowl of cream (beat) sour.

CHELSEA
Benjamin we need to discuss the settlement.

BEN
Yes Chelsea.

CHELSEA
I think seventy per cent is fair.

BEN
I don’t agree.

CHELSEA
I hear you are off your meds.

BEN
I’m glad medical records are confidential.

CHELSEA
Not in the family court.

BEN
Or any family it seems.

CHELSEA switches her gaze to SIMON.

CHELSEA
The board needs a timeline Simon.

SIMON shifts uncomfortably. CHELSEA looks from SIMON to BEN.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
Simon has managed to get the fastest grant approval at Screen Oz. (Beat) Always beating the odds your brother.

SIMON tries to stop her going on.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
It was the director that got it over the line. T.J. Good choice.
BEN stares into his drink.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
Another family secret comes out?

SIMON
Stop it Chelsea.

CHELSEA
Why because it might hurt your brother’s feelings. I have needs too you know.

SIMON
Aplenty.

BEN
You both do. Remember?

SIMON
(to CHELSEA)
If you had any feelings you would stop this.

CHELSEA
(to BEN)
Still getting your brother to protect you?

BEN is fidgeting hard with the keys. His knee is shaking. He is trying hard to control himself.

BEN
I have emotional dys...

CHELSEA
What you have is a fear of intimacy Ben and you deal with it by ...

SIMON
Chelsea. Stop.

CHELSEA
Settle now Ben or we go to court.

CHELSEA storms off. Film tech DEAN, walks past.

DEAN
(looking after Chelsea)
She is one hell of a producer.

BEN
Hell is the word for it.
DEAN
Looking forward to it Simon. I hear it’s an actual location, not stuck in...

BEN looks bereft.

SIMON
Thanks ... We’ll be in touch. (To BEN) Chelsea will come after dad’s estate. Then you’ll have nothing.

BEN
Have I ever?

GILLIAN, LANDLADY, 65, an ex production designer, treated like a queen in this club sashays into the club and up to SIMON and BEN.

GILLIAN
Ben.

BEN jumps.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)
You’re late. Again.

SIMON
Hello Gillian.

GILLIAN
I thought I could smell a rat. Hello Simon.

BEN
I’ve got funds coming soon Gillian.

GILLIAN
Did I hear a dog barking?

BEN
No.

GILLIAN
Your lease says no pets.

BEN
I know.

GILLIAN
If you don’t pay before the fifteenth I’ll have to evict you. That’s my super Ben.
GILLIAN leaves, courteous to the GUYS who look at her in awe as she leaves.

SIMON
Are you mad. The estate may take six months if not more.

BEN
Then give me the directing gig.

SIMON
They would only accept a director... who....

BEN
... Hasn’t had a...

SIMON
No, no not at all. All the best people have breakdowns.

BEN
Name one.

SIMON
Well there’s.... And then there’s .... What’s wrong with the green screen gig?

BEN
I told you, I’m done with that. I need to learn how to deal with emotions. That’s what directors do. Real directors. I’ve been working on this with Meryl.

SIMON
Okay. I’ll see what I can do, but only if you go and see Fiona about the teaching gig. Gives me leverage that you are back.

BEN
In the real world? Academia is not the real world Simon. Look at our father.

SIMON
Precisely anyone can be an academic.
BEN
Precisely. It’s become a sheltered workshop for industry types who have...

SIMON
It’s only for a short time. Besides you’re not a has been, just an expert on a...

BEN
Break?

SIMON
Look taking the job gives me leverage to put your name forward.

BEN
It’s a world of petty arse suckers.

SIMON
Fiona will have your back. Till then I’ll pay the rent.

BEN thinks. SIMON gestures to the BARMAN for two more drinks. The drinks arrive. BEN takes a sip.

BEN
Thanks. I’ll pay you back.

SIMON
Just take the bull by the horns, and remember you know more than them.

INT. PUB. NIGHT

RACHEL KOZLOWSKI, 52 is sitting with JACK KERR, 60. He is clearly enamoured of her.

RACHEL
I’ve decided to take the bull by the horns.

JACK
And apply for the deputy dean position.

RACHEL
Good god no.

JACK
But you’d be great.
RACHEL
I’m not a manager Jack.

RACHEL imitates Fiona (the Dean) and JACK chips in as Henry (head of the department).

RACHEL (CONT’D)
(as Fiona)
Moving Forward we have some exciting news.

JACK
(in a high pitched voice as HENRY)
Yes very exciting Fiona.

RACHEL
(as Fiona)
We’ve decided to take out all theory from the bachelor degrees.

JACK
(as HENRY)
Yes who reads anymore.

RACHEL
(as Fiona)
This is a practice led faculty...

JACK
(as HENRY)
Oh very practice led, great leader.

RACHEL
(as Fiona)
So anyone with a PhD will be offered redundancy.

JACK
(as Henry)
Who needs a PhD anyway. That’s for chumps.

RACHEL
(as Fiona)
And if you don’t take redundancy then... then...

JACK
(as HENRY)
I’ll spank you.
RACHEL
(as Fiona)
I love a good spanking.

JACK and RACHEL fall about laughing. JACK takes a sip of wine, pauses then...

JACK
Rachel, that’s why we need you.

RACHEL
What to save you from having to do the spanking or getting spanked? Besides I’m sick of working so hard and getting no recognition. I’m going to apply for the commissioning editor’s job at the ABC.

JACK
(panicked)
Nooooo body could be better suited.

RACHEL
I knew you’d say that. You know the Head of Television don’t you?

JACK

RACHEL
Didn’t you have dinner with him last week?

JACK
No. I mean yes. Sort of.

RACHEL
Well you did or you didn’t have dinner.

JACK
I did.

RACHEL
So I can put you down as a referee?

JACK
No. I mean yes.
RACHEL
Besides, I need more industry experience if I am to progress in this world of...

JACK
Industry has been.

INT. APARTMENT. NIGHT
BEN watches a Douglas Sirk film, Imitation of Life, takes notes. A text arrives. It is from CHELSEA: Court has sent subpoena to that shrink.

There is a knock at the door. BEN stops the film. BEN and the dog go to the door. It is LINDSAY. She looks at the dog, then at BEN.

INT. APARTMENT. BEDROOM. NIGHT.
LINDSAY is getting dressed as BEN lies on the bed. The DOG is sitting by the bed looking up.

LINDSAY
Come on Toby. He doesn’t do sleepovers.

BEN
See you Lindsay. Bye Toby.

LINDSAY exits with the DOG.

INT. APARTMENT. NIGHT
BEN turns on the Douglas Sirk film, Imitation of Life, takes notes.

INT. APARTMENT. NEXT MORNING
BEN, asleep on the couch. Knocking at the door. The DOG looks at him forlornly.

BEN
Food better at my place? How’d you get in? She got a key?

BEN opens the door.

GILLIAN
I said no pets.
BEN
He’s visiting.

GILLIAN
I don’t care. If it’s not gone by the weekend I’ll have to evict you.

TOBY sniffs GILLIAN.

BEN
He doesn’t like to be called It.

BEN shuts the door.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY.

BEN stands at a map of the campus. He wears dark glasses and a peaked cap, looks around with suspicion. STUDENTS pour onto the campus, girls giggling, guys on skateboards, some doing high fives.

INT. UNIVERSITY. DAY

THE DEAN, FIONA WILLOUGHBY-BAXTER, 50, conservatively dressed, slim and fit, shows BEN around the faculty from the kit hub to the cafe to the open plan office. They clearly know each other.

FIONA
How’s Simon?

BEN
You know Simon. On the hunt.

FIONA
Got the film through I hear.

BEN
So he told you?

FIONA
It’s a small industry Ben. Moving Forward.

INT STUDIO. DAY.

FERGAL, 32, technical tutor, fiddles with equipment. BEN and FIONA enter.

FIONA
Fergal this is Ben Baxter.
FERGAL
Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh.

FIONA
What is it Fergal.

FERGAL
It’s Ben Baxter.

FIONA
Yes Fergal I just said that.

FERGAL
Oh my gosh.

FIONA
Will you stop saying that Fergal.

FERGAL
It’s it’s....

FIONA
What is it Fergal?

FERGAL
(like a shy schoolgirl)
He’s the green screen queen. I mean king.

BEN is obviously flattered. FIONA is irritated.

FIONA
He’s here to teach the second years film craft, green screen and the last classes in International Cinema as we move to a fully practice led degree.

FERGAL
Oh. Oh. Oh.

FIONA
For heaven’s sake Fergal will you get a grip.

FERGAL
I’ll be your technical tutor.

BEN
I’m only here for one term.

FIONA
Moving Forward.
FIONA sashays out of the studio followed by BEN leaving FERGAL in a state of rapture.

EXT. STUDIO. DAY.

BEN
I suppose you know about Chelsea.

FIONA
Everyone knows about Chelsea. She makes sure of that Ben.

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE. DAY

MERYL, 40, the therapist sits looking bored. She is a ballsy woman who has no patience for pity parties.

BEN
I’m getting my life in order.

MERYL
I’ve heard that before.

BEN
So I’ve come off my meds.

MERYL
Heard that too. Look Ben you are wasting my time and your money if you keep going off your meds.

BEN
But I’m better.

MERYL
No you are not.

BEN
Yes I am

MERYL
Not.

BEN
Am.

MERYL
Not.

BEN
Am.
MERYL
On meds

BEN
On meds. I mean not on meds.

MERYL
Am.

BEN
Not.

MERYL
Am. Not.

BEN
Am.

MERYL
Suffering disorder.

BEN
Suffering .... No no. You are tricking me.

MERYL
Just getting you to be honest.

BEN
I am honest.

MERYL
With yourself.

BEN
I want to be normal.

MERYL
Normal is boring Ben. Who wants to be normal. You are interesting.

BEN
Well interesting hasn’t helped me much. No career, no marriage...

MERYL
Careers are nothing but a fancy way of describing work.

BEN shuffles in his chair.

BEN
(confessing)
Chelsea wants seventy per cent.
MERYL
Never one to shy away that Chelsea.

BEN
She’s going to subpoena my records.

MERYL
Only by a court order.

BEN
That’s what she’s doing.

MERYL
How does that make you feel?

BEN
(angry)
What do you think Meryl?

MERYL
You need to own your feelings Ben.

BEN
I’ve got a sea full of feelings Meryl.

MERYL
Well Chelsea is just one drop in the ocean. You can do this Ben. But only if you stay on your meds.

BEN
They make me feel like a failure.

MERYL
You are not a failure Ben. You are sensitive and you had a childhood that didn’t support that.

BEN
Can we not talk about my mother.

MERYL
It’s not the mother Ben.

BEN
Then who?

MERYL
(looks at the clock)
That’s it for today. See you next week.
BEN
I can’t I’m starting a new job. Teaching.

MERYL
Oh. Really?

BEN
My father was an academic.

MERYL
There we have it.

BEN
Can’t be that hard.

MERYL
Into the abyss.

SEQUENCE #2 (YOU’RE GOING TO DO WHAT?)

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY.

BEN walks into a class full of confidence.

BEN
Good morning. I’m Ben Baxter and I’m taking International Cinema until the end of term.

STUDENT
(putting her hand up)
Sir,

BEN
You can call me Ben.

STUDENT
Sir I mean Ben.

BEN writes on the whiteboard. BEN BAXTER. FILMMAKER.

BEN
And yes I did work in Hollywood.

The students roll their eyes. Some take out their phones.

BEN (CONT'D)
No phones in class. So let’s get into groups.

STUDENT
Did you make ‘Shattered Glass’?
BEN
I did. Now let’s get into groups.

JACK appears in the doorway.

JACK
Hello.

BEN
Ben Baxter.

JACK
I know who you are. A blow in and this is my class.

BEN
But the timetable says...

JACK
Timetabling couldn’t organise a shag in a brothel.

BEN
Is this room 126?

JACK
It is.

BEN
126 Williams building.

JACK
It’s room 126 in the College Building. Students. What is the first rule of documentary?

STUDENT 1
That you have the camera?

JACK
Have you learnt nothing from me?

STUDENT 2
That documentary is the greatest film form there is. Like you.

JACK
That you are in the right place at the right time. So while Ben is at the right time.... he is in...

The students start laughing.
STUDENT 2
....the wrong place.

JACK
You might very well say that Corey.
I couldn’t possibly comment.

BEN gathers up his things and runs out.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY

BEN rushes into the classroom. A handful of STUDENTS are there.

HOLLIE
We thought the class was cancelled.

BEN
Well it’s not. I’m here now.

COURTNEY
Should you get a late note.

RACHEL appears in the doorway. BEN gasps.

RACHEL
I heard you were here.

BEN
(to the few students)
That’s it for today. I’ll pick up tomorrow. Class dismissed.

HOLLIE
But we didn’t start.

BEN
We will... next ....week.

GRAHAM
But you said tomorrow.

BEN
Yes, yes I meant that, if I’m here.

RACHEL
And I want your essays by the end of the week.

The STUDENTS leave, mumbling “who is this guy?”.
RACHEL (CONT'D)
Just one of the best green screen directors in the business.

NICK
(as they leave)
Hey I think he made ‘Shattered Glass’.

BEN
(to RACHEL)
I, ah,... need to ... get to a...
meeting.

RACHEL
Meetings, the bane of my life, I do anything to get out of them.

BEN rushes out.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Still running away.

INT. UNIVERSITY TOILET. DAY

BEN splashes water on his face. JACK comes out of the toilet. BEN flees.

JACK
(doing up his fly)
Academia’s not what it’s cracked up to be.

JACK exits. BEN sticks his head in the sink full of water and blows bubbles. He looks up into the mirror.

BEN
One term. She can’t get to me in one term.

INT. CLUB. NIGHT. (BEN’S CATCH)

SIMON is chatting to film guys. There aren’t many in the club as it is early. BEN rushes in.

SCOTTY
Hi Ben.

BEN
Hi Scotty. (He turns on SIMON) You knew.
SIMON
Knew what?

BEN
That she worked there.

SIMON
Who? Fiona? Well she is my...

BEN
...ice queen of an ex-wife. Not her. Rachel.

SIMON
Fiona might have mentioned that.

BEN

SIMON
I thought you were over Kozlowski.

BEN
I am. But that doesn’t mean I want to work with her. How could you?

SIMON
I was more concerned about getting you out of the clutches of Cat woman.

BEN
I’ll do the green screen gig.

SIMON
Ahhh. Sorry Bro I gave it away.

BEN
(angry)
To Who? No one is better than me.

SIMON
Well Sergio seems keen.

BEN
Do you want keen or good?

SIMON
I want someone I can rely on.

BEN
What do you mean by that?
SIMON
Well you would know.

BEN
I’m better.

SIMON
When you are on your meds.

BEN
That’s not for you to say.

SIMON
It is for Screen Australia.

BEN
How do they know?

SIMON looks at him with a knowing look.

BEN (CONT'D)
Chelsea. (Beat) No one sets traps better than her. (BEN tries to control his leg shaking) I am not going back.... To that time.... You have to get me out of there.

SIMON
Bro, see this as a challenge.

A WOMAN looks at them, BEN smiles back.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Still got feelings for her then?

BEN
No!

BEN looks back at the WOMAN. Dissolve to flashback.

FLASHBACK EARLY 2000S. INT. CLUB. NIGHT.

BEN, sitting at the bar, looks across and sees RACHEL animatedly telling FRIENDS a story. BEN begins to walk over

GILLIAN
(younger)
Hey Ben, I hear we are working together. Just like old times.

BEN
Hi Gillian, yes good isn’t.
RACHEL looks at BEN. The image rips like a green screen.

INT. CLUB. NIGHT. CONT.

Sound of text beep. BEN looks at the phone. It is from CHELSEA: ‘Solicitor subpoenaed records. Have a good night’.

    BEN
    How does she do that?

    SIMON
    What?

    BEN
    Know where I am.

    SIMON
    You need to prove to Chelsea you are okay.

BEN gets up.

    BEN
    I am okay. And I will prove it.

BEN leaves.

    SIMON
    (to himself)
    Yeah and I’m the drover’s dog. Or Bryan Brown whichever shits first.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY

A faculty meeting with FIONA in the chair. BRIANNA, young and keen lecturer, is there and FERGAL tries to sit next to her. She gets up and sits next to BEN. LUCIANA, departmental administrator, takes notes.

    FIONA
    Top of today’s agenda is recruitment. The numbers for next year are not good

    JACK
    Could that be because we have given up anything that resembles academic inquiry?

    FIONA
    So we need to find ways to attract students.
BEN
We could offer more practice based courses.

BRIANNA
I agree with Ben.

JACK
(sarcastically)
That will bring them in droves.
Like dogs to the cannery.

BEN
People these days want to know how things work.

BRIANNA
Ben’s right.

JACK
Not why stories work.

RACHEL
I think we need a balance of both.
Applying ideas to technology.

FIONA
Back to the agenda.

JACK
If you don’t have the idea in the first place what use is the technology?

BEN
Sometimes the technology gives you the idea.

JACK
Poppycock.

FIONA
Thank you Jack.

JACK
My pleasure.

FIONA
Moving forward. The deputy dean position will go live this week so spread the word. The VC wants more women. With industry experience.

JACK looks at RACHEL.
INT. UNIVERSITY CAFE. DAY.

RACHEL
Moving forward.

JACK
Into the abyss of practice based courses.

RACHEL
Why are they so afraid of ideas?

JACK
Probably because they have none of their own.

RACHEL
I didn’t get an interview.

JACK
(not surprised)
Sorry to hear that.

RACHEL
How did you know?

LUCIANA sidles up to them.

LUCIANA
Well that was a fun meeting.

JACK
Barrel of laughs. God where does she get off?

JACK and RACHEL riff about the Dean.

LUCIANA
I think you need to get out more Rachel. Time to start dating.

RACHEL
(scoffs)
Men in their 50s want women in their 30s and men in their 60s want women in their 40s and men in their 70s want a nurse maid. Not that I’d know.

JACK
Not if you are the deputy dean. Some men like women with power.
ACT TWO

SEQUENCE #3 (IT’S A MAD MAD WORLD)

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY

RACHEL arriving at the university carrying numerous bags. Ben sees her and tries to catch up. Students start merging towards RACHEL, she turns and BEN hides behind a building.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY

RACHEL packing up at the end of class. BEN appears in the doorway. RACHEL catches sight of him as he disappears.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM CORRIDOR. DAY

RACHEL charges out of the classroom. BEN is standing by the vending machine and watches as she sashays past. STUDENTS scurry to catch up to her and she is giving them her attention.

INT. RACHEL’S HOUSE. NIGHT.

A nice house with tasteful furnishings. Photos of grown children on the sideboard. She lives alone. Rachel is at the kitchen table furiously marking. She gets up and exits the kitchen, as she closes the door we see a dart board on the back of the door with a photo of a man and lots of darts in his face.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY

BEN is standing by LUCIANA who helps him enter grades.

   LUCIANA
   Then you have to go to ‘my students’ and the list of classes you teach should come up.

   BEN
   I couldn’t see it.

RACHEL rushes in.

   RACHEL
   Up till midnight entering in those grades.
BEN
Oh hi Rachel.

LUCIANA looks at him then her as if to say ‘This will be interesting’

RACHEL
Luciana can you book a pod for me to do tutorials. I’ve got students coming out of my ears.

LUCIANA taps away at her computer.

BEN
Can I help?

RACHEL
Teach them to think.

LUCIANA
Done. Don’t forget the faculty meeting at four.

RACHEL
Who has time for faculty meetings?

BEN
I do.

RACHEL
Wait till you’re doing a fulltime load.

JACK enters

JACK
Coming to the faculty meeting later?

RACHEL
Doesn’t anyone teach around here?

JACK
Good for you to show your face. Deputy Dean position.

RACHEL
Told you. Not interested.

JACK
They want more women.
RACHEL
To apply so they can say they tried. It’s a game Jack, you of all people should know that.

There is a buzzer. LUCIANA answers.

LUCIANA
Media department. (pause then looks at Rachel). Yes she’s in.

RACHEL looks horrified.

LUCIANA (CONT’D)
It’s Max. He needs to talk.

RACHEL opens the door. MAX stands there.

RACHEL
Max! Lovely to see you.

MAX
Sorry to bother you. Are you busy?

RACHEL
Only with tedious faculty meetings. Let’s go to the pods.

RACHEL exits. LUCIANA looks at BEN who is staring at the door.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY.

People including students going about their business, eating, walking, chatting on benches, grass patches.

INT. STUDIO. DAY.

BEN sets up the equipment with FERGAL.

FERGAL
Ben, can I ask you something?

BEN
Sure - fire away.

FERGAL
I’ve... I’ve... I’ve ...

BEN
Spit it out Fergal, the students are due.
FERGAL
Well. It’s about...

BEN
About?

FERGAL
A girl. I mean a woman.

BEN
Ah so love has taken hold.

FERGAL
I don’t know how to... how to...

BEN
To ask her out?

FERGAL
Yes. I’m so scared she will say no.

BEN
The secret is to capture her gaze.

FERGAL
Like a camera?

BEN
And like a camera you need to know the lens to use.

BEN moves close to FERGAL. FERGAL straightens up.

BEN (CONT'D)
Once you’ve got her in your gaze, then you need to lean in, like a close up, put your hand in the middle of her back.

BEN leans in. FERGAL tries to relax.

BEN (CONT'D)
Then look into her eyes. And this is the most important part. Listen to every word she says.

FERGAL
But what if I don’t understand what she is saying? Like it’s too intellectual.

BEN
Then beforehand you google her and find everything you can about her.

(MORE)
BEN (CONT'D)
Have one thing to say to her you know she is good at or keen to develop. (Beat) Like writing the best script ever.

FERGAL
But what if it’s not a script.

BEN
(slightly irritated)
Whatever you think she is interested in.

FERGAL
I don’t know what she’s interested in.

BEN
(irritated)
There must be something.

FERGAL
I heard her mention she likes romcoms.

BEN
Then watch some of those. Especially the most popular one.

FERGAL
She mentioned someone called Nancy Meyers.

BEN
Never heard of her.

FERGAL
That she was the most successful director in Hollywood and no one has heard of her.

BEN
Well find out all about her.

FERGAL
Then what.

BEN
What?

FERGAL
Then what do I do, once I googled, watched, found out about this Nancy person.
BEN
I think that’s enough for you to be
getting on with Fergal.

As BEN takes FERGAL out the door, the students stand in the
doorway looking in awe. MAX is one of them. He blushes.

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE. DAY.

BEN
I came back and she was married.

MERYL
And ... that prompted the...

BEN
Incident. But I’m over her.

MERYL
Are you?

BEN
Yes. I have to be. She’s married.

MERYL
For now. How’s it going with Jack?

BEN
Him? Fine. He’s just unhappy with
life.

MERYL
And Chelsea?

BEN
The poacher. Stole my life.

MERYL
Who else stole your life?

BEN
What?

MERYL
You need to stop living in La La
Land and face these issues head on.
Like a steam train.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY.

Sound of a steam train. Close up on bags and papers. RACHEL
arrives in the classroom and sets up. STUDENTS wander in.
RACHEL
Good morning. Nice to see you all.

BEN appears in the doorway.

NICK
Ben can you look at my film.

BEN
I’d be happy to Nick.

RACHEL
So today we are going to learn about turning points and the importance to the story.

COURTNEY
Ben I think I have corrupted my files.

NICK
Like you Courtney.

COURTNEY
Shut up Nick. Ben can you help?

BEN
I’ll be in the edit suites after lunch why don’t you pop round then.

RACHEL
(in a loud voice)
After lunch we have the writing workshop.

COURTNEY
Thanks Ben.

NICK
(to another student)
Is that Ben Baxter? The green screen guy?

MAX
He made Shattered Glass. It won the Palme d’or for short film.

RACHEL
Ben do you mind?

BEN
Not at all.

BEN walks into the class.
RACHEL
I’ve got a class. On screenwriting.
And I’ve brought biscuits.

The students all perk up as BEN walks to the front of the class.

HOLLIE
Yeah I googled him. He’s famous.

GRAHAM
Famous isn’t the only thing Hollie.

BEN
So who can tell me what a beat is.

RACHEL
(mumbling to herself)
A hit.

MAX
The moment the emotion changes.

BEN
Very good Max.

RACHEL
That’s right Max. I’ll take it from here Ben. In your essays – due this week – find an example of a beat in a scene from a film you admire and analyse why it works.

BEN
Or not.

RACHEL
Yes. Or not.

BEN
And some scenes have more than one beat.

RACHEL
(mumbling)
All the better to hit you with. (To the class). Okay I’m going to have tutorials with each of you and you have to tell me what scene and what film you have chosen.

HOLLIE
Will that help get us a good mark?
RACHEL
Hollie this is not about getting good grades. This is about learning and applying that learning.

HOLLIE
Yes but my mum wants me to get a first.

RACHEL
Well tell your mum...that...

GRAHAM
You are a pain the arse.

RACHEL
That’s enough Graham. I will not tolerate disrespect in this class.

BEN
Hollie tell your mum that you are working to realise your potential. The first will come if you apply yourself.

HOLLIE
Thanks Ben.

RACHEL
Yes thank you Ben.

RACHEL starts packing her bag.

RACHEL (CONT’D)
That’s all for today.

RACHEL leaves. BEN stands looking bewildered.

INT. CLUB. NIGHT

BEN
She avoids me but that’s a good thing. (Beat) Isn’t it?

SIMON
She’s smart. She’ll know to leave you alone.

BEN
That’s what I always liked about her. She’s smart and can read people.
SIMON
Have to confess bro, I always had a thing for her.

BEN begins to shake.

BEN
I need to go. (Beat) And... and...
prepare a lesson. Catch you Si.

BEN leaves. SIMON smiles to himself as he picks up BEN’s half glass of beer and drinks it.

INT. APARTMENT. NIGHT

BEN directs the Lego characters, and the DOG looks on. There is a bowl next to the DOG. And a lead.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY

BEN arrives. RACHEL is at her desk. LUCIANA watches on. BEN goes over to RACHEL and stands by her desk.

RACHEL
(annoyed)
Yes?

BEN
Just wondering if you had any information on running orders.

RACHEL
What?

BEN
I have to teach that today. I’m doing a studio green screen exercise.

RACHEL
Well just get them to deconstruct a show.

BEN
Deconstruct?

RACHEL
Yes. You know break it down into segments. I wrote my thesis on formats.
LUCIANA
(under her breath)
That no one reads.

BEN
Oh. Yes. I remember that.

RACHEL
Do you?

BEN walks off. LUCIANA gets up from her desk and goes over to BEN’s desk.

LUCIANA
Here’s an example of a running order. It’s from her thesis. That no one reads.

BEN
Thanks Luciana, I owe you one.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

BEN is teaching and has an example of a format on the screen. RACHEL walks past, sees it and stops.

BEN
So when looking at a show you need to break it down into segments. This is important so we know if the green screen and lighting or shot need to change perspective.

BEN then reads part of RACHEL’s thesis. RACHEL storms in.

RACHEL
Did you give me credit for that piece.

BEN
Sorry?

RACHEL
I wrote that. And you are passing it off as your own.

BEN
No. I told the class when we began that your thesis is significant contribution to the study of television formats.
RACHEL
Oh. Well yes it is.

GRAHAM
Has it been published?

RACHEL
Well. Not quite.

BEN
But it will be.

RACHEL
Carry on.

RACHEL exits. BEN smiles to himself.

BEN
So for homework I want you to look at a chat show and break it down into segments and apply the Kozlowski theoretical framework to deduce if it works which will enable us to develop the backgrounds.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY

RACHEL enters and goes over to LUCIANA. JACK is at his desk bashing on his keyboard.

RACHEL
He used part of my thesis. And tried to pass it off as his.

LUCIANA
Did he?

RACHEL
Well. He would have if I hadn’t caught him.

The media department buzzer goes. LUCIANA answers it.

LUCIANA
Rachel it’s the first years they want to see...

RACHEL
I don’t teach the first years.

LUCIANA
They asked for you.
RACHEL
(to Jack)
Why do they do that?

JACK
Because you are the best.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT/UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY

A group of eager YOUNG STUDENTS stand there.

RACHEL
Yes what do you want?

STUDENT
We’re doing a music show tomorrow and Ben wants the script but he hasn’t...

RACHEL
Let me guess. Taught you how to write one.

STUDENT
How did you know?

RACHEL
My brilliant teaching radar. Okay let’s go and find a classroom.

INT. STUDIO. GALLERY. DAY.

The end of the show with the band. It looks great. BEN stands there with pride. FIONA comes in.

FIONA
(pointing to a monitor) That looks amazing.

FERGAL
That’s coming from an outside source.

FIONA
Oh.

FERGAL
(pointing to a monitor) This is what we did today.
FIONA
Wow that looks amazing. Ben you have done an amazing job.

BEN
Thanks. You’ve got a good green screen here.

FERGAL looks chuffed. RACHEL enters.

RACHEL
Hi Fiona.

BEN
Hi Rachel. Nice to see you. I was telling Fiona that...

FIONA
Need to go.

FIONA leaves.

RACHEL
Wanted to see how the script went.

BEN
Oh great. I gave them an example to copy.

RACHEL
You? I think you will find that I did. And taught them how to write a script.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY.

RACHEL and JACK at the Kitchenette.

RACHEL
Who does he think he is?

JACK
A failed director.

RACHEL
Well he wasn’t - at one time.

JACK
Well he is now. This is where we all come to die.

RACHEL
But I like it here.
JACK
Do you?

RACHEL
Yes. (beat) I think so.

JACK
Good for you.

RACHEL
I’m an academic. Isn’t this where I am meant to be?

JACK
Are you?

RACHEL
(irritated)
Anyway he’s taken all the credit for the studio show. I helped them write the script, reduce the band to a manageable size, prepped the techs and..

JACK
Yes you are amazing.

RACHEL
What is he doing here?

JACK
Clearly to irritate you. And me.

BEN enters the office.

BEN
That went really well. Fiona was impressed.

JACK looks at RACHEL ‘see I told you he was a fake’.

SEQUENCE #4 (IT GETS WORSE)

INT. UNIVERSITY. VARIOUS. DAY

Montage of BEN trying to impress RACHEL and he fails and she ‘wins’ every time.

INT. BEN'S APARTMENT. NIGHT

BEN acts out a scene with Lego RACHEL where they are walking in a park with her.
BEN
So how’s the writing?

INT. RACHEL’S HOUSE. NIGHT.
RACHEL is on the phone.

RACHEL
It’s a nightmare.

INT. BEN’S APARTMENT. NIGHT
BEN
When will you finish it?

INT. RACHEL’S HOUSE. NIGHT.
RACHEL
I’m tied up till the end of term.

INT. BEN’S APARTMENT. NIGHT
BEN
And then?

INT. RACHEL’S HOUSE. NIGHT.
RACHEL
The new guy is sending me crazy.

INT. BEN’S APARTMENT. NIGHT
BEN
Bet he will love it.

INT. RACHEL’S HOUSE. NIGHT.
RACHEL
I’m not being competitive.

INT. BEN’S APARTMENT. NIGHT
BEN
It feels right.
INT. RACHEL’S HOUSE. NIGHT.

RACHEL
No. Something’s not right.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY.

BRIANNA sashays into the office wearing a similar top to RACHEL who is at her desk. BEN is at his desk. BRIANNA sidles up.

BRIANNA
Ben, lovely to see you. Wondering if you could help me.

BEN
Sure Bri.

RACHEL’s cocks an eyebrow.

BRIANNA
I’m teaching video essay this term and need to show the students how to use premiere. Any chance you could...

RACHEL walks past on her way out.

RACHEL
I’m sure Ben would love to show you Brianna. He loves showing off... his hardware. (to LUCIANA) You coming for coffee?

We see that LUCIANA is doing Rachel’s dating profile.

LUCIANA
Sure. Just closing this dating app...I mean the app on academic dates.

RACHEL
What the university has the dates on an app?

LUCIANA
Yes. Very appy.

INT. DEAN’S OFFICE. DAY. (RACHEL’S CATCH)

A large office with a bookshelf and not many books on it. A conference table. A desk and a window with a view.
FIONA
So how is it going?

RACHEL
Fine. Except Ben can’t teach.

FIONA
Well I’m here to help.

RACHEL
For a start he doesn’t have lesson plans. He doesn’t follow the learning planner and I doubt he has even read the handbook.

FIONA
He’s finding his feet.

RACHEL
What has academia become? A sheltered workshop for industry professionals who can’t make it?

FIONA
You are a valued member of this faculty Rachel. You work hard and you deliver results. (Beat) For the students.

RACHEL
Well the students are what I love most. I did get nominated for teacher of the year.

FIONA
Sorry to hear about the commissioner’s job.

RACHEL
How did you know? (Beat) Oh yes it’s a small industry.

FIONA
Have you thought about applying for the deputy dean position?

RACHEL
Won’t Henry be applying?

FIONA
I doubt it. He’s having too much fun on sabbatical – got a new play up. Besides the VC wants to see more women in leadership positions.
FIONA gets up and comes around to Rachel’s side of the table.

RACHEL
Why was Ben hired?

FIONA
Are you accusing me of not following due process?

RACHEL
No. I simply asked why was he hired? Did Simon have something to do with this.

FIONA
Oh. Simon. Yes he asked for...

RACHEL
A favour? Thought so.

FIONA
But we followed due process.

RACHEL
What? Advertised the job on the same day applications closed?

FIONA
Are you accusing me of doing something wrong?

RACHEL
Just asking.

FIONA
(changing tack)
I wish more staff could be mentored by you.

RACHEL
I haven’t got time. I’m trying to write a...

FIONA
I’m working at making this faculty a collegiate environment. I’d like you’d to apply for the deputy dean position. I’m on the committee so I’m sure you’d get shortlisted.

RACHEL
I have to be short listed. I’m staff.
FIONA
Well you’d have a friendly face at the interview.

RACHEL
Thank you Fiona. I have enough friends.

FIONA
As I said the VC wants more women in leadership positions and he was very impressed with the studio show. I told him it was all you.

RACHEL
It was.

FIONA
I know.

RACHEL
I’ll think about it.

FIONA
I should mention that mentoring is a criteria.

RACHEL
I don’t have time to babysit people.

FIONA
You are a senior lecturer it’s expected.

RACHEL
Like who?

FIONA
I think Brianna would benefit from your ... your ... your experience.

RACHEL
She’s an idiot.

FIONA
Well how about Fergal?

RACHEL
He’s a technician. That’s Daniel’s territory.
FIONA
Well there must be someone you can mentor. Show your leadership potential. (beat) Age is not on your side.

RACHEL
I am fully aware of my age. What about Ben?

FIONA
Now there’s a thought. Do you think you could help him.

RACHEL
If anyone can I can.

FIONA
I couldn’t agree more.

RACHEL leaves. FIONA smiles to herself.

INT. CLUB. NIGHT.

SIMON is with the BOYS and regaling them with funny stories. There is much laughter. BEN enters.

BEN
Bro can I have a word?

The GROUP, clearly drunk call for BEN to join them. SIMON is in the full throes.

SIMON
And then he demanded a bucket ice. I know where I want to put that bucket.

The GROUP laughs. SIMON looks over at Ben at the bar and motions to the guys he needs to go over.

BEN is at the bar.

SIMON (CONT'D)
What’s up Doc?

BEN
This isn’t working.

SIMON
What?
BEN
Her. She treats me like crap.

SIMON
Well show her who you’ve become.

BEN
I can tell you, I’ve not become a teacher.

SIMON
Don’t worry about that. Just schmooze with the powers that be.

BEN
What, like with your ex?

SIMON
She does hold some sway.

BEN
I’m not into game playing.

SIMON
Well that’s why you...

BEN
I what?

SIMON
Nothing.

BEN
Go on say it.

SIMON
Just get through the year and then let’s take stock.

BEN
Year? I said I’d do it for a term. Is that why Rachel’s observing me?

SIMON
Just keeping you on track. In case...

BEN
In case what?

SIMON
Does she know?
BEN

No!

SIMON
I think she should. If you want to show her who you really are.

BEN
I am not defined by .... That.

SIMON
No. But it is part of you.

BEN
It’s not. And I can prove it.

INT. CAFÉ. DAY

BEN at the counter. RACHEL is sitting at a table working on her computer.

ANGELA
(shouting)
Two Americanas.

BEN
Thanks.

BEN goes to RACHEL’s table.

BEN (CONT'D)
Here. I wanted to apologise for you having to mentor me.

RACHEL
I’m allergic to coffee Ben. You know that. Or did. You could have asked.

BEN
That’s one thing I’m not good at - asking.

RACHEL
Clearly and now I have to mentor you. Lucky me.

Student arrives. RACHEL is all smiles.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Take a seat Hollie.

BEN stands looking like a lost boy holding the two coffees.
INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY

RACHEL arrives dressed in jogging clothes. BEN comes into the office, hair in a top knot, looking fresh, wearing dark glasses, he arrives at the same time as BRIANNA, wearing jogging clothes, opens door for her with a flourish.

RACHEL
Ben can I have your lesson plan?

BRIANNA
I see you got the memo.

RACHEL
What memo?

BRIANNA
The staff lunch time jog!

RACHEL
Ben I need that lesson plan for your observation that Fiona asked me to do.

BRIANNA
You applying for the deputy dean position Rachel?

RACHEL
No. And I’m not going to jog either.

BEN
(searching his desk)
I did it, it’s here somewhere.
(Beat) maybe I left it at home.

FLASHBACK. FILM SET. DAY

POV RACHEL watching BEN on set, lots of technical equipment surrounded by technicians. YOUNG RACHEL walks onto the set.

YOUNG RACHEL
(yelling)
You forgot. Again...

The screen rips.

YOUNG RACHEL (CONT'D)
You know how much that meant to me...
INT. UNIVERSITY CAFÉ. DAY

RACHEL and LUCIANA are standing in queue.

LUCIANA
My shout.

RACHEL
Well I can’t have chai latte, too much sugar, can’t have a hot chocolate too much..

LUCIANA
Sugar. Stop it. What do you feel like?

RACHEL
I feel invisible.

LUCIANA
I meant to drink.

RACHEL
The 50s are shit.

LUCIANA
Everyone lies on their dating profile.

RACHEL
Chai Latte then.

LUCIANA
Some see you even if you don’t. (To Angela) Two chai lattes please.

RACHEL
Thanks.

LUCIANA
He’s just trying to be friends.

RACHEL
With friends like that...

ANGELA
Two chai lattes.

LUCIANA
Thanks Angela they’re for the pity party over here.
EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY.

Students and staff arriving for another day.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY.

BEN stands in front of the class, fidgeting. RACHEL stands at the back holding the lesson plan, which is a copy of a hastily written outline. BEN has a copy of the rough lesson plan on the desk at the front and glances at it intermittently in the hope it will save him.

BEN

What’s the main job of the director.

STUDENT

To hold the camera?

BEN

Ahh. Not quite. That’s the ... the ...the cameraman’s job.

STUDENT

To have a vision?

BEN

Yes that’s part of their job.

(glances at the desk).

STUDENT

To edit the film?

BEN

Well that’s the editor’s job and the director does sit in on the edit. Think about what happens before the filming starts.

MAX

Is it to do with subtext?

BEN

Well yes that is very important Max. Can anyone tell me what subtext is.

RACHEL

(mumbling)

It tells us what is really going on.
MAX
What is really going on?

RACHEL
(mumbling)
Something that’s lacking here.

BEN
(steeling himself)
No. The main job of the director is casting.

RACHEL
Finally.

The class turns around to look at RACHEL.

RACHEL (CONT’D)
(stumbling over her words)
And if you get the casting right
you have a good chance of ...

BEN
Winning...

RACHEL
Making a good film. Now think of a
film you like and the casting - why
does it work?

Lots of hands go up.

RACHEL (CONT’D)
I think my work here is done. I’ll
leave you to it Ben.

RACHEL leaves. BEN is ashen. He looks at the desk and the
crumpled piece of paper and takes a deep breath.

FLASHBACK. FILM SET. DAY

POV BEN as he sees (young) RACHEL storm off.

ANDY (CHIPPY)
Ben I’ve nearly finished the
standing desk.

BEN
(looking in the direction
of Rachel)
Thanks Andy, don’t think I need it
anymore.
A young GILLIAN is nearby watching.

GILLIAN
Andrew, we’ll use it in the office scene.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY

Beginning of the day. Staff coming in, dropping bags, saying hi to each other. BRIANNA arrives with RACHEL. They are wearing the same outfit.

BRIANNA
Snap!

RACHEL
Brianna stop before I snap you.

BRIANNA
Rachel you are so funny. Can I ask you something?

RACHEL
How not to be a pain in the arse?

BRIANNA
(sort of laughing at the insult)
I wanted to ask if you ever get that feeling that someone is keen but they don’t know how to tell you?

RACHEL
At my age feelings are a rare thing Brianna.

BRIANNA
I think I scare people Rachel.

RACHEL
What with? A wet hanky? The only thing you scare Brianna is your shadow.

BRIANNA
So I should just take Ben by the horns so to speak.

RACHEL stops in her tracks.
BRIANNA (CONT'D)
You two go back away don’t you?

RACHEL
Just friends.

BRIANNA
Is he seeing anyone? You know in a ...

RACHEL
Romantic sense? Ben doesn’t see anyone. (Beat) Including himself. Isn’t Fergal more your age Brianna.

BRIANNA
I’ve always been attracted to older men.

RACHEL
(mumbling to herself)
Daddy’s girl then.

BEN arrives.

BRIANNA
Ben I’m still having problems with premiere.

LUCIANA
Ben Max is looking for you.

BEN
Thanks I’ll catch him later.

LUCIANA
Not sure later will work.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY.

RACHEL’S class ends and STUDENTS pack up their things. MAX hangs back. He goes up to RACHEL.

MAX
You have a son don’t you?

RACHEL
Yes Max. Bit older than you. You two would get along.

MAX
Would he ever tell you something that he was ashamed of?
RACHEL
Dan tells me way too much. I’ve made it a rule for him not to tell me about any girlfriends until he’s been with them for at least three months.

MAX
What if he told you something that you didn’t expect?

RACHEL
Max, what are you saying?

MAX
Nothing. Just something with Ben.

RACHEL
Then I’m sure he would be only too happy to help.

MAX
Would he?

RACHEL
He’s a good listener. That’s one thing he excels at.

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE. DAY.

BEN
Shattered Glass is part of a retrospective.

MERYL
How does that make you feel?

BEN
I wanted to direct a feature.

MERYL
Did you?

BEN
I thought they would...

MERYL
Would what?

BEN
I don’t know.
MERYL
You do Ben.

BEN
That they would ... would...

MERYL
Would what?

BEN
See me. Love me.

MERYL
Is it love?

BEN
I thought it was.

MERYL
And?

BEN
I felt a failure.

MERYL
But you’ve got a film in an important retrospective.

BEN
It’s not a feature.

MERYL
Would that change things?

BEN
No. But...

MERYL sits quietly. BEN stares into the floor.

BEN (CONT’D)
Is that why ... I have these extreme feelings?

MERYL
See you next week.

INT. BEN’S APARTMENT. NIGHT

Close up on BEN.

BEN
I’ve got something to tell you.
INT. RACHEL’S HOUSE. NIGHT.

Close up on RACHEL.

    RACHEL
    Miss you too.

Shot widens to see RACHEL on the phone.

    RACHEL (CONT'D)
    Miss you too.

EXT. UNIVERSITY DAY.

STUDENTS stream onto campus.

INT. EDITING SUITE CORRIDOR. DAY

RACHEL is sauntering down the corridor. As she passes one of the suites she stops. She sneaks back.

BEN is leaning over BRIANNA (close up her shoes) RACHEL looks at her shoes – the same! As she looks up, BEN turns and sees her. BEN stands up. RACHEL gives a knowing look. BEN opens the door and looks down the corridor as he is about to say something but she is gone. FERGAL walks down the corridor.

    FERGAL
    Hey Ben, need help?

    BEN
    Ah, (he looks inside) ah no. Fancy a drink?

INT. PUB. NIGHT

BEN is in a good mood at the bar, his hair is loose and long. He is having fun with the students. They are raptured by him. MAX sits in the corner alone.

    BEN
    Yes, so when I worked with Bill we had the wildest wrap party.

    STUDENT 2
    Do you mean Bill Murray?

    BEN
    He is one wild dude.

The STUDENTS are in awe.
GRAHAM
My dad was taught by your dad.

BEN stops for a moment.

BEN
Is that so?

GRAHAM
He said he was inspiring.

BEN
Is that so?

BEN sees MAX sitting alone and looking forlorn.

BEN (CONT'D)
Excuse me.

BEN gets up and goes over to Max.

BEN (CONT'D)
Hey Max you okay?

JACK and BRIANNA walks in and sees them. They wave to the group. BEN waves back. BRIANNA looks flattered. Focus on BEN and MAX.

MAX
I don’t know what to do.

BEN
Well maybe I can help.

MAX
There’s someone.

BEN
And?

MAX
I feel like jelly every time I see them.

BEN
Are they here at the university?

MAX
Yes.

BEN
That’s tough. Do they know how you feel.
MAX
Oh god no. I would die if they did.

BEN
Dying is over rated. Take it slowly.

MAX
Like how?

BEN
Well just be in their orbit, so you can bump into them.

MAX
Doesn’t that look obvious?

BEN
Not if you have to give them something, like a USB or SD card that you think belongs to them. Shows you care.

MAX
I think someone else is in love with them.

BEN
Well you need to take it easy and show that you are better than them. Let’s catch up later in the week.

INT. EDITING SUITES CORRIDOR. DAY

FERGAL is walking down the corridor. BRIANNA pops her head out of one of the edit suites.

BRIANNA
Hi Fergal. Do you know where Ben is?

FERGAL stops when he hears Ben’s name.

FERGAL
Why?

BRIANNA
I need help with premiere. I can’t edit this scene of Casablanca for my class.

FERGAL
I can help with that.
INT. EDIT SUITE. DAY.

FERGAL is tapping away at the computer looking at the screen.

BRIANNA
Did Ben ask about me?

FERGAL
Why would he?

BRIANNA
Well you seem to spend a lot of time with him. Did he teach you how to master this?

FERGAL
No. I am self taught.

FERGAL presses lots of buttons,

FERGAL (CONT'D)
So what are you trying to do?

BRIANNA
I want the final scene from Casablanca. The one where...

FERGAL
Ilsa thinks she is staying with Rick and Victor is going. Rick has done a deal with Victor.

FERGAL looks intently at BRIANNA.

BRIANNA
Yes that one. Ben is going to do that one in his camera class.

FERGAL
I could teach that class.

FERGAL moves closer to BRIANNA, who is uncomfortable.

BRIANNA
Fergal what are you doing?

FERGAL
Nothing. Nothing.

FERGAL goes back to tapping on the computer. The scene from Casablanca begins to play.
BRIANNA
Thanks Fergal. That’s it. Airbridge it to me.

BRIANNA flees.

INT. CAFE. DAY

RACHEL stands in line with LUCIANA.

RACHEL
My shout.

LUCIANA
What do you want?

RACHEL
Nothing. Why would I want something?

LUCIANA
You only give to get Rachel.

RACHEL looks shocked.

RACHEL
Do I?

LUCIANA
We all do, you’re just bad at covering it.

RACHEL
Am I?

LUCIANA
You have no idea how transparent you are. (imitating Rachel). I am not competitive.

RACHEL
I am not.

LUCIANA
And the denial continues. That lesson plan you gave Ben.

RACHEL
It helped him.

LUCIANA
Did it?
RACHEL
Not my fault that he didn’t understand the basics of teaching.

LUCIANA
Not your fault! And when you took over the class, not your fault?

RACHEL
I was helping out.

LUCIANA
Were you?

RACHEL
I am the better teacher.

LUCIANA
Finally confessions of a narcissist.

RACHEL
I did get nominated for teacher of the year.

LUCIANA
After you knocked everyone else out of the park.

RACHEL
What are you getting at Luciana?

LUCIANA
Did you apply for the deputy dean position?

RACHEL
I might have.

LUCIANA
And what about that writing fellowship I gave you.

RACHEL
I’m too old for that.

LUCIANA
But not to create havoc in your life?

RACHEL
I like it here.
LUCIANA
Do you? When did you last see Dan?

RACHEL
Who?

LUCIANA
Your son.

RACHEL
What are you doing Luciana?

LUCIANA
Getting you to see that you have another life to live.

RACHEL
I’m in my 50s, menopause is knocking, and women in my age bracket are the fastest demographic of homelessness in this country.

LUCIANA
You own your home.

RACHEL
And I need to feed myself.

LUCIANA
But not your soul?

RACHEL
Stop it Luciana. I am happy.

LUCIANA
Are you? Flat white please.

RACHEL
(to Angela)
One white, one black.

ANGELA
Which?

LUCIANA
One flat white and one flat life.

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE. DAY.

BEN
I’m on top of it.
MERYL
On top of who.

BEN
The teaching, dealing with people.

MERYL
Able to turn women down?

BEN
Yes Meryl. Even Rachel. In a strange way she’s helping me.

MERYL
You told her that you have...

BEN
No. But can if I want to. I am top of my feelings.

MERYL
Which feelings might they be?

BEN
Those swirling around me.

MERYL
Still in denial then.

INT. STUDIO. DAY.

BEN teaching directing. STUDENTS are acting out a scene from a script. RACHEL sits at the back, focussing on an application for a fellowship.

The scene finishes. BEN turns to the students.

BEN
So can you see the difference in the performance from that small adjustment?

Students are rapped. RACHEL is smiling to herself. BEN looks at Rachel.

BEN (CONT'D)
So now we will try the same scene as if the characters are falling in love.

The door flies open and BRIANNA stands there, in a rage.
BEN (CONT'D)
Sorry Brianna is there something you need.

BRIANNA
What I need I can’t have. (beat) You.

The class stops. Everyone looks at BEN. RACHEL looks up from her papers.

BRIANNA (CONT'D)
I know what your problem is Ben.

RACHEL puts her papers aside and gets up and goes over to BRIANNA.

RACHEL
Can we take this outside Brianna?

BRIANNA
I suppose you know he has dys...

BEN, now shaking, comes over to them.

BEN
Ladies, can you take this...

BRIANNA AND RACHEL
Don’t call us ladies.

BEN
Girls?

BRIANNA
Is that how you see me Ben – as a girl?

BEN
Of course not.

BRIANNA
Then why do you treat me like one? You don’t reply to my emails or my texts. What is wrong with you?

BEN starts to shake.

BEN
I’m .... I’m ... sorry Brianna. I don’t know what you mean.
BRIANNA
You can't just flirt with someone and then not follow through.

RACHEL
Okay we need to take this outside. Students please do the scene again this time with an adjustment. (glaring at BEN). Try as if the characters hate each other.

JACK appears in the doorway.

JACK
So this is the great directing class.

RACHEL is at the doorway pushing BRIANNA out.

RACHEL
Not now Jack. We have a problem. Maybe you could help by observing this scene and .... Try to guess.... What the .... Adjustment is that I just gave them.

RACHEL looks nervous. One Student starts filming.

BRIANNA sticks her head around the door.

BRIANNA
And what about me Ben? Or am I irrelevant? Like you?

The class is stumped. RACHEL looks at BEN.

RACHEL
(imploring)
Jack?

JACK
Okay guys show me what you have.

FERGAL appears in the doorway, dishevelled. BEN flees.

RACHEL
And here's the next instalment.

FERGAL
I have to ....

BRIANNA flees. FERGAL follows BRIANNA.
JACK
Exit stage left pursued by an Irishman.

The STUDENTS look at the footage.

STUDENT
Rachel we have some great stuff.

RACHEL
You should call it Groundhog Day.

STUDENT
What an awesome title.

JACK
Yes awesome.

EXT. UNIVERSITY DAY.

STUDENTS hanging around. People going about their business.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY.

RACHEL arrives looking worried and goes straight to LUCIANA.

RACHEL
Suppose you heard about the other day.

LUCIANA
Oh everyone’s heard. What is wrong with you?

RACHEL
Me? Brianna was the ... the...

LUCIANA
The what? The crazy one?

RACHEL
Well she was a bit over the top.

LUCIANA
Does it ever occur to you there might be a reason why women act that way? Look at yourself always yelling about incompetent management, toxic cultures, and you can’t even manage a few tears.
RACHEL
It was more like a nuclear attack.

LUCIANA
That are now the grounds for a grievance.

RACHEL
Against me?

LUCIANA
It’s not always about you Rachel. No. Ben.

RACHEL
Oh well yes it was his class she burst in on.

LUCIANA
As his mentor you need to fix this. Or Fiona will come down on you like...

BEN arrives looking ashen.

RACHEL
Ben we need to talk. Shall we go for a walk?

EXT. UNIVERSITY GROUNDS. DAY. (MIDPOINT)

RACHEL and BEN walk.

RACHEL
How’s it going?

BEN
Okay. Some days are less good than...

RACHEL
That event with Brianna?

BEN
No idea what brought that on.

RACHEL
Ben, you must have done something to lead her on.

BEN
You know she can be a little crazy.
RACHEL
Okay. I’m not buying into the notion that a woman is crazy because she gets emotional.

BEN
Well you find her irritating.

RACHEL
Irritating is not the same as crazy Ben. When someone, anyone reacts that way something has triggered it.

BEN
Well it wasn’t me.

RACHEL
Ben you don’t realise the effect you have on people.

BEN
And people, some people don’t realise the effect they have on...

RACHEL
We all have to take responsibility for our actions and ...

BEN
Our emotions?

RACHEL
Yes. Look the reason Luciana has asked me to talk to you is Brianna...

BEN
Is crazy.

RACHEL
Stop with the crazy Ben. She is not crazy... she’s ...

BEN
Emotional?

RACHEL
Yes. Anyway she’s lodged a grievance.

BEN
Against who?
RACHEL
Okay. I didn’t think this would be so hard.

BEN
What me?

RACHEL
And the penny drops.

BEN
But I haven’t done anything. If anything I didn’t let the situation escalate.

RACHEL
Yes I know. But she has a right to ...

BEN
Be crazy!

RACHEL
Yes.

BEN
See you think she is crazy too.

RACHEL
I didn’t say that.

BEN
So what’s the deal?

RACHEL
Well the regulations state that...

BEN
Regulations?

RACHEL
Yes the university regulations.

BEN
What about dysregulation?

RACHEL
There’s no such thing.

BEN
There might be.
RACHEL
Sounds like a dystopian form of regulation.

BEN
And how would you feel about that?

RACHEL
Being dystopian?

BEN
No. Having some form of dysregulation.

RACHEL
I don’t. There’s no such thing.

BEN
What if you did.

RACHEL
Then I guess I would get regulated. What has this to do with the grievance? Against you I might add.

BEN
There might be a reason for certain behaviours.

RACHEL
What behaviours?

BEN
Ahh. Well.

RACHEL
Spit it out Ben. Is there something you need to tell me?

BEN
No. No. No.

RACHEL
If the grievance proceeds then you and Brianna will be in ...

BEN
In what Rachel?

RACHEL
Mediation.

BEN
What’s that?
RACHEL
A form of counselling.

BEN looks panicked.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
So we need to nip it in the...

BEN
Bud.

RACHEL
I’m applying for the deputy dean position and I need a clean slate.

BEN
So do I.

INT. PUB. NIGHT. (MIDPOINT REVERSAL)

BEN is drinking alone - his hair is dishevelled. STUDENTS come in, including MAX.

STUDENT
Hey Ben, we got some great footage the other day.

BEN
Great.

STUDENT
We’ve put the background as a castle - it looks like a Harry Potter scene.

BEN
My life as magical fantasy. Great.

STUDENT
To demonstrate green screen effect?

BEN
Keep up the fakery that is this industry.

MAX looks upset.

STUDENT
But you worked in the industry.
BEN
And I was a failure. It’s dog eat dog out there. And you are all puppies.

The STUDENTS looked shocked.

MAX
Ben you pretend you understand people but you don’t even know yourself.

BEN exits.

INT. CLUB. NIGHT. (MPR FOR RACHEL)

SIMON is at the bar. RACHEL charges in.

RACHEL
Thought I’d find you here.

SIMON
Most people say hello.

RACHEL
Still the keeper of secrets I see.

SIMON
Followed by how are you.

RACHEL
What’s he hiding?

SIMON
Or nice to see you.

RACHEL
Stop avoiding the question Simon.

SIMON motions to the BARTENDER.

RACHEL (CONT’D)
He’s hiding something. What is it?

BEN can be seen in background, with peak cap and dark glasses.

SIMON
Not for me to say.

The drinks arrive.
SIMON (CONT'D)
Cheers.

BEN gets under the table and moves the table closer.

RACHEL
Is this about me?

SIMON
It's not always about you Rachel.

The table appears to be moving on its own. RACHEL sees it, shakes her head, and gulps down her drink.

RACHEL
Well he won't last in the cesspit. There's echoes of...

SIMON
A previous time?

RACHEL
Yes. It feels all too familiar. We get on. Then we don't. He's there. Then...

SIMON
He's not.

RACHEL
And now I wonder if...

SIMON
He's going to dis...

The table crashes into SIMON. BEN jumps out.

SIMON (CONT'D) ... appear.

BEN
Oh hi. Didn't see you two there.

The three of them stand there not knowing what to say.

BEN (CONT'D)
Glad I bumped into you Rach, I need some advice. On that issue we spoke about...

SIMON and RACHEL look uncomfortable.

BEN (CONT'D)
Sorry, have I interrupted you guys?
SIMON
No bro, just shooting the breeze.

BEN
Oh good. So not talking about anything personal.

SIMON AND RACHEL
No. Not at all.

BEN
Good. Because I need your help with Max. I think he is suffering from mental health issues.

SIMON
Is that so?

BEN
Yes and he needs someone he can talk to, someone he can trust.

SIMON
What about Rachel?

BEN
Funny you should say that Si. I thought the same thing. She is someone people trust.

RACHEL
I’m right here Ben.

BEN
And someone that doesn’t snoop.

RACHEL
Hello.

SIMON
That’s right Ben she is someone you can trust. With anything.

RACHEL
Guys to earth. I am right here. What is it you aren’t telling me.

BEN
I need...

SIMON
Spit it out Ben.
BEN
Did I get the gig?

SIMON
I tried. Sorry Bro.

BEN
Not as sorry as I am.

SIMON
Time she knew.

BEN
Rachel I need help.

SIMON
Finally.

BEN
With Max.

RACHEL
Max? Tell progression and support.

BEN
But he needs you.

SIMON
He does.

BEN
He does. Will you help?

SIMON
Sounds like a cry for help.

RACHEL
Aren’t you his personal tutor?

BEN
Yes. But I’m not getting through to him. I think he’s confused... about something.

SIMON
He’s not the only one.

RACHEL
He has difficulty relating to people.

SIMON
He’s not the only one.
CHELSEA appears. No one sees her. SIMON sees CHELSEA.

SIMON (CONT'D)
Warning warning. The wicked witch from the east.

CHELSEA
And what about our relationship Ben?

BEN
That wasn’t a relationship it was a syndrome. In Sweden.

CHELSEA
I’ve been reading your medical...

BEN looks at RACHEL then CHELSEA.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
We need to talk Ben.

BEN grabs CHELSEA by the hand and walks out.

BEN
Okay Chelsea, let’s talk.

BEN looks at RACHEL.

EXT. OCEAN. SUNRISE.

INT. APARTMENT. BEDROOM. MORNING

BEN wakes and sees the dog, looks relieved. CHELSEA appears with coffee. BEN is horrified.

CHELSEA
Benji, I need to go to work, but I’ll be back and we can make plans.

CHELSEA goes to kiss BEN. BEN pulls back.

CHELSEA (CONT'D)
For a new life.

BEN
I need to.. to..

CHELSEA
Pee. (beat) I know you so well Benji.
CHELSEA blows BEN a kiss. Exits.

BEN
No (beat) you don’t.

INT. APARTMENT. MORNING. LATER

BEN feeds TOBY and then picks up the lead, looks at the door, gets a rope and ties it to the door then gets a chair. He writes a note.

BEN
Sorry Toby I’m checking out.

TOBY goes to the kitchen area. BEN gets on the chair. TOBY stands there with the lead in his mouth. BEN looks defeated.

BEN (CONT’D)
At least I can make you happy. One last time.

BEN puts the lead on the dog and leaves the apartment. The noose is swinging from the door.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY

RACHEL arrives. LUCIANA is at her desk.

LUCIANA
Thought about ....

RACHEL
I’ve filled it out okay, and sent it off. Before the closing date.

LUCIANA
Not the fellowship. A date. Have you thought about dating.

RACHEL
I told you I’m not interested.

LUCIANA
He’s nice.

RACHEL
Sure he is. Not interested.

LUCIANA
He’s my cousin.
RACHEL
Oh then you should give him to someone more suitable.

LUCIANA
His name is Ernie. And Ben’s in hospital.

RACHEL
What? Which one?

LUCIANA
St Vincent’s.

RACHEL is out of the door in a flash.

LUCIANA (CONT’D)
Sure I’ll find someone to do your class. Brianna I need you to cover for...

BRIANNA is a mess.

BRIANNA
Sure Luciana. As long as it doesn’t require being with Ben.

LUCIANA
He’s tied up.

BRIANNA
I keep falling for the wrong guys.

LUCIANA
We all do Brianna. And sometimes we have to be offered something to realise what it is we need.

BRIANNA looks confused.

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY.

SEQUENCE #5 (LOVE IS IN THE AIR/FRIENDSHIP)

Close up on TOBY going crazy. Widen to see MERYL, the therapist, by the bed. BEN wakes, groggy.

MERYL
Got anything to say?

BEN
Don’t give me a hard time Meryl.
BEN begins to cry. CHELSEA arrives waving the note from the apartment. BEN cries harder.

MERYL
Chelsea I think we need to give him a moment.

CHELSEA
He’s had plenty of moments. And he does this to me (waving the note).

MERYL
(conspiratorially)
Chelsea I need to have a private word.

CHELSEA looks at MERYL, then at BEN.

CHELSEA
I’ve been reading some books.

MERYL
I’m sure you have Chelsea.

CHELSEA
Benji don’t worry we can work this out.

MERYL
Come Chelsea we need to talk. You rest .... Benji.

MERYL and CHELSEA leave. BEN tears up. RACHEL appears in the doorway.

RACHEL
Hi.

BEN
Hi.

RACHEL
I heard you were here.

BEN
It’s not what you think.

RACHEL
What did I think?

BEN
That everything everyone says about me is true.
RACHEL
I don’t listen to other people. You should know that.

BEN
(laughing)
Yes. I forgot that... everyone else is a...

RACHEL
Fool.

There is a quiet moment between them.

RACHEL (CONT’D)
Simon told me ... everything.

BEN
I wanted to tell you.

RACHEL
Why couldn’t you.

MERYL returns.

MERYL
(looking out the door - in direction of Chelsea)
That’s her dealt with. (Looks ready to take on another) And this must be Rachel.

BEN
Can you give us a moment Meryl?

MERYL
Well miss what do you have to say for yourself?

BEN
Not now Meryl.

RACHEL
Me? What’s this got to do with me.

BEN
It doesn’t.

MERYL
Still in denial then. So tell me about how this started.
RACHEL
(looking at BEN - who is this?)
Sorry?

MERYL
The relationship. Even you two must realise ...

RACHEL
Realise what?

MERYL
(to BEN)
I thought you said she was smart.

BEN
She is. I’m the dumb one.

MERYL
Okay. At least humour me. How on earth did you two meet? Cupid must have been having an off day.

BEN and RACHEL look at each other.

FLASHBACKS - SPLIT SCREEN - SIMULTANEOUS HIS STORY AND HER STORY

RACHEL’S STORY. INT. PARTY. NIGHT. (STYLE OF HORROR)

RACHEL (V.O.)
I was dragged to a party by a friend of mine who wanted to get Simon.

Image of YOUNG SIMON holding court. BEN flirting with a woman.

RACHEL (V.O.)
What she saw in him was beyond me. I was in a foul mood and it was the last place I wanted to be.

She turns and walks away.

RACHEL (V.O.)
Until some idiot trips me.

RACHEL begins to fall.
BEN’S STORY. INT. PARTY. NIGHT.

BEN chatting to a woman, and he turns and sees RACHEL standing there like a Botticelli vision (Miranda in Picnic at Hanging Rock). The image is foggy and dreamy as opposed to RACHEL’s almost black and white vision of the party. He approaches her, she turns and moves away. As she falls he catches her in an embrace.

RACHEL’S STORY. INT. PARTY. NIGHT.

RACHEL in BEN’s arms.

RACHEL (V.O.)
He caught me.

RACHEL throws her wine in his face.

BEN’S STORY. INT. PARTY. NIGHT.

Holding RACHEL with wine over his face.

BEN (V.O.)
It was a perfect meeting of minds.

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY.

BEN and RACHEL look at each other.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY. CONT.

RACHEL
But there was a problem.

BEN
I’m the one with the problem.

MERYL
(impatient)
I’ll see you next week Ben for your regular session. (Turns to RACHEL) and you need to see someone now. You have issues.

RACHEL
I don’t have issues.

MERYL
(shakes her head)
Also in denial. Tragic.
MERYL leaves.

BEN
And Simon?

RACHEL
I just wanted to find out what was wrong. (Beat) Between ....

BEN
Us. (Beat) Me too.

FLASHBACK - FLAT. DAY. SPLIT SCREEN

BEN and RACHEL have the same flashback from their own perspective.

RACHEL is unpacking boxes, putting books on the bookshelves. Books about writing.

BEN bursts into the room with flowers. They dance in joy. He opens champagne.

BEN
I got it.

RACHEL
Got what?

BEN
The directing gig.

RACHEL does a dance.

BEN (CONT'D)
L.A. will be great.

RACHEL stops dancing.

RACHEL
L.A? I thought it was here. In Sydney.

BEN
The actors don’t want to do it here.

RACHEL
What act?

BEN
No. The green screen stuff.
RACHEL
But you hate green screen.

BEN
It’s what they offered. To test me out.

RACHEL
Well I’m not going to L.A. I hate those people.

BEN
But this is my chance. To do it..

RACHEL
Your chance! Always about you.

RACHEL storms out.
The screen widens to BEN alone in the room.

BEN
For you. To prove to you ... I am something.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY. CONT.

There is a moment between BEN and RACHEL.

RACHEL
I was never committed. (beat) To teaching.

BEN
But you give so much to it. (beat) Too much. To teaching.

RACHEL
But not unconditionally. I think I compete with everyone.

BEN laughs.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Including the students.

BEN
But they know you have their back. I have difficulty committing too. (beat) To teaching.

RACHEL
But I (beat)... they love you.
BEN
Who? You?

RACHEL
Yes. No. I mean the students.

BEN
Maybe I ....

RACHEL
Everyone in the office thinks you had a breakdown.

BEN
Maybe I just need a break.

NURSE comes in.

RACHEL
Me too. I need to go.

BEN
So soon?

RACHEL leaves. We can see her talking to a staff member through the window to the corridor.

NURSE
Time to get that caste on Ben. Lucky the cyclist didn’t take the dog out.

BEN
Where is Toby?

NURSE
That woman who just left took him.

BEN smiles.

INT. MEDIA OFFICE. DAY

BEN arrives looking fresh and clean cut, hair is shorter. On crutches with a caste on his arm and hobbles towards RACHEL who is at her desk.

BEN
How many grandmothers died this week?
RACHEL
(laughing)
About half the class. Guess dogs can’t eat computers.

BEN
You are too soft on them.

RACHEL
At least they don’t swoon over me. Or tell me their briefs are too tight.

BEN
You’re just jealous.

RACHEL
Of what? Mr. Green Screen?

BEN begins to walk through the office. As he passes JACK’S desk he says

BEN
I fixed Nick’s problem. It was in the editing software.

JACK looks stumped. BEN goes to the printer where he picks up a freshly printed Lesson Plan and exits the office.

INT. DEPARTMENT STORE MAKE UP COUNTER. NIGHT.

RACHEL wanders through the cosmetic department trying to look like she isn’t looking at expensive creams. A sales assistant has clocked her.

SALES ASSISTANT
Can I help?

RACHEL

SALES ASSISTANT
I could sell you the most expensive cream on the market but I don’t believe in doing that.

RACHEL
Oh what a relief. I just want to get a good cream for....

SALES ASSISTANT
Anti-ageing?
RACHEL
Yes, no I mean to keep my skin
looking...

SALES ASSISTANT
Young?

RACHEL
Not so ... saggy.

SALES ASSISTANT
Well these are good creams but this
one, well what can I say, it’s a
miracle cream.

RACHEL
Miracle? Isn’t that a bit of an
overstatement?

SALES ASSISTANT
Well they have spent a decade
researching and testing its
effects.

RACHEL
A decade. That’s impressive.

SALES ASSISTANT
Why don’t you try a small jar.

RACHEL
That’s probably a good idea.

SALES ASSISTANT
Can I suggest you try these
eyelashes, to bring the focus of
your face to your beautiful eyes.

RACHEL
I have beautiful eyes?

SALES ASSISTANT
Has no one told you that?

RACHEL
Well years ago, someone did. But
sadly not since.

SALES ASSISTANT
Well I think it’s time they took
notice again. They need to be seen.
RACHEL
Well I am finding that I am invisible. Oh OK, why not give them a try.

SALES ASSISTANT
Shall I charge them?

RACHEL hands over her credit card.

SALES ASSISTANT (CONT'D)
That’s a nice dress you have on.

RACHEL
Thank you. It’s from a brand in Surrey Hills. She used to work in the film industry. Sark you should have a look.

SALES ASSISTANT
I will.

She rings up the purchases. And hands RACHEL the POS terminal. RACHEL gasps when she sees the price. Swallows hard and enters her pin. She takes the parcel and hurries out of the store. The sales assistant smiles to herself.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT. DAY.

A full day in the office. The phone rings. LUCIANA picks up as RACHEL sashays into the office. LUCIANA looking at Rachel’s new ‘face.’

LUCIANA
Yes I will get onto it right away. (Puts phone down). Rachel.

RACHEL
I’ll get to those marks today Luciana.

LUCIANA
It’s not the marks. Rachel. It’s Max.

RACHEL
I’ll see him in class later today.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

STUDENTS sit in groups on their phones, some are sleeping.
RACHEL
Okay so today we are looking at mid points. Can anyone tell me what happens at the mid point.

No one answers.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
(tries harder)
Think of a film and its midpoint. I’ll give you five minutes.

No one does anything much. A few STUDENTS google on their phones/laptops.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
So last week I defined the mid point. Can anyone tell me what happens at the mid point.

COREY
It’s the half way point of the film.

RACHEL
Yes that’s right Corey. And what happens in terms of the story at that point?

Silence around the room and RACHEL becomes frustrated.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
We just did this.

BEN appears in the doorway.

BEN
Think about the beat.

NICK
Is it the moment when the character realises some need.

BEN
Think about what the character feels at that moment.

NICK
Fear they might lose something?

BEN
Yes. So what does the narrative do at that point?
HOLLIE
It shifts.

MAX
Because they are afraid of not getting the one thing or person they want...

BEN looks at RACHEL.

RACHEL
And what does the character do?

BEN
They deny the truth.

NICK
Is that the turning point?

RACHEL
No. It’s a moment...

BEN
Of recognition.

BEN smiles and hobbles away.

INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY

RACHEL sits with MAX. BEN passes by and stops. MAX looks at BEN. RACHEL looks unsure. BEN steps in.

BEN
Hi. Okay if I sit?

MAX
I thought you were going to call.

RACHEL goes to speak but motions to BEN to speak to MAX.

BEN
You okay Max?

MAX
My life is shit. I feel like I’m not living the life I should be.

BEN
Well growing up can be tough.
MAX
I’m not going through a growth spurt Ben.

BEN
I know. You are confused as to what you should be doing. I get that.

MAX
Ben I’m gay.

RACHEL
And that’s fine Max.

MAX
But I don’t think they are. There’s someone...

BEN
What?

MAX
Who’s... Gay.

RACHEL
Well they may not know how they feel...

MAX
I’m thinking of changing gender.

BEN and RACHEL take a deep breath in.

RACHEL
That’s a big step Max.

MAX
My dad always wanted a girl, got three boys instead.

BEN has a reaction.

BEN
(slowly)
That’s not a good reason to change gender Max.

RACHEL
Not that there’s anything wrong with it.

BEN
But you need to be sure.
RACHEL
That it’s the right thing for you.

BEN
This is your father’s problem not yours.

RACHEL
Changing your gender is not the answer.

BEN
You need to know thyself Max.

MAX’s face lights up.

MAX
I knew you would understand Ben.

BEN and RACHEL look perplexed. RACHEL looks quizzically at BEN.

MAX (CONT’D)
Being gay in this industry can’t be easy.

MAX gets up and leaves. RACHEL and BEN look stumped.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY.

BEN starts the class. RACHEL appears and sits at the back.

BEN
So now we are going to look at green screen which increasingly has become a necessary aspect of filmmaking. Can anyone tell me why?

MAX
To replace location shooting?

BEN
That’s right Max. Green screen, if done correctly it can open up places and back drops that might be difficult to take a full crew. Any production designer worth their salt knows this and has green screen as part of their tool kit.
MAX
Is that what you did in Shattered Glass with that scene in the hospital?

There is a long pause. BEN looks at RACHEL.

BEN
Um. Yes.

MAX
So when the main guy staggers to the hospital as the image begins to shatter, was that VFX or green screen?

BEN
It was....

INT. HOSPITAL. DAY.

A YOUNG BEN (28) is walking through hospital corridors. As the image begins to shatter, walls begin to crack and fall. YOUNG BEN runs towards the corridor that is not breaking where the walls are not crumbling.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY.

BEN
It was green screen.

One of RACHEL’s eyelashes falls onto the page. She quickly hides it. BEN looks at RACHEL who is trying to pull the second eyelash off. She stops and looks up.

MAX
Was the external a reflection of the internal?

BEN
It was a .... form of...

RACHEL continues to pull at the eyelash.

MAX
Is it to do with subtext?

BEN
Yes Max. It was all about the subtext.

RACHEL is really tugging at the eyelash.
RACHEL finally gets the eyelash off.

RACHEL
Oh. That’s better.

The class turns around to her.

RACHEL (CONT’D)
Yes. The subtext ....

BEN
Find an example of subtext for me.

The STUDENTS get out their phones to search films. BEN goes up to RACHEL who now has pink eye.

BEN (CONT’D)
You okay?

RACHEL
Yes fine. Thanks.

RACHEL gets up. Her notes fall on the floor and the first eyelash with it. She gets flustered and tries to pick things up. RACHEL rushes out of the classroom.

INT. APARTMENT. EARLY MORNING.

Alarm goes off. TOBY is by the bed. BEN wakes.

BEN
(talking to the dog)
Well Toby. It’s you and me mate.
Another day finding bits to put together.

SFX text. BEN picks up the phone. Text from RACHEL: ‘Max in hospital’. BEN rushes out. TOBY looks quizzical. There are Lego pieces everywhere.

EXT. HOSPITAL. SUNRISE.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY

BEN rushes in. Widen to see RACHEL then MAX. MAX’s face brightens up when he sees BEN. RACHEL is dressed in very grey leisure wear. She looks like she has been there all night.

BEN walks to the bed, takes a chair.
RACHEL
Bashed in the Cross.

BEN
(to RACHEL)
Why don’t you take a break. You
look like you need a strong cup
of... tea.

RACHEL exits.

EXT. HOSPITAL. DAY.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM. DAY. LATER

RACHEL stands in the doorway looking at BEN talking to MAX
holding a cup of tea.

MAX
I just want to find love. But my
emotions take over.

BEN
Yes emotions can be overwhelming.
But only we can own them Max. No
one else can. What happened to you
is not the fault of your emotions
Max.

MAX
I just want to be with someone I
love.

BEN
I get it. Not the guy thing. But
wanting to be loved. And not
rejecting those you ...

MAX
Rejection feels like you will crack
into a thousand pieces. In this
case literally.

BEN
(smiles)
Yes. (beat) Putting them back
together is the tricky bit.

BEN has flashback.
FLASHBACK. INT. APARTMENT. DAY

BEN arrives home and finds CHELSEA in bed with SIMON. BEN is a glass figure that begins to crack. BEN is putting tape on the cracks until the figure collapses. This morphs into real action in the hospital.

INT. HOSPITAL DAY. CONT.

BEN
And sometimes it is easier to do it all yourself than think someone else will do it for you.

MAX
Exactly.

BEN
But that’s not the answer Max.

MAX
What is?

BEN
Listening to yourself. Your true self. (Pause) Be kind to yourself. Time to get some rest now.

INT. HOSPITAL CAFE. DAY

RACHEL and BEN sit opposite each other silently. There are posters everywhere about Mental health, Suicide. They drink coffee/tea.

RACHEL
You were very good with him.

BEN
I know what he is going through.

RACHEL
And that is?

BEN looks at the posters around the cafe.

A GOOD SAMARITAN (a la Magda Szubanski) comes to the table, looks sympathetically at RACHEL.

GOOD SAMARITAN
(handing them flyers)
I know this can be a difficult time.
BEN
We are fine. Thanks

GOOD SAMARITAN
Accepting reality is the first step.

BEN
I said we are fine.

RACHEL
(playing the game)
Tell me what is on your mind.

BEN pauses and suddenly gets RACHEL is playing as if they are in therapy.

BEN
Well Dr. Kozlowski,

RACHEL
(slumped)
I never wanted to be an academic.

The GOOD SAMARITAN doesn’t know what to do.

BEN
What was it that you wanted to be.

RACHEL
A writer.

The GOOD SAMARITAN tries to intercept.

BEN
And what stopped you?

RACHEL
You. No. I mean me. And now you come along and you’re a better teacher than me.

BEN
And I wanted to be a painter and one day it was gone. VFX and green screen became a digital version of painting.

RACHEL
And now you are your father.
GOOD SAMARITAN
Well if you need to chat or some
advice for your wife you know where
to find me.

RACHEL
I’m not ...

BEN
She is... not.

GOOD SAMARITAN
As I said the first step.

GOOD SAMARITAN leaves. RACHEL and BEN smile. There is a look
of understanding between them.

RACHEL
I should have trusted you. Us.

BEN
Rach, do you think...

RACHEL
I need to trust me.

BEN
I wish I was more normal.

RACHEL
Normal people hurt others. Look
what normal did to Max.

BEN
They are afraid.

RACHEL
You have a positive effect on
people Ben.

BEN
I only ever see it as bad.

RACHEL
But you tell the truth.

BEN
Not to me I don’t. And not to you.
INT. CAFÉ. DAY

BEN
So I was doing the pitches with the third years and in listing what they need Cleo was struggling to remember a certain piece of equipment.

RACHEL
Like a Zoom corder?

BEN
No. (Imitating the student) Like, like you know that thing... a camera.

They both fall about laughing. MAX appears.

RACHEL
Hey Max. How are you? Since...

MAX
Good. I’ve got my life back in order.

BEN
Good on you Max.

FIONA rushes over to them. FIONA is looking imperious. And impatient.

FIONA
Ben. Ben. Hi Rachel. (To Max) and you are?

MAX
I’m in your cinema aesthetics class.

FIONA
Oh yes. Good on you. (She turns to BEN) Ben you’re on the shortlist for teacher of the year.

RACHEL smirks. BEN shrugs his shoulders.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY

The class is sleepy. RACHEL looks frustrated.
RACHEL
So today we will review the midpoint.

STUDENTS look sleepy.

RACHEL looks at the clock. It is 9.10 am.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Can anyone tell me what it is.

No response.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
You all know this. Come on.

No response. Some STUDENTS are on their phones.

RACHEL is about to speak when she has a thought.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Think about the beat. What does it say to you?

Class not listening.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
So who watched Groundhog Day.

No one puts their hand up.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Anyone?

Rachel is a bit thrown.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Ah okay.

Just as RACHEL is about to give up.

COREY
Is it the moment when the character realises some need.

RACHEL
That’s right Corey. Facing our need is one of life’s challenges.

HOLLIE
We learnt that from Ben.

RACHEL
I’m sure you did.
Rachel looks through her bag/finds a scene from The Piano. She starts to show the clip.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY
Shots of university students going about their day.

INT. CLASSROOM. DAY
Rachel turns on the lights. She is facing the class.

RACHEL
Okay in that clip when did the main character act?

HOLLIE
When they went to get the guy to help with the piano.

RACHEL
Good Hollie. What do you think the character felt at that moment.

NICK
Anxiety?

RACHEL
Why?

HOLLIE
Because she needs the piano and not having it makes her anxious.

RACHEL
Good. Let’s expand on the anxiety.

COREY
The piano gives her voice and not having it makes her anxious.

RACHEL
Excellent. So what does the narrative do at that point?

HOLLIE
It shifts.

NICK
It’s the turning point.

RACHEL
And what guides the turning point?
HOLLIE
The theme?

RACHEL
That’s right. Theme and narrative structure inform each other.

HOLLIE
Like in Ben’s film the character with the disorder, he finds life too much to bear.

RACHEL is stumped.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY

Shots of university students going about their day.

INT. EDITING SUITE. DAY.

RACHEL is watching ‘Shattered Glass’. BEN comes in. RACHEL tries to hide she has been crying.

RACHEL
Is that where you went?

BEN
I wanted to tell you.

RACHEL
No instead you .... deleted me.

BEN
I just couldn’t.

RACHEL
This is me Ben. Me. What part of me did you think would not understand.

BEN
It was me who didn’t understand. (tries to make a joke) Welcome to me. I can’t tell you how good it feels to tell you.

RACHEL
Good? Good! Do you know what this means?

BEN
That we can finally be fully honest with each other.
RACHEL
No Ben. It means I took a decision all those years ago based on what you did. Or rather what you didn’t do.

BEN
And? You became a successful academic.

RACHEL
But it wasn’t my plan. I thought you rejected me because I hadn’t made it as a writer. So I went down the theory path. Not what I planned. An accident.

BEN
My life is the accident.

RACHEL
You always land on your feet Ben.

BEN
No I don’t.

RACHEL
You only act when your back is up against the wall. Do you even know what you want in life?

BEN
How can anyone want something when they don’t know who they are?

RACHEL
This always happens in my life. I find myself at crossroads, choices to make and I never know which path to take. I take the path that I think other people will want me to take. (beat) To admire me.

BEN
I admire you.

RACHEL
For what?

BEN
Being brave. Taking no shit. From anyone.
RACHEL
And you have done that so successfully haven’t you?

RACHEL gets up and leaves.

INT. CLUB. NIGHT.

BEN sits alone. SIMON swaggers in, being acknowledged and acknowledging others in the club. He pulls up next to Ben, gives a nod to the Bartender.

SIMON
Hey Bro. Why the long face?

BEN
Why did I decide to go to film school?

SIMON
To get away. No idea. But glad you did.

BEN
Yes everyone seemed glad I did.

SIMON
You did well.

BEN
Until... I didn’t.

SIMON
These things happen bro. We all make mistakes.

BEN
Yes you did.

SIMON
She wasn’t good for you bro.

BEN
But my career was good for you.

SIMON
Isn’t that what brothers do?

BEN
Help themselves to each other’s lives? Not to mention their wives.
SIMON
Don’t blame me for what happened.

BEN
I’m not blaming anyone.

SIMON
Really? Remember the first ... time?

BEN
How can I forget.

SIMON
You were full of blame.

BEN
And then Chelsea came on the scene.

SIMON
And that’s when your life took ...

BEN
A wrong turn.

SIMON
Take responsibility for your ...

BEN
What? My disorder?

SIMON
Your mistakes. We all make them.

EXT. PUB. NIGHT.

LUCIANA stands having a smoke.

INT. PUB. NIGHT

BRIANNA is sitting in the corner. BEN approaches.

BEN
Brianna. I’m sorry.

BRIANNA
For what Ben? Breaking my heart.

BEN
Come one Brianna, I never had your heart.
BRIANNA
I thought you were special.

BEN
I’m not. I’m confused.

BRIANNA
I never seem to find the right guy.

BEN
I think he is right here.

BRIANNA
I told you Ben it’s over.

BEN
Yes Brianna. And maybe someone else, someone better will come along.

RACHEL enters the pub and sees BEN and BRIANNA.

BRIANNA
You need to be honest Ben. With everyone.

BEN
Yes I know.

RACHEL leaves as FERGAL enters.

EXT. PUB. NIGHT.

LUCIANA stands there having a smoke. RACHEL exits the pub.

LUCIANA
Running away?

RACHEL
I can’t seem to time anything right.

LUCIANA
Or see what is right in front of you.

RACHEL
There’s nothing Luciana. He’s a player and I’m...

LUCIANA
Yes very clever we all know.
RACHEL
Getting a proper PhD is no walk in the park you know.

LUCIANA
Yeah. All the degrees, books and clever articles in the world doesn’t mean you know how to read people.

RACHEL
I can read people Luciana. I teach screenwriting after all.

LUCIANA
Not yourself you can’t. Stop analysing everything and give him a chance.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. DAY
Shots of students streaming into the university.

INT. CAFE. DAY

RACHEL
Do you miss it?

BEN
Directing? I thought I would but I miss...

JACK appears.

JACK
I’ve got two tickets to an advance screening at the Chauvel. (Pause) Rachel would you like to ...?

RACHEL holds her breath as she looks at BEN. BEN shrugs his shoulders.

JACK (CONT’D)
It’s the sequel to our film - how marriage has survived.

RACHEL
Thanks Jack that seems like it would be okay.
JACK
Great. I’ll meet you at the front at six?

RACHEL
Yes. See you then.

JACK walks off. RACHEL looks at BEN. He smiles. And drinks his coffee. She smiles and drinks her tea.

EXT. CINEMA. NIGHT.

INT. CAFE FOYER BAR. CINEMA. NIGHT.

RACHEL
That was interesting.

JACK
They don’t know what they are doing.

RACHEL
We have to let the next generation tell it like they see it.

JACK
But they don’t see anything.

RACHEL
They do. We just don’t like it. Or let them.

JACK
But stories are what connect us.

RACHEL
They still come back each year to your graduate session. That shows they know you know something.

JACK
You applied for the deputy dean position?

RACHEL
Reluctantly.

JACK
Good we still have you.

JACK smiles. RACHEL is touched.
INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY

There is a cake with STAFF hanging around. RACHEL enters.

RACHEL
What’s all this then?

LUCIANA
For Ben. He won teacher of the year.

RACHEL
He’s a good teacher.

LUCIANA
Fiona has nominated him for the deputy dean position.

RACHEL
Sorry what?

LUCIANA
The deputy dean position.

BEN walks into the office, full of confidence. People cheer and say congratulations.

RACHEL
So you planned it all along then?

BEN
Planned what?

RACHEL
The deputy dean position.

BEN
I don’t know what you are talking about.

RACHEL
Again the lies. I should have known you only ever think about yourself.

FLASHBACK. AWARD CEREMONY.

REPEAT OF FLASHBACK OF AWARDS CEREMONY AND BEN IS FLIRTING WITH CHELSEA. SCREEN RIPS.

RACHEL’S POV. She sees another man –the man we have seen on the dart board. RACHEL stops.
BEN
No. (beat) I’m working on understanding my feelings...

RACHEL flees.

BEN (CONT’D)
... for you.

LUCIANA has been watching this intently and she turns to JACK.

LUCIANA
Just so you know. Henry is going to apply even though he is on sabbatical. Someone told him about it. Can’t imagine who.

JACK
Still calling mummy then.

BEN
I don’t care about the job, or Henry.

SEQUENCE #6 (WHAT WAS I THINKING?)

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY.

LUCIANA is putting mail into the mail trays for the staff. RACHEL enters - looking forlorn.

RACHEL
Anything for me?

LUCIANA
Let me check. (taking a pair of glasses around her neck) Oh yes these glasses.

RACHEL
I don’t need glasses Luciana.

RACHEL walks off.

LUCIANA
Still can’t see what’s really important.
INT. UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM. DAY

MAX, confident, doing a pitch to BEN, RACHEL and JACK.

MAX
So instead of Rick betraying his love for Ilsa he follows his heart to go with Victor.

RACHEL
So he is in love with Victor?

MAX
That’s what is not spelled out.

BEN
True love never is.

MAX
Rick decides his heart is in defeating the Nazis and not just stuck in ...

BEN AND RACHEL
Teaching.

BEN and RACHEL look at each other.

RACHEL
Had you thought about Ilsa staying with her true love ... Rick.

JACK who has been typing on his computer suddenly perks up.

JACK
After all he is the one who gave her a life.

BEN
But Rick and Ilsa had...

RACHEL
Dreams... I mean Paris.

MAX
It’s a queer reading of Casablanca.

BEN AND RACHEL
Good good, very innovative Max.

JACK
Queer is certainly the word.
RACHEL
What made you decide that Rick needs to be with Victor.

JACK
I think you have misread Casablanca. It’s about winning.

BEN
I think it goes to core of what love is.

RACHEL
It’s about loyalty. To the cause and to others who help the cause.

MAX
It’s about being with the person who makes you feel alive. Like you are Rachel with Ben.

RACHEL looks uncomfortable.

MAX (CONT'D)
I think we spend our lives being with someone who is safe, not who makes us feel...

RACHEL
Thank you Max. We’ll send you feedback at the end of the day.

MAX exits. JACK and BEN perk up looking at RACHEL.

JACK
Do you still want me to help with the directing class Rachel?

RACHEL
(looking like a betrayer)
Thanks Jack that would be most...

JACK
Helpful. That’s me helpful Jack.

BEN leaves. RACHEL looks after him.

JACK (CONT'D)
You know he still holds a candle for the wife.
INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL rushes into the toilet.

INT. CLASSROOM CORRIDOR. DAY.

Students start to gather around the toilet door. MAX is one of them.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL washes her hands and as she is wiping them with a paper towel she hears his name.

MAX (O.S.)
Ben tells me the opposite of what Rachel tells me.

RACHEL straightens up. She goes to the door to listen.

INT. UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY.

MAX
She says to forget those who hurt us.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL

RACHEL
That’s right Max.

INT. UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY.

MAX
Ben says we need to own up to our feelings.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL at the door.

RACHEL
That’s the pot calling the kettle black.
INT. UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY.

MAX
But I think she’s the one who denies feelings.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL straightens up.

RACHEL
Is that so?

INT. UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY.

STUDENT
My step dad works in the industry and tells me Ben had a breakdown.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL looks shocked. She goes to the door.

INT. UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY.

STUDENT
Over some woman.

MAX
Who?

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL straightens up. At this point the camera is looking from the top of the two areas with RACHEL on one side of the wall and the STUDENTS on the other.

INT. UNIVERSITY CORRIDOR. DAY.

STUDENT
Don’t know but Dean says no one mentions it. All he knows is he came back from L.A. and found her...
INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL strains to try to hear but the toilet flushes and someone comes out from the cubicle.

WOMAN
(washing her hands)
You okay?

RACHEL
Yes. Yes. Just, checking ... the door, the lock wasn’t working the other day.

INT. CLASSROOM CORRIDOR. DAY.

MAX
That would hurt him.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL straightens up. The WOMAN is drying her hands, watching RACHEL.

RACHEL
I did not hurt him.

WOMAN looks at RACHEL.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
I mean I wonder who hurt I mean broke the lock.

INT. CLASSROOM CORRIDOR. DAY.

MAX
Do you think he’s still in love with her?

STUDENT
Don’t know. Don’t care.

INT. TOILET. DAY.

RACHEL
I’m sure you ... don’t care.

WOMAN
Sorry?
RACHEL
I’m sure you do care about the lock.

WOMAN looks at her strangely as she tries to get past RACHEL at the door and exits.

STUDENT
That sucks.

MAX
Yeah. And I think he is still in love with her.

The students wander off to the classroom. And we hear:

STUDENT
Anyone know where Rachel is?

EXT. APARTMENT. DAY.

RACHEL stands outside the apartment. She sees CHELSEA arrive. BEN opens the door. BEN sees RACHEL. RACHEL turns and leaves.

BEN
Rachel.

RACHEL looks back, looks at CHELSEA and then walks away.

BEN (CONT’D)
I have ...something to tell you.

RACHEL stops. She looks again and then continues walking. BEN runs after her. Then stops.

BEN (CONT’D)
I’ve got ....

CHELSEA
A disorder Ben. Time to own up.

RACHEL is out of range.

BEN
Ice cuts like a knife.

INT. APARTMENT. DAY

BEN
I want out of the marriage Chelsea.
CHELSEA
But we were, I mean are, such a
good team.

BEN
It’s not a team I want to play on
any more. It costs me too much.

CHELSEA
Now we can have those dreams

BEN
What does that mean?

CHELSEA
With the settlement we can go to
L.A. chase those dreams - your
dreams, our dreams.

BEN
What are my dreams Chelsea?

CHELSEA
To .. To.. make it in Hollywood.

BEN
No. That’s your dream. I thought it
was that, but in reality it was to
... to prove something to...

CHELSEA
He’s dead Ben.

BEN
Not to me. Is that your game
Chelsea? To get your share?

CHELSEA
(angry)
No. Not at all.

BEN
You make out that you are helping
me Chelsea but in reality it is you
you are looking after. I lost track
of who I was or meant to be. I want
out.

CHELSEA stands there fuming.
CHELSEA
You act out of fear of rejection Ben, and reject others to feel in control. (beat) She won’t give it to you.

CHELSEA leaves.

BEN
I know.

ACT THREE
SEQUENCE #7 (NEW ME BEGINS TO EMERGE)

INT. DEAN’S OFFICE. DAY

Close up on BEN with caste.

BEN
So there I was on the chair. I mean on the chair.

Shot widens to see that we are in the Dean’s office. FIONA looks aghast.

BEN (CONT’D)
And everyone thinks I tried. You know. But I didn’t.

FIONA
I heard you and Rachel are looking after Max.

BEN
Yes. He’s fine.

FIONA
I think you should report it to cause for concern.

BEN
He doesn’t want us to.

FIONA
But for your own protection Ben. You don’t want to be liable.

BEN
Liable. Me? He doesn’t want it Fiona.

(MORE)
BEN (CONT'D)
Is that what education is now – avoiding liability – from managing expectations to certificates to prove you can climb a ladder. What about the lies we tell them that they will be directors, writers who can change the world? When did teaching become a business? And a snake oil one at that.

FIONA shifts uncomfortably in her chair. She fiddles with the pen she has in her hand. Close up on her notebook, on which she has apparently been taking notes, and there is a page of doodling.

INT. RACHEL’S HOUSE. DAY
Rachel is packing up the house. The dart board is in a box of rubbish.

INT. UNIVERSITY EDIT SUITES CORRIDOR. DAY
BEN is walking down the corridor of edit suites. He comes across BRIANNA and FERGAL in a passionate embrace. RACHEL appears in the corridor.

    BEN
Don’t go in there. Fergal finally made his cut.

MAX appears from one of the suites and ushers them.

    MAX
(smirking)
Hey got something to show you.

INT. UNIVERSITY EDIT SUITE. DAY. LATER.
BEN and RACHEL are alone.

    BEN
I need you to know....

    RACHEL
I think I already do Ben.

    BEN
I didn’t apply for the job.
RACHEL
Oh. That. Another of Fiona’s way to
stir application frenzy.

BEN
I hear Henry got it. Sorry.

RACHEL
No surprises there really. Pale
male and stale - that’s the
criteria.

BEN
(laughing)
That’s me.

RACHEL
Pale and male yes. Stale no. You’ve
brought new energy to the
department. We needed shaking up.

BEN
Maybe we could...I could...

RACHEL gets up to leave.

RACHEL
Ben I’ve got something to tell you.

BEN begins fidgeting. RACHEL is also fidgeting with the door
handle. They speak simultaneously.

BEN
I have a disorder.

RACHEL
I have a fellowship.

The moment hangs in the air.

RACHEL (CONT’D)
Gives an opportunity to reconnect
with Dan.

BEN
Yes.

RACHEL
After the divorce.

MAX enters the suite.

MAX
So what did you think?
BEN
Best news. I mean ... best... video essay.

MAX
(beaming)
If it wasn’t for you two I’d...

BEN
Be better off?

MAX
You both believed in me.

RACHEL
Yes believing in yourself is important.

MAX
I’m proud and out. And no longer in love with Fergal.

RACHEL AND BEN
Fergal!

SEQUENCE #8 (THE NEW ME ARRIVES)

INT. APARTMENT. DAY

SIMON stands nervously watching BEN as he packs up the Lego people.

SIMON
You okay?

BEN
I was always okay. It was how other people saw me that I had a problem. Normal in this world is a lie.

SIMON
I’ve got something to ...

BEN
Tell me? I’m all ears.

SIMON
I was wondering if you would like the directing gig.

At this moment BEN is holding the book ‘An Actor Prepares’. He looks at it.
BEN
Why? The prodigal TJ not PC enough for Screen Oz?

SIMON
No. Screen Australia thinks it needs a director with an understanding of ...

BEN
What Simon?

SIMON
Emotions.

There is a long pause.

BEN
I went to L.A. to run away from my emotions. But I found out that emotions always catch up with you. No matter what mistakes you make.

FLASHBACK APARTMENT. DAY

BEN and RACHEL look at each other.

BEN
So will you come?

RACHEL
(begins to tear up)
I just got this writing gig.

BEN
I know. Maybe you can do it from there?

RACHEL
Are you running to a career or from us? I need to be here.

INT. APARTMENT. DAY

SIMON
So? The directing gig?

BEN
Thanks Simon but I finally found where I belong. I like teaching. It suits me. I’m more like Dad than I like to admit.
SIMON
He wasn’t that bad.

BEN
No. But by the time I came along he wanted a daughter. I had to play rebel.

There is a moment of recognition in BEN’s face.

SIMON
You could always read the lie of the land better than anyone I know. Remember Amsterdam.

BEN
(reflecting)
Yes Good times.

SIMON
Going into that bar. You knew what was coming.

BEN
Well they did look hungry for a fight.

SIMON
Whatever the scrape, you always had my back. And the students know it too.

BEN
Maybe. But I am lucky to have them too.

SIMON
I should have had your back more.

TEXT arrives. BEN reads it.

BEN
She’s agreed to the settlement. Fifty fifty. And dad’s estate is not included.

SIMON
What changed?

BEN
Probably some deal where she needs the money now. You know producers. They’ll screw anyone.
SIMON
I do. About that Ben....

BEN
You shouldn’t have done it Simon.

SIMON
I’m sorry.

BEN
About what? Having it off with my wife? About the breakdown that I suffered? Or about the loss of my career?

SIMON
All of it.

BEN
You’re my brother. Brothers are meant to look out for each other.

SIMON
Give me a break Ben.

BEN
It was me that had the breakdown. I was rejected, then betrayed and people wonder why I went off the rails. I blamed the wrong woman because (beat) I didn’t want to lose you.

SIMON
As they say nobody’s perfect.

BEN
Trying to be is the problem. And by the way lose the fancy watches and shoes - you look like a bad copy of Harvey Weinstein.

INT. APARTMENT. DAY. LATER

BEN sorts through books. Packs up the Lego men. The apartment exudes a sense of calm. BEN comes across a script by RACHEL, dated 2000. There is a knock at the door. BEN goes to answer it. LINDSAY stands there with the dog and a bag in her hand.

LINDSAY
Hi Ben.
BEN
Hi. (sees bag) Everything alright?

LINDSAY
It’s my son. He’s... he’s ... not well.

BEN
I am sorry to hear that Lindsay.

LINDSAY
I need to take care of him for a while.

BEN
Yes. Just give him time. It’s the best healer.

LINDSAY looks at TOBY. TOBY looks at BEN.

LINDSAY
He’s allergic to dogs.

BEN
Happy to.

LINDSAY
It will be only until he gets better.

BEN
(looking at the dog)
I think he belongs here Lindsay.

LINDSAY
Thanks Ben. You are a good soul.

LINDSAY leaves. BEN looks at TOBY.

BEN
I don’t think we are in Kansas anymore Toto. And you’re going to win over the witch from the Eastern Suburbs.

TOBY barks.

EXT. APARTMENT BLOCK. DAY.

RACHEL stands outside the apartment block.
FLASHBACK - TWENTY YEARS AGO. DAY

RACHEL outside BEN's apartment. LINDSAY (20 years younger) comes out of the building next door.

    LINDSAY
    He left last week.

EXT. APARTMENT BLOCK. DAY. CONT.

RACHEL looks up, sees BEN on the balcony smoking and reading the script. She tries to hide but he has seen her.

INT. APARTMENT. DAY

RACHEL stands nervously in front of BEN. He holds her script.

    BEN
    It’s good.

    RACHEL
    It’s another Australian coming of age tale.

    BEN
    But in this one they grow up. Funny how truth can only be found in fiction.

    RACHEL
    I have to do this.

    BEN
    I know.

    RACHEL
    There’s something I’ve always wanted to ask.

    BEN
    Shoot. It’s a day of revelations.

    RACHEL
    Did you leave because...

    BEN AND RACHEL
    I am too much.

There is moment between them.

    BEN
    My turn to say sorry.
RACHEL
For what?

BEN
For not seeing you. Ironic really.

RACHEL
Why don’t you come visit.

BEN
I might just do that. For now I need to look after Toto.

TOTO goes and gets his lead.

EXT. CLIFF TOPS. DAY

BEN walks TOTO as the shot rises to see them on the path and the ocean beyond. A plane flies in the distance.

EXT. UNIVERSITY. VARIOUS. DAY

BEN walks into campus. He looks confident, students stream pass and say hi. FIONA passes him and there is a moment of acknowledgement.

INT. MEDIA DEPARTMENT OFFICE. DAY.

LUCIANA and BEN arrive at the door at the same time. They look at each other and burst through the door together.

LUCIANA AND BEN
Bring it on.

THE END
CRITICAL REFLECTION ON CREATIVE PRACTICE 2:

A FILM, TITLED THE ACCIDENTAL ACADEMIC DEVELOPED FROM CREATIVE PRACTICE 1, AN ENSEMBLE SITCOM, IT’S ACADEMIC.

The aim of this creative practice

The aim of Creative Practice 2 (CP2) was to apply the theoretical approaches discussed in Chapter Two. The objective was to explore that the MP enables or exposes information, creating a bind in one or more of the characters with a resolution that challenges generic expectations to demonstrate that CP1 is related to CP2. By writing a feature film set in the same world as CP1 and with some of the same characters, I set out to write a film script that has a bind at the midpoint (MP) and challenge the ‘happily ever after’ of the romcom.

Developing this creative practice

Choosing Ben and Rachel as the protagonists was the first task, in order to subject these characters to some degree of transformation, yet not couple up at the end.

The catalyst for CP1, the ensemble sitcom, is Ben’s return to the media department. In demonstrating the relationship between CP1 and CP2, Ben’s absence must be explained in the film (the bicycle accident that lands him in hospital) while in CP1 his colleagues believe it is a breakdown. Further, I wanted to explore that CP1 sits within Act Two of the film, the basis for the theoretical framework in Chapter Three.

I developed the logline, synopsis, one page story and outline of the script. It was during the outline phase that I realised the MP operates differently in some comedies about relationships. Here research was informing practice in real time and was a contributing factor to the discussion in Chapter Two.

Insights gleaned from this creative practice

Ben’s want is to direct actors (in live action) but then it shifts to wanting to have a relationship with Rachel (a goal), undermined by his need to accept he suffers from emotional dysregulation which prevents him having stable and sustainable relationships (or so he believes). Rachel’s bind is less clear. First she wants to work in the industry, then decides to
apply for the Deputy Dean position. In this draft, for both protagonists the bind is not strong, and I offer that the reason is because the want+need is not clearly established for Ben or for Rachel. Furthermore, the flaw (or behaviour) of each protagonist is not directly connected to their need and thus not at odds with their want, which I argue is essential. Currently, the MP in CP2 is a series of moments from which Ben flees rather than confront or become trapped by the (emotional) tension. While Ben’s want is clear (to direct real people), it is his bind (undermined by his need to be honest about his emotional dysregulation) that must be evident at the MP and, in this draft, it is not. This suggests that I have not established a connection between Ben’s want and need/flaw that will drive the tension towards the MP, culminating in a bind.

While I argue that the bind enables comic tension in the second half of Act Two, I surmise that the reason the bind is not strong in this draft is because the catch has not been established at the beginning of Act Two. And while there is a catch – that Ben must teach at the same place as Rachel – this does not test his flaw of commitment issues. In fact, his need is not clear. Is it fear of relationships or commitment or a need to own his disorder? Rather than confronting this script problem, I moved the focus to Rachel becoming aware that she is 'an accidental academic' and I suspect I did this instinctively because of the failure of Ben's bind at the MP. While I recognise this is a weakness in the script, I contend that it is possible to have the bind shift or affect two characters, but it should not be a solution to a problem. However, the dramatic question (DQ) (will these two protagonists face their need that have resulted in misunderstandings), is answered by the resolution (if not by comic tension as intended, arising from the theoretical discussion); this leaves space for other questions unanswered, such as the relationship between Ben and Rachel.
In *The Nutshell Technique*\textsuperscript{86} Jill Chamberlain offers that at the end of Act One the protagonist’s want must be clear, yet there must be a catch which then tests their flaw. But if Ben’s flaw is changed to having a fear of relationships (stemming from his disorder, rather than to hide his disorder), then the catch that tests his flaw is being in the same world as Rachel, whom he blames for his breakdown.

Chamberlain posits that the flaw is tested at the crisis point, the second TP. However, in this draft Ben’s crisis, at the end of Act Two, is realising Chelsea, his soon to be ex-wife, uses their relationship to exploit him – this would then be a direct connection to the reason for the flaw – his fear of commitment arising from a fear of exploitation. This framework enabled me to see that the catch for each protagonist is not in play by the beginning of Act Two and is one possible reason for a weak bind. Similarly, while Rachel’s catch is mentoring Ben, this needs to come earlier and be related to her flaw of competitiveness. As such I offer that the current plotting does not build in tension because there is no catch for Ben or Rachel – her flaw (competitiveness in her belief she is the best teacher) is not tied to her current want (to work in the industry). If I shifted Rachel’s want to covet the Deputy Dean position, and to succeed in getting the job she must mentor Ben (delivered by the Dean) with whom she competes as the best teacher – her flaw would then be tested, as per Chamberlain, by a catch. This change in story and plotting would give Rachel more to lose when she discovers Ben is being nominated by the Dean for the position of Deputy Dean, forcing her to a crisis point at second turning point (TP2). I further offer that maybe the lack of comedy is because of the absence of a catch for either character. I offer that developing a plot point related to a catch for each character would increase the comic tension, as their flaw is tested by the narrative.

Implications for practice

The one-page synopsis in the Appendix concludes with:

*The Accidental Academic* is a comedy about the accidents we make in life and the opportunity to correct them when given a second chance.

The theme of ‘accidents’ in the film is evidenced by Ben becoming a good teacher by accident, yet the twist is that Rachel realises that she has become ‘the accidental academic,’ resulting from a decision made twenty years ago. While Ben is currently caught in a bind centred on a secret that he attempts to hide, in sequence #6 Rachel is the one now in a bind, having given up a dream and realising that she is trapped in the comfort of academia. It is the revelation of the disorder in CP2 and the immediate actions resulting from Ben’s initial breakdown that changes how Rachel views her life and indeed him. Revelation of significant information is related to character transformation and should be considered when reworking texts where change is either enabled through the narrative or entrapped by it. CP2 is about what happens when we do not ‘know thyself’ – and may give insight into how to increase comic tension. Articulating this might have helped in connecting motivation and goal when structuring the plot. *The Accidental Academic* has a story, but in reordering the events by way of testing each of the protagonists’ flaws, I hope will enable the bind and thus the tension in Act Two. On reflection to date, for each character there must be a strong connection between their need and their change (transformation) underpinned by the catch.

What are the implications of insights gained from the theoretical chapter and the writing of the film script to be applied to creative practice 3?

*The Accidental Academic* is a “backstory” film which incorporates the following:

- Theme: misunderstanding resulting in choices that became accidental.
- A MP which attempts to explore the bind of the main character.
• Evidence that the bind can shift to another protagonist (but not as a solution).

• Transformational change in the protagonists yet challenging the traditional genre definition of the romcom.

For any text post-transformation of the main characters, the writer needs to ask what questions remain unanswered which can then be explored in a subsequent text, particularly a comedy series where character relations play out differently to that of the feature film.

CP2 concludes with each character realising that their lives have taken a different course based on a misunderstanding, and while one leaves, the other stays behind to continue their healing, yet both offer a “hopeful future.” Given that the situation and characters from CP1 (the sitcom) are now employed in CP2, CP1 is defined by unresolved histories between the two protagonists. When those histories are resolved (if not the relationship) at the conclusion of CP2, CP1 therefore sits within the second act of CP2 – where the unresolved history drives the tension and struggle between these two, before the TP into Act Three – with Rachel’s departure. CP2 testifies to many of the observations and propositions discussed in Chapter Two as well as Chapter One, however it fails in demonstrating the nature of the bind in the relationship comedy because, as noted, the bind moved from one character to another, and the flaw was not tested by a catch for either protagonist.

As the relationship between Ben and Rachel was not resolved in CP2 (or CP1), and with both CPs in the same locale (the university) I posit that the relationship can only be resolved in another environment (situation), allowing for new (untested) flaws to be triggered. CP3, Have You Fed the Cat? is a narrative comedy series that places the main characters, Ben and Rachel, in a new environment a few years after the film. Picking up from CP2, CP3 is governed by a DQ (will they get together?). I argue in Chapter Three that a series governed by a DQ can enable seriality.
SECTION THREE

NARRATIVE COMEDY

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CHAPTER THREE

THE SERIAL TENSION OF NARRATIVE COMEDY AND ITS TURNING POINTS

This thesis began with an examination of the ensemble comedy and then turned to the film comedy and character transformation. I now examine the episodic narrative comedy to ascertain what elements need to be considered when developing a series from a feature length film. The narrative comedy, born of the sitcom in terms of character and relational dynamics, has emerged as a term that categorises those screen comedies, often shot single camera, having a story arc which enables, and in some cases demands, sequential viewing. Examples include, from the UK, Fleabag (2016-19), and Gavin and Stacey (2007-2010)\(^1\), and from Australia Kath & Kim (2002-4), which I analyse extensively in Situation Comedy, Character, and Psychoanalysis.\(^2\) I argue that what defines both the sitcom and narrative comedy is the relational dynamics which result in repeated entrapment underpinning the re-situation\(^3\) – the return to the emotional stasis – not the form of production (studio or location filming) or order of viewing.

In Situation Comedy, I determined that the closed narrative structure of the sitcom has three turning points (TPs), each forcing a ninety-degree turn, creating a rectangular shape that represents the plot, and which enables the emotional stasis to be re-established.\(^4\) What has perplexed me since elucidating that shape is the relationship between the three TPs and the traditional three act structure, wherein the TP is the point when the narrative shifts gears and a new act begins. This thesis has established that in film comedy the midpoints (MPs) and

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\(^4\) Klika, as before, Chapter 4, ‘The Tension of the (Closed) Narrative,’ p.147 and figure 4.3.
TPs act in different ways to those in drama. As such, this analysis seeks to explain why the narrative turns at each of the TPs in an episode, as opposed to how. This chapter asks: What is the nature of the TP in the episodic narrative structure of comedy?

In Chapter Two, I determined that the MP in relationship film comedies delivers to the main character a bind and rather than the character responding to their need, they attempt to subvert the narrative, until the second TP into Act Three (that is they deny the challenge offered by the narrative and instead attempt to shape it to serve their goal). If the sitcom/narrative comedy episode has three TPs, then I posit that one of those is doing more than simply being a TP. If so, then I offer that the second TP has the greatest impact on the rectangular shape of the plot. In this chapter I interrogate the middle TP to find that the character acts in ways that both progress the narrative, whilst actively denying information that has been delivered, thus enabling the right-angled turn in the middle of the episode. In doing so, in the Textual Analysis I deconstruct an episode of *The Young Offenders* (2018-present)\(^5\) to argue that the second TP operates in much the same way as the midpoint (MP) discussed in Chapter Two.

Critically analysing two films, *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947) and *The Young Offenders* (2016),\(^6\) both of which have been developed as half-hour comedy series, I find that each harbours some elements of seriality centred on a relationship.\(^7\) The first is a romantic relationship and the latter centred on relationships between friends, overshadowed by the romantic involvement of one of the character’s mother with the friends’ antagonist, the local police officer.\(^8\)

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Further, I reflect that the MP in the film might be a pointer to the sitcom, or comedies with some degree of closed narrative. To that end, this chapter critically examines the relationship between character and narrative to offer that when developing a comedy series (be it narrative comedy or sitcom) from a film, it is essential to know which characters migrate from the film, what issues remain unresolved and how might those tensions/flaws be triggered.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND APPLICATION

As stated in the Introduction, Murray Smith writes that “…our ‘entry into’ narrative structures is mediated by character.”9 While Smith is arguing for a conception of character that straddles humanist and structuralist conceptions, he explicates that it is the character which engages us with the narrative. Critically examining the character in a series, Radha O’Meara writes that “[c]haracter change seems to be an essential ingredient of narrative, so television series require frequent character changes to sustain their stories…”10 My argument centres on characters refusing to undergo any change. Sol Austerlitz writes:

[Friends] success, then is the product of two competing urges: to melodrama and to comedy. Emotion is delicately balanced by laughs, but at peak moments, comedy is scuppered entirely in favor of sentiment… Ross and Rachel’s saga is the through-line of Friends, their decade-long, winding paths to happiness the emotional heart of the show.11

It is the delineation between melodrama and comedy as noted by Austerlitz that is of interest, specifically in the narrative comedy where there is a series arc governed by some DQ. O’Meara further writes “… character change in sitcom series is often treated comically or flippantly, whereas character change in serials is conventionally treated dramatically.”12 The

12 O’Meara, as before, p.197.
point is echoed by Austerlit, in that character change in narrative comedy veers towards melodrama and is played out over the series, whereas the lack of change in a character – or rather their refusal to change – is treated comically. In other words, the refusal to change by the character in the sitcom underscores the comicality. I add, and referring to O’Meara’s analysis, that should any change occur, it does so within the episode’s narrative. Analysing the soap or drama series with elements of seriality, O’Meara also notes that

There are three key types of character action observable in television narrative, each of which imply an internal, psychological change: the experience of significant life events, such as births, deaths, marriages, moving house and getting or losing a job; the experience of intense emotions and especially their physical manifestations, such as screaming with terror, raging in anger or kissing passionately; and observable contrasts in behaviour, as when a former miser squanders money or a former killjoy throws a party.13 (My bolding).

TV writer and script consultant Ellen Sandler offers that in a (drama) series the DQ contains a dilemma, wherein the main character is caught between different value codes, often between public duty and private life or behaviour.14 This is not dissimilar to the bind as discussed in relation to film comedy as well as the comic antihero in their persistence to deny certain realities. Steve Kaplan writes that “[a] film features a problem that can be solved (or not) within two hours. In a sitcom, there is an ongoing dilemma that can never be solved, because it is the basic premise of the series.”15 While Greg Smith notes that “[in serial television the needs of the arc and of the episode are often at odds with each other.”16 Whilst Smith is analysing the British one-hour comedy-drama, Cold Feet (1997-present), and applying analysis from both the traditional serial and the limited six-episode series, he raises issues not just about the merging of such narratives but how they are developed. Smith

13 O’Meara, ‘Changing the way we think about character change in episodic television series,’ as before, p.190.
14 Open Program Course, AFTRS, Sydney, 2013.
continues: “The pacing of a serial depends on the close coordination of arc and episode, providing some narrative events whose impact is primarily local, while others move the character forwards towards turning points.”17 Here turning points are related to the character’s arc over the series.18 Thus, the series narrative arc of the characters reflect bigger changes in the character’s view and engagement with the world, whereas the episodic narrative raises an issue that enables us to see more layers of the character, informing behaviour in light of the larger narrative arc. Smith puts it succinctly: “these plot events give us resolution without progress in the serial narrative;”19 in doing so, Smith makes the point that each episode of Cold Feet ends on a cliff-hanger. This is less so with the narrative comedy/sitcom, where the demand to return to the emotional stasis (or only slightly moved on) is a defining element. Thus, characters in the narrative comedy have neither progression nor resolution until the concluding episode (if there is one). The second series of Fleabag (2019)20 is a good example of the narrative comedy series with a DQ – allowing for elements of seriality as well as resolution within each episode as well as in the concluding episode.

Furthermore, in the Textual Analysis I critically analyse the 1960s sitcom, The Ghost and Mrs. Muir, (1968-70)21 to find that the MP of the originating film gives insight into the potential for both repeatability (the ghost and Mrs. Muir never consummate their relationship) and seriality (they slowly begin to accept that time separates them, but love does not). The emotional struggle is often found at the MP, and I offer is a good starting point in developing a series, specifically one that has a narrative arc and DQ centred on a relationship, pregnant with potential.

17 G. Smith, ‘Serial Narration and the Character Arc,’ as before, p.84.
18 My use of the TPs are those moments in the episode that changes direction of the plot, as opposed to being either a beat or emotional shift within a scene.
19 G. Smith, as before, p.84.
20 Fleabag, creator, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, as before (2016-19).
Having defined the situation comedy as “a half-hour comic story involving a small group of characters premised on a struggle,” the narrative comedy could now be defined as: a half-hour comic story involving a group of characters premised on a struggle that may have elements of seriality by way of a narrative arc and a dramatic question which is resolved in the final episode. Regardless of the seriality or episodic nature of the narrative, such comedies follow the same fundamental principles as the sitcom, in that they must resolve the question posed by the inciting incident in the episode even if there is some degree of transformation by the character/s responding to the series DQ. Consequently, it needs to be determined which narrative arc is affecting change in the character/s and how is the return to the emotional stasis enabled within a half-hour episodic series (and which may have elements of seriality).

The point of difference between the sitcom/narrative comedy and the film is that in the sitcom the characters never change, they remain stuck in a loop of fear, desire, and repeated comic degradation; psychoanalytically they never actualise, face their flaw, or bring to consciousness their need or wounding that has kept them ‘stuck.’ When they fall in love or bring to consciousness the power struggle that has kept them in the situation (including within the dynamics of the gang), the series ends.

As mentioned, in Chapter Two I examined the nature of the MP in the film comedy to find that the MP delivers information to the main character, triggering a bind; this is determined by the character’s need, now conscious, and/or exposed, and which may be at odds with the want or goal and thus impact the narrative trajectory. Creative Practice 2 (CP2) found that the bind works best when the main character has a want at odds with their need, made intense by a catch that triggers extreme behaviour in their flaws. The bind may shift from one character to another character, but, as has been found through the analysis of CP2, the bind must be in play by way of a catch at the beginning of Act Two. Thus, when deciding which characters to

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22 Klika, *Situation Comedy*, as before, p.7.
migrate from a film to a series, it is necessary to define the character’s struggle; it is this tension which I have argued underpins comic performance.

**Relationship between the film and a subsequent series**

If the film narrative is transformative of the characters, then there is little room for the subsequent (unconscious) struggle that is at the heart of the sitcom and narrative comedy. Therefore, when migrating characters from film to series there needs to be the suggestion of some endeavour which will be repeated in the series. If the new endeavour is to be a relationship sitcom, then it needs to be asked which characters have unresolved issues, and at what point are these still unresolved in the film narrative?

Further, and noting the categorisations listed in Chapter Two, it must be determined if the situation remains the same or if the characters are situated in a new environment. If the situation remains the same, then I argue that the ongoing tension driving the series is to be found in the second act of the film, but the situation must be ‘entrapping,’ either by its physical nature (such as a prison or school) or by a discourse that reinforces the situation (the frame), and which may be evident in the film. Thus, it is not only essential to clarify which characters are best suited to migrate from a film to a series, but also if the situation is a new environment or the same as the film, and importantly which unresolved needs and associated flaws are triggered and how.

Sitcoms centred on relationships such as *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1968-70), *The Odd Couple* (1970-75), *As Time Goes By* (1992-2005), and *Gavin and Stacey* (2007-2010)\(^{23}\) are focussed on the *differences between* characters, whether status, outlook, class, or different

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eras. They are commonly set in domestic situations and once the conflict, separation or misunderstanding in the relationship is resolved, the series ends. On the other hand, and as discussed in Chapter One, ensemble sitcoms explore the tension both inter and intra a group, with examples such as *Friends* (1994-2004), *Frasier* (1993-2004), and *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-14). As such the pursuit of love or resolution of a discordant relationship enables the narrative arc, whilst each episode has its own form of closed narrative that either hinders or progresses one or more of the relationships.

While it is not essential to incorporate seriality, I do propose that if characters have unresolved relationship issues in the film narrative, then those characters are best placed to migrate to a series with a narrative arc and DQ. As such, and picking up Chapter Two, when transposing a character or characters to a comedy series it needs to be ascertained if there remains an untested flaw that is repeatedly tested and denied through various pressures brought to bear by way of a weekly inciting incident. In other words, it needs to be asked, what issues remain unresolved, either as a flaw or in a relationship, which will drive the comic tension within the episode and possibly the narrative arc of the series. I now ask: At what point in the narrative can such tension be found?

In the film narrative the MP precipitates the character to act, triggering the midpoint return (MPR) – yet such action does not alter the direction of the narrative, it heightens the character’s desire to achieve their goal (even if it is misguided in their denial). They are determined to achieve their goal. In the comedy series, the character attempts to subvert the narrative by way of denying information or responding to information that is at odds with their view of the world and idealised goals. If the TPs in the sitcom are an attempt by the narrative to subvert the character’s desire, then I posit that the middle TP must be a combined MP-TP;

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information is revealed, yet the character acts to change or deny the information, resulting in the narrative to ‘turn.’ Further, if the second TP in episodic comedy series is also a MP, then the character must be acting on, or in response to, the narrative that delivers an expectation or some information and which challenges their need. In other words, the character denies any ‘reality’ that may explicate their need; they not only deny the information, but they must also act to maintain that denial as well as progress the goal, triggered by an inciting incident.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Turning now to critically examine *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* (1947), a romance drama about the obstacles of love – death and time. I find that the MP gives insight to the seriality of the subsequent narrative comedy.25 This is followed by the deconstruction and analysis of the narrative structure of Episode 1 of *The Young Offenders* (2018-) and assists in determining the nature of the second TP.26

*The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* 27

*The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* is a 1945 romance novel of the same title adapted to film in 1947 starring Rex Harrison and Gene Tierney. Twenty years later (1968-70) it is developed as a sitcom, garnering cult status on YouTube.28 The narrative arc of the series is centred on unrequited love, specifically a love at odds with time and death. The fifty episodes of the series which span two seasons are framed by a narrative that underscore the slow and clear realisation in the main character, Mrs. Muir, of her feelings for Captain Daniel Gregg (The Ghost), whose own desire to be her partner make any coupling difficult to achieve. Captain Gregg hails from the Victorian era, (mid- to late-1800s), and remains so in both the film and

26 *The Young Offenders*, dev. Peter Foott, as before (2018 – present), first transmitted February 1, 2018.
27 This section is based on an article arising from a conference paper at SRN, 2018: ‘Caught in the Second Act: The Relationship between Film Comedy and the TV Sitcom,’ in *Journal of Media, Performing Arts and Cultural Studies* (N3, 2019) pp. 372-388.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8YDacElh0&list=PL0i5g_YmVrZxe2qd5ML4H66XigOU10bog
TV series. Table 3.1 gives a timeline of the adaptation of the novel to film and the development of the series. However, there are two different Mrs. Muirs in the screen texts, each born in different social periods and as such have different views on how they should live their life, as opposed to that of the Victorian era sea-faring adventurer Captain.

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<td>Produced</td>
<td>1945</td>
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Table 3.1: Overview of the evolution of The Ghost and Mrs. Muir.

With reference to Table 3.1, by transposing the main characters from the film to a series, the location moves from Victorian coastal England to seaside New England, USA, with some additions to the cast. In the 1947 film, Lucy Muir, a widow with an income derived from the mining shares of her deceased husband, seeks independence from her suffocating in-laws; when the mine is closed, she is suddenly forced to find an income – the character’s motivation becomes goal. In the 1968 TV series, Mrs. Muir becomes Carolyn Muir, a widow and established writer with depleted resources; goal is established yet motivation remains unclear, other than needing to increase her existing income. The new Carolyn Muir, having realised the house is haunted, becomes concerned about the effects of a ghost on her children, whilst also wanting to stay at the charming seaside house, Gull Cottage; the goal is now at odds with a desire to protect her children – the character is conflicted between the motivation of need (income) as well as a place to write (as a means of generating income), yet she has concerns for her children. In addition, the realtor (estate agent) in the 1947 film, the stodgy
Mr. Coombs becomes Claymore Gregg, the grand-nephew, or so he believes, of Captain Gregg. Claymore is an anxious comic character, an archetypal fool—an important addition as it enables the comic gap between Claymore and the domineering Captain. The daughter, Anna, from 1947, is renamed Candice (Candy) and a son has been added to the family, Jonathan, who, it is revealed, can see the Captain and converses with him and in doing so expands the Captain’s interaction with other ‘beings.’ Martha, the housekeeper, and Scruffy the dog survive the migration. In the series the situation remains the same (Gull Cottage), and the comedic gap is increased by situating the new Mrs. Muir in a new era (and country) along with the introduction of Claymore Gregg as an echo to The Captain.

While there have been some changes to the characters, the essence of the story remains the same: a widowed (initially independent) woman, along with her child/ren and housekeeper, take up residence in Gull Cottage, which is haunted by its owner, an old-fashioned, yet dashing, sea Captain. While goals remain the same in both narratives, motivation in the film is clearer than in the series. However, as has been posited, if theme is evident at the MP of the film, critically examining the MP of the film (specifically the keystone scene) elucidates both the theme and the nature of the relationship between the main characters: The Ghost and Mrs. Muir.

At the MP of the film, the two protagonists have just finished writing the Captain’s memoirs that will (and does) enable Lucy Muir to have an income and stay in Gull Cottage.

EXT BALCONY. NIGHT.
Lucy Muir enters the balcony followed by the Captain.

CAPTAIN: Ship out there. Too close by the sound.
LUCY: It’s a lonely sound. Like a child lost, crying in the dark.
CAPTAIN: He’s lost alright. With the Captain cursing a blue streak wondering why he ever went to the sea instead of opening a grocer’s shop like a sensible man.
CAPTAIN (cont.): A fog in the channel is treacherous.
I’d rather face a north easter.

LUCY: Still, it’s honest, the sea. It makes you face things honestly doesn’t it.

CAPTAIN: Something on your mind?

LUCY: Yes. What’s to become of us Daniel? Of you and me.

CAPTAIN: Nothing can become of me. Everything’s happened that can happen.

LUCY: But not to me. When we were writing the book, I was happy, we were accomplishing something together.
Now when I try to think about the future it’s … it’s all dark … and confused. Like trying to see into the fog.

CAPTAIN: You’ve been working too hard. Cooped up in the house too long. You need a change of scene.

LUCY: But I love it here.

CAPTAIN: You should be out in the world more, meeting people. (Pause) Seeing men.

LUCY: I have no desire to see men.

CAPTAIN: You should Lucia. You’re a confoundedly attractive woman. Or hadn’t you noticed. Really my dear you owe it to yourself.

LUCY: Yes, Daniel. Goodnight.

CAPTAIN: Goodnight.

Lucy exits the balcony.

CAPTAIN: My dear.

INT ROOM. NIGHT

Lucy enters the room and sits in the armchair and sighs.

LUCY: Oh, Daniel I’m afraid we’ve got ourselves into an awful fix.29

29 *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*, 1947, as before, 52’.
Lucy has relished writing the Captain’s story of sea-faring adventures which will give her an income and enable her to stay at Gull Cottage. However, Lucy begins to realise that she will now lose the close working relationship she has had with the Captain, which gave her purpose and meaning, in turn igniting feelings for him. The theme of the film, the need to face the truth of stormy feelings, is evident at the MP; the haunting sound of being lost gives subtext to the scene. The Captain has also come to a realisation that he cannot keep Lucy tied to him, urging her to go and live among the living. This film asks the question: What happens when a ghost falls in love with someone still living? The difficulty with writing about ghosts is that a ghost has nothing to lose if they fail in their goal, in this case to have a relationship with a living person. The ghost’s goal must be achieved through the characters who have something to lose and the biggest thing we can lose is life.

Time passes, depicted by a disintegrating wooden post, slowly submitting to the sea. Lucy, now an elderly lady, dies in the chair where she sighed at the MP, which is also often the site and/or indication of the resolution. The Captain returns and takes Lucy as a young woman to his realm. At the film’s resolution the central protagonist has changed physically, as well as emotionally post MP, yet both characters have faced their need: that they love each other solely and the obstacle that has kept them apart, time, now no longer exists. Furthermore, the question has been answered: The Ghost waits for his love to join him and for Mrs. Muir to experience love she must wait for death.

However, when reworking the film narrative of The Ghost and Mrs. Muir (1947) to a half-hour comedy series, the first question that arises is what keeps these two characters bound to each other week after week? Leger Grindon writes: “Memory shapes our present but the present can also alter our memories.” The character of Lucy Muir is stuck between a want (to

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have an income and to love again) and her need (to realise that for her love exists in another realm); the memory of having a happy marriage informs and entraps her present. Thus, we need to ask: what keeps these two characters, a ghost, and a widow, bound to each other?31

The bind, as I explored in Chapter Two, comes about from not only want+need but also from the attempt to re-shape the present (and the narrative) in the face of obstacles triggered by flaws that are refuted. The MP of *The Ghost and Mrs. Muir* gives a clue to the emotional tension that then plays out in the (relational) comedy series. If a comedy series such as this one sits in the second act of the film, we need to ask: What is the obstacle that prevents the character/s from changing? We know the Captain loves Mrs. Muir and his cottage, and as such his fear would be of losing both. The series explores scenarios in which the Captain puts up obstacles to incidents that may threaten change to either the house, such as renovations, or any ‘relationship’ that Carolyn, may have from potential suitors. Thus, a relationship sitcom or narrative comedy must be centred on unresolved feelings – which can be found at either the MP of a film or at its resolution, which I discuss in the development of creative practice 3 (CP3) from CP2, the film.

*The Young Offenders*32

*The Young Offenders* is a 2016 film redeveloped as a narrative comedy in 2018 about two lads in Cork, Ireland. In the film the boys learn that a large amount of cocaine has come ashore from a shipwreck and set out to make some money. Loading the illicit drug onto their bicycle, they accidentally puncture the wrapping; as they cycle home, they leave a long trail of white powder, finishing with an empty sack. While miscreants, these characters are examples of the


31 Being the only relationship in the story limits the series’ life, as opposed to the multitude of relationships underscored by the need to ‘grow up’ that the six characters in *Friends* confront, specifically the two with issues of commitment, Rachel, and Ross. *Friends*, creators David Crane, Marta Kauffman, as before (1994-2004).

comic antiheroes discussed in Chapter One; being aware of the frame that undermines their desires (the law) and rather than play by its rules, they attempt to push its limits. The series sits firmly before Act Three of the film, as the two Irish lads, Conor and Jock, egg each other on in a series of dares, antagonising the local policeman, Sergeant Healey. This series plays more like a sitcom in that there is no overarching DQ that indicates potential change to the lads or their relationship. Furthermore, the law as a ‘frame’ is less evident as containing the lads, unlike the frames discussed in Chapter One. Therefore, something else needs to be in play which ensures comic tension.

In the film Jock lives with an abusive father and for the series to explore intra-relational dynamics, a few episodes into the series he comes to live with Conor and his widowed mother, Mairead, now dating Sergeant Healy. While the lads are the main characters, Mairead is the key character as she attempts to raise the boys while trying to have some kind of love life. Mairead finds herself in a dilemma between love for her fatherless son, his miscreant behaviour influenced by his ‘loser’ friend, and her relationship with the local policeman. Thus, it is not so much about characters in a series of comic situations (many of those in the film are then repeated in the first episodes of the series) but to have those characters exist within a situation that creates a power dynamic centred on a key character caught in a struggle between their want (to raise good citizens) and need (to have love). Jock is more akin to being a comic antihero rather than a key character as he is aware of the frame (the law) which he attempts to demolish, taking his sidekick Conor along for the ride. However, it is the local wild boy, the unstable Billy Murphy, who manifests the unconscious fear of this town’s collective – that in this world of non opportunity, they will become the crazy fellow.

The first episode of the series, narrated by Conor, (re)introduces the main characters from the film: his best friend, Jock, school principal Walsh, Sergeant Healey, Conor’s mother, Mairead MacSweeney and crazy Billy Murphy as well as the daughters of principal Walsh,
one of whom is black.

This episode begins with the lads stealing lead from the roof of a building as a way of buying irrelevant stuff such as blow-up dolls. When the police come looking, the boys jump off the building and fall into some trash piled up in an alleyway. Wearing masks to cover their identity (a Billy Murphy mask, fashioned from a photo and ordered online, and a mask of a girl – “It’s all they had in the Halloween store” says Jock when Conor complains).

Spotted by the two daughters of the school principal, the boys ditch the stolen lead, and are pursued through the local food market; they fall foul of some painters, with their uniforms now covered in yellow paint. Back in school and wearing stolen uniforms the boys realise they need to win over the girls to stop them squealing. While Jock wins over the white sister, Conor's fear of girls is exposed with Linda:

CONOR: What’s it like …erm… being adopted?
LINDA: I’m not adopted.
CONOR: Hmm. Is?…Er okay.
LINDA: Why what makes you think I’m adopted?
CONOR: No, like I don’t think you are, it’s just … er… you look adopted.
LINDA: How do I look adopted?
CONOR: Your hair is really…. Black.
LINDA: You trying to say I’m Black?
CONOR: You’re ….. you’re Black?
LINDA: Yeah.
CONOR: I didn’t even notice.
LINDA: You serious?
CONOR: Oh, it’s….. like I see past pigment.33

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33 The Young Offenders, dev. Peter Foott, as before (2018 – present), S1E1, first transmitted February 1, 2018.
Questioned by Sergeant Healey and Principal Walsh (the girls’ father) about the stolen lead, the lads lie as to their whereabouts on the day in question, saying they were with Conor’s mother. This is the second TP with shades of a MP as lying is afoot. When Mairead confronts the boys about the theft, they deny it (MPR); the narrative is forced to turn and in doing so focusses on the relationship between Mairead and Conor, the loss of his father and feelings about his friendship with his closest friend Jock. Thus, when a plot point does not resolve or confront the issue triggered by the inciting incident (through lying or deceit), it is forced to focus on something else.

Arriving at the school for the day of interrogation, Mairead is met by Sergeant Healy who flirts with her (hints of the relationship that may come) until she asks what he is doing at the school, to which he responds, “I’ve come to question a couple of scumbags about a robbery.” Mairead retorts: “My son is not a scumbag.” Mairead's demeanour shifts from suspecting her son to defending him, and then lying herself when questioned as to where the boys were, colluding with them by saying they were with her at the cinema. This is followed by confusion between Mairead and the boys when she is questioned as to what film and which cinema. The yellow painted jumper with Conor’s name sewn inside is then produced as evidence; it appears the gig is up and Mairead knows it. While the adults confer outside the classroom, the lads mention there is a plan. When the interrogation team return, Sergeant Healey attempts to make Conor confess in order to have the charge laid on Jock, but Conor refuses to hand in his best friend. As Conor is about to be handcuffed, the school alarm rings and as they all rush outside, there are two similar sized lads with the same masks as earlier, attacking the weathervane on the roof of the school. Sergeant Healey takes chase, and Principal Walsh apologises to Mairead and Conor about the ‘misunderstanding.’ The TPs reveal the rectangular shape which I determined in my book:
In this example tension is maintained through the fear of the lie being exposed, while the plan of having copycat offenders forces the narrative to turn again and reset the emotional stasis of the main characters underscoring the theme of the series: best friends no matter what.

However, if it is decided to develop a series post the resolution of the film, then it is essential to consider what issues remain which could be the basis for a comedy series. The character must finally and comically face their need (in film), yet they refuse to do so in the sitcom or with incremental steps in the narrative comedy series.

CREATIVE PRACTICE 3

CP1, the ensemble sitcom, essentially sits within Act Two of the film, CP2, and therefore CP3 is developed as a post-film comedy series with a DQ. As CP1 and CP2 are located in the same milieu, CP3 has transposed the characters to a new situation. Set a few years after the film, CP3 picks up the relational potential evident in sequence #5 of Act Two between Ben and Rachel which was not resolved at the conclusion of the film; it applies a DQ centred on the unresolved nature of their relationship. To that end, CP3 aims to demonstrate the principle that a series with a DQ centred on a relationship enables seriality. Further, CP3 sets out to

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34 *The Young Offenders*, dev. Peter Foott, as before (2018 – present), S1E1, first transmitted February 1, 2018.
validate the principle that relationship sitcoms require strong TPs, specifically at the MP, in order to enable comic tension and the return to the emotional stasis at the conclusion of each episode.

Overview

CP3 Have You Fed the Cat? is a half-hour narrative comedy that picks up after the film The Accidental Academic (CP2). The question that remains at the conclusion of the film: will the main characters see each other again? This comedy series places the main characters, Ben and Rachel, in a new situation a few years after the film in order to test that question. Further, this CP explores the nature of TPs in the half-hour narrative comedy/comedy series to determine if the middle TP operates in the same way as the MP, as was elucidated in the film comedies analysed in Chapter Two.

CONCLUSION

In Chapter Two I argued that that the bind, triggered at the MP, is a harbinger to comic tension in the latter part of the second act. Here, I extend on that proposition to posit that the MP in a film can also be an indicator of the emotional tension and struggle between the main characters, elucidating the nature of the (emotional/physical/relational) struggle in a subsequent series. I posit that discordant relationships with a DQ enable both a comic struggle within the episode and seriality across the series. If the series sits post the film narrative timeline (less common), and considering the analysis of CP2, then it needs to be determined which unresolved issues remain and whether the situation is the same or different to enable new tensions. If there is no discordant relationship, or at the least a DQ, then I offer that the new site must have a discursive frame through which comic tension is enabled.

Further, deconstructing the TPs of an episode in a series, I have elucidated the principle that the second TP in the narrative comedy/sitcom is a form of MP that reveals information as well as reinforces the comic tension for the second half of the episode.
Thus, this chapter has offered principles to be considered when transposing characters from a film to a comedy series; the MP or Act Two is the prime site in which to find the struggle that could enable repeatability, or the conclusion has some unresolved questions which could engender repeated confusion. I further posit that it needs to be considered if comic tension can be enabled by a discursive frame; what that frame might be, and how nebulous its limits is another point to consider. As such, I argue that the comedy series (be it sitcom or narrative comedy) is best suited for seriality when it is centred on a discordant relationship; if there is no discursive frame or a story ideology which is not overtly restrictive, then it should be considered that the narrative arc be governed by a DQ.
HAVE YOU FED THE CAT?

A comedy about divorce across the generations.

Pilot episode

"On the Market"

Written by

Deborah Klika

Creative Practice 3

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.
Have You Fed the Cat?

A comedy set in a shared house in North London. It centres on Rachel, Kat, and Jeremy all divorced and wondering if they will ever find love again.

When a new lodger, Ben, moves in, Clover the talking cat, discovers there is history between this interloper and Rachel.

A magic-realist comedy about loss, middle-age, and unrequited love. It picks up two years after the film, The Accidental Academic when Ben and Rachel last saw each other.

MAIN CHARACTERS

RACHEL, 54, came from Australia to work on a soap but things haven’t turned out as she hoped. Messy, like her relationships, she pursued other areas and was determined to make it work, even buying a house that she has renovated with the help of Kat whose focus is getting Rachel to go online dating with Bumble, Tindr, Okay Cupid, but Rachel prefers eHarmony because she likes taking surveys.

KATHERINE (Kat), 44, Journalist. Loves to organise people and their lives. One son, George, whom she loves to death. Always on dating apps. Dream is to work for a charity but the income won’t support her lifestyle. Avid entertainer, and owner of …

CLOVER the talking cat. Runs the house like it’s her kingdom, has firm views on why the women in this house are failing in their lives. In love with…

JEREMY, 35, writer and lodger. Works in publishing. Pines for his ex-wife, Ashley. Fussy, tidy, and clean. Likes to boss Kat’s son…

GEORGE, 15, Mixed race. Behaves like a cat, which triggers sibling rivalry in Clover. Extreme conservative; rejects Kat’s liberal views as hypocritical. Befriended by …

BENJAMIN (Ben), 50, Australian filmmaker in London on a teaching exchange at the NFTS, hoping to get a big break. A dreamer, still recovering from the departure of the woman who has rekindled his flame … Rachel.
TEASER: INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

CLOVER, the cat, is watching TV and changing the channels. She turns off the TV and goes to her climbing frame; suddenly realises the camera is on her.

CLOVER
(to camera)
Oh hello. Thanks for joining us and welcome to my world and our house, technically owned by Rachel, (whispers to camera) she’s Australian. Came here thinking she’d make it as a writer. (holds in a laugh). Those colonials. Got to laugh at their naivete. Bought this house out of her property settlement. Brave. Or stupid. Kat, technically, my owner, lodges here to save money, along with the love of my life, Jeremy - a true writer who just needs someone to understand him. Sadly there is no one - but he has me. (she swoons). I digress. They are all single wives/husbands. My story is simple: get needs and wants met. You know the drill, the character has a goal, and they must face their needs, and then they are changed. Then what? No one asks that question do they? As Freud ruminated we cats give nothing back - complete narcissism. 100 years later and not many people have cottoned on. They keep thinking we understand them. (laughs) And worse that we love them. Misguided fools. Have you seen Cats and Dogs? Not the wimpy romcom The Truth about Cats and Dogs, a misleading title if ever there was one, no, Cats and Dogs demonstrated the intellectual superiority of cats - they rule the world. Stick around and I’ll show you how to have power without the responsibility.

Sound of door opening.

CLOVER (CONT'D)
Looks like someone’s home.

Clover exits.
INT. KITCHEN. DAY

RACHEL, 54, enters and looks at Clover who is sitting beside the bowl. Rachel texts, we see the name ‘Kat’.

CUT TO:

Titles: Have you Fed the Cat?

INT. KITCHEN. DAY

Rachel feeds Clover. Opens computer and emails.

RACHEL

Another dodgy lodger. Delete.

Clover sits in the corner shaking her head.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

RACHEL (CONT'D)

Delete.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM. DAY.

MALE LODGER

Will you be doing the laundry? My mother always did my laundry.

MALE LODGER begins to cry.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

RACHEL

Delete.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM. DAY.

PARANOID WOMAN

Have the aliens been to visit?

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

RACHEL

Delete.

INT. LOUNGE ROOM. DAY.

OCD MALE wiping all the surfaces.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

RACHEL

Delete.
INT. LOUNGE ROOM. DAY.

OLDER MALE stares at Rachel’s cleavage.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

RACHEL Delete.

CUT TO:

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

Rachel stops scrolling through her emails.

RACHEL Oh. Clover.

Clover looks up, then to camera and shakes her head. She keeps eating.

RACHEL (CONT’D) An invitation to apply for a job.

Clover slows down eating.

RACHEL (CONT’D) Back home. (Beat) Oh I wonder.

Clover looks in horror at the camera.

CLOVER (to camera) Australia? Where spiders lie in wait on toilet seats? Stop wondering lady.

Rachel looks around the kitchen.

RACHEL I’d probably get a good price for this place.

Clover looks to camera in horror.

CLOVER (to camera) Whoa Lady. From no lodger to selling the house? Slow down. We can figure this out. This is my home. There’s a lodger for everyone I promise. Let’s look on match.com Or spareroom.com, Any dot com.

Clover meows that sounds like a shriek of horror.
Sound of front door open. JEREMY, 35 walks into the kitchen and Clover jumps into his arms.

**JEREMY**
Hello beautiful. That’s a warm welcome.

Clover looks to camera.

**CLOVER**
(to camera)
Poor guy confuses my fear with love.

**JEREMY**
Has she not been fed?

**RACHEL**
(distracted, focussed on the computer)
What. Yes.

**JEREMY**
Normally she’s purring after a meal.

Clover scratches Jeremy. He winces.

**RACHEL**
Should never have allowed it to come with Kat. The son is enough.

**JEREMY**
She doesn’t like to be called it. She’s special (looks at Clover) aren’t you Clover.

Jeremy opens the kitchen cupboard and there is a shelf labelled ‘Clover’s special food’ Jeremy gets a packet of food and waves it in front of Clover’s face.

**CLOVER**
(to camera)
See what I have to put up with to get food?

**RACHEL**
I’ve been invited to apply for a job.

Jeremy fusses around the kitchen getting Clover’s food ready.

**JEREMY**
Good. Where?

**RACHEL**
Home.
JEREMY
Working from home? You’d like that.

RACHEL
No. Back home, in Australia.

Jeremy, stops, looks quizzically.

CLOVER
(to camera)
Not the quickest read on the shelf.

RACHEL
Can’t find another lodger to cover the mortgage. And besides the writing gig hasn’t worked out. Can’t get an agent.

JEREMY
I’ll help you find an agent.

RACHEL
I’ve decided to sell.

JEREMY
Selling out is not so bad. It brings in the big bucks. Albert Square needs more diversity. And you are....

RACHEL
White and middle class.

JEREMY
Yes exactly they need middle class perspective.

RACHEL
I’m selling it.

JEREMY
You don’t need to sell out.

CLOVER
As I said not the fastest...

RACHEL
I can.

CLOVER
You can’t.

RACHEL
I’m selling the house.

JEREMY
But it’s my... I mean our home.
CLOVER
That’s right Jeremy.

RACHEL
Well my home is not here.

Sound of front door closing. Jeremy runs out.

INT. HALLWAY. DAY.

KAT, 44, is taking off her coat, scarf and shoes.

JEREMY
Kat, thank goodness you’re home. You have to stop her. She’s gone crazy.

KAT
I told you to stop seeing Ashley. She’s not good for you.

JEREMY
It’s not Ashley – besides she’s now seeing some posh guy. Apparently he looks like me.

KAT
Back to the point Jeremy.

JEREMY
It’s Rachel. She wants to sell the house.

KAT
It’s her house. She can do what she wants.

JEREMY
But, but... We’ll be homeless.

KAT
See it as an opportunity Jeremy.

JEREMY
Opportunity to sleep with other homeless people?

KAT
Good opportunity to find somewhere cheaper.

JEREMY
What, so you can pay your way through more dodgy dates?
KAT
I’m sick of being single. I want to share my life with someone.

Kat exits.

JEREMY
(to Clover)
Always confusing sex with love.

MONTAGE OF KAT MEETING DODGY LANDLORDS. ONE TRIES TO HIT ON HER. ONE ASKS HOW OLD SHE IS. ONE SHOWS HER HIS BASEMENT OF FUN (IT’S A SEX PLAYGROUND). ONE IS A PARANOID WOMAN.

INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY

Jeremy is watching TV with Clover who keeps changing the channel and Jeremy can’t figure out why. Kat enters holding one of the For Sale signs.

KAT
We have to stop this.

Jeremy is trying to change the channel back.

JEREMY
Yes, it’s driving me nuts.

KAT
The sale.

Jeremy looks at her. He smiles. Clover smiles and then changes the channel behind Jeremy’s back.

KAT (CONT’D)
We need to find her a lodger. And I need to change my dating profile.

Kat puts her phone down. Clover smiles to camera.

INT. HALLWAY TOILET.

Clover in Kat’s dating app and she pauses a while on a man, who we recognise as Ben from the film.

CLOVER
He’s more her type. But he’ll have to wait.

Close up on Spareroom.com. We see Clover typing.

Suddenly the door opens and Rachel stands there looking suspicious.
RACHEL
Clover? What are you doing in the loo?

Clover puts on sweet face and hides the phone behind the toilet brush. She rushes out.

EXT. HOUSE/STREET. DAY.

GEORGE, 15, saunters up the road drinking. Arrives at the house, goes to hide the bottle and sees the For Sale signs behind the bins. He gets one and starts hammering with the bottle. Jeremy appears at the door with Clover at his feet.

JEREMY
George! What is that?

George hides the bottle behind his back.

GEORGE
Nothing.

JEREMY
I’ll tell your mother.

CLOVER
(to camera)
Kat’s son. Only comes round when he is hungry.

GEORGE
And I’ll let Amazon know who wrote those reviews for your latest book.

JEREMY
You’re skating on thin ice young man.

CLOVER
(to camera)
That’s my man. I love him when he talks like that.

JEREMY
Put that sign back.

GEORGE
But isn’t she selling?

JEREMY
She’s holding fire until we, I mean she, can figure something out.

George reluctantly puts the sign behind the bin and throws the bottle into the bin.
INT. TOILET. DAY

Rachel sitting on the loo, finds the phone behind the toilet brush. The screen is lit up, we see photo of Ben as phone shuts down.

RACHEL
(to herself)
And another one bites the dust.

INT. HOUSE. DAY

Open day at the house. Rachel is showing POTENTIAL BUYERS the house. Jeremy pulls one aside.

JEREMY
What do you think about the rising damp?

WOMAN BUYER - PHILIPPA
Is there rising damp?

JEREMY
Well I’m not sure but...

Jeremy pulls the sofa away from the wall and there is a big black mark.

WOMAN BUYER - PHILIPPA
Rupert. Have you seen this?

RUPERT - HUSBAND OF WOMAN BUYER
What is it Philippa?

PHILIPPA
(points to wall)
This.

RUPERT - HUSBAND OF WOMAN BUYER
I told you it was too good a price. That will cost ten grand at least.

Rachel comes over. Jeremy shoves the sofa back.

RACHEL
Any questions? Ahhhh.

Clover has attached herself to Rachel’s foot as Rachel tries to look composed.

PHILIPPA
It’s a lovely house.
It’s...it’s....

RACHEL
Ahhhh. Aahh.
PHILIPPA
Yes. Ahhh.

RUPERT
It’s not for us. Thank you.

Jeremy shows them out with a smile on his face. There is ANOTHER BUYER at the door.

JEREMY
Hello. Can I help?

WOMAN BUYER
I’m here about the house.

At that moment a NEIGHBOUR comes out. Jeremy hushes in the buyer.

JEREMY
(whispering)
You don’t want to be on the porch when Voldemort, I mean Vonda comes out.

WOMAN BUYER
Why?

JEREMY
Well let’s just say she’s off her meds.

WOMAN BUYER
Meds?

JEREMY
Yes they help stop the screaming.

WOMAN BUYER
Screaming?

JEREMY
You get used to it after a while. Besides three a.m. is a good time to write.

WOMAN BUYER
Three a.m.?

JEREMY
Like an alarm clock. Lately it’s a black car at nine a.m. and then we don’t see her all day (beat) or night.

WOMAN BUYER
Black car?
JEREMY
I think it’s her pimp.

WOMAN BUYER
Pimp?

Rachel comes to the door.

RACHEL
Oh hello. Are you here to see the house?

Clover rushes out and bites the woman buyer on the foot.

WOMAN BUYER
Ahhhhhh.

RACHEL
Clover get off.

Jeremy peels Clover off the buyer’s foot.

JEREMY
Clover you naughty girl.

WOMAN BUYER
Thanks. I... I.... Don’t think this area is for me.

RACHEL
But you haven’t seen the house. And what do you mean by this area isn’t for you?

The woman buyer runs off. Jeremy holds Clover, smiling, which turns to disapproval as he turns to Rachel.

JEREMY
Some people are such snobs. It’s not Chelsea.

A STREAM OF WOMEN WITH CATS on leads and in baskets start arriving.

CAT WOMAN 1
This is it. Number 109. Are you Rachel?

RACHEL
Err. Yes. Why?

CAT WOMAN 2
I’m here about the room.

CAT WOMAN 1
I was here first.
CAT WOMAN 2
How rude. It’s not the first that counts cats...

CLOVER
It’s the cat that counts first.
(shouts) which of you can count?

Sound of cat sounds saying ‘I can. Pick me. I play chess’.
Clover jumps down from Jeremy’s arms.

CLOVER (CONT'D)
Come to mama.

CAT WOMAN 2
Can we see the room?

RACHEL
I’m not looking for a lodger. (points to For Sale sign)
I’m selling.

CAT WOMAN 1
I told you it was a mistake. Who’d ask for a lodger with cats.

CLOVER
(singing with the other cats)
I would. Who’d want to be a millionaire, I would. Who’d want to be... (stops suddenly) I digress.
Back to the issue at hand.

Kat comes to the porch.

KAT
What is going on here? And what’s all that screeching?

CLOVER
It’s not screeching. It’s singing.

RACHEL
These women seem to think that I need a lodger ... with a cat. Lots of cats.

CLOVER
(to camera, swooning)
Heaven.

Rachel looks at Jeremy and Kat.

RACHEL
Did either of you have anything to do with this?
KAT
Honestly Rachel I had nothing to do
(she starts laughing) with this. My
goodness look at all those cats.

RACHEL
You have a cat.

George appears at the front of the house.

KAT
(shifting the blame)
I saw Jeremy on spareroom.com.

RACHEL
Jeremy did you post an ad for a
lodger?

CAT WOMAN 1
So you don’t need a lodger?

Simultaneously they answer:

RACHEL
No.

JEREMY
Yes.

KAT
Maybe.

GEORGE
Careful Jeremy.

CAT WOMAN 2
Told you it was a mistake. I’m
always right.

CAT WOMAN 1
That’s what you think.

The women start walking away.

CLOVER
(shifting the blame)
Hey guys. Come visit. Anytime. I
have the place to myself.

Kat and Rachel go inside. Jeremy picks up Clover and stands
there stroking Clover. BEN walks up to the house next door
and knocks on the door.

JEREMY
She’s not awake.

BENJAMIN
Sorry?
JEREMY
It’s only two p.m., she’s not up yet.

BENJAMIN
But I’ve got an appointment to see the room.

JEREMY
You looking for a room?

CLOVER
(to camera)
Looks familiar? Yes I thought so too. Maybe our fortunes have changed.

Clover meows into Jeremy’s ear, jumps down from Jeremy’s arms and runs off.

CLOVER (CONT’D)
(to camera)
Planted the seed. Now to see what the freeloader is eating.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY.

George is rummaging through the fridge. Kat is standing there. Clover enters.

CLOVER
(to camera)
See? Only comes here for the food. Who does he think he is? A cat?

KAT
George I need to talk to you.

George turns from the fridge with food in his mouth.

GEORGE
You need to talk to me?

George puts food down in a slow measured way.

GEORGE (CONT’D)
I think you need to explain yourself young lady. Posting ads without the owner’s permission. I think that’s illegal.

KAT
I don’t know where they came from.

GEORGE
And blaming Jeremy. Tch Tch.
George gets more food into his mouth.

CLOVER
(to camera)
There goes my special dinner. Back to the issue at hand.

Clover runs off.

EXT. HOUSE. DAY (MP THAT BECOMES A TP)

Clover jumps into Ben’s arms. He pats her.

JEREMY
Do you like animals.

BENJAMIN
Yes, grew up on a farm.

JEREMY
So you won’t mind the rats then.

Jeremy points to the house.

BENJAMIN
Rats?

JEREMY
Well there’s only three left I think.

BENJAMIN
Three? Rats?

JEREMY
The council has given her notice.

BENJAMIN
All I wanted was a simple room. There’s so many dodgy landlords in this city.

MONTAGE OF BENJAMIN MEETING DODGY LANDLORDS. THEY ARE THE SAME ONES THAT KAT HAS MET EARLIER. THEN THERE IS ONE WHO IS THE SAME AS A LODGER THAT RACHEL INTERVIEWED ASKING BEN IF HE LIKES TO PLAY IN BASEMENTS.

JEREMY
And they lie. And have weird tastes.

BENJAMIN
Yes.

Benjamin starts to leave.
JEREMY
We have a room. And we are not weird. Or lie.

Benjamin looks at the For Sale sign.

BENJAMIN
But aren't you selling.

JEREMY
What made you think that?

Ben points to the For Sale sign.

JEREMY (CONT'D)
Oh that.

BENJAMIN
Is this your house?

JEREMY
Yes. Well technically not mine, but ... The owner is desperate...

BENJAMIN
I don't want desperate.

JEREMY
I mean desperate to find someone. Like you. And when she couldn't she rashly made the decision to...

CLOVER
(to camera)
This will be interesting. What was that about lying?

BENJAMIN
What's the rate?

JEREMY
What can you afford?

BENJAMIN
Eight, I mean seven hundred a...

JEREMY
Perfect. Six hundred a month it is.

BENJAMIN
But I said....

JEREMY
All that is needed is the bond and my home is safe... I mean the room is safely yours.
BENJAMIN
Shouldn’t I meet the owner?

JEREMY
Rachel will love you. I just know. Lovely woman. Makes rash decisions but we are able to get her back on track. Don’t we Clover?

Clover meows. And then winks to camera.

BENJAMIN
Her name is Rachel? I knew someone..

JEREMY
Bit too Friends if you ask me. Back to the business at hand. I can show you the nearest ATM.

BENJAMIN
Shouldn’t I see the room?

Jeremy gets out his phone and scrolls to the ad on spareroom.com.

JEREMY
See? Great room. South facing. Ensuite. What more could you want?

BENJAMIN
To see the room?

JEREMY
If you want it you will have to give me a bond. It’s got a lot of interest. We’ve got three, I mean five, people coming tonight and if I have your bond I can tell her, I mean them it’s taken.

BENJAMIN
I’m not sure. I think I should at least meet...

JEREMY
It’ll be gone by the time you get back with the bond. Now have you got your card?

Jeremy leads Ben off. Clover sits on the porch looking pleased with herself.
INT. PUB. NIGHT.

Kat is sitting at the bar looking at men coming in. Ben walks in. Kat looks at her dating app, sees photo is same as Ben. She waves.

BENJAMIN
Hello, Kat?

KAT
Yes. So pleased you look like, I mean, to meet you.

BENJAMIN
Drink?

KAT
Thanks that would be nice. You Australian?

BENJAMIN
Yes. Just arrived.

KAT
And what do you do?

BENJAMIN
Filmmaker. On a teaching exchange with the National Film School. But hoping...

Kat is very impressed.

KAT
Oh worked on anything I might have seen?

BENJAMIN
Muriel’s Wedding.

KAT
Oh I love Muriel’s wedding. So insightful about family dynamics.

BENJAMIN
I think you might be thinking about Margot After The Wedding. With Nicole.

KAT
Oh I love Nicole. Do you know her.

BENJAMIN
I’ve worked with her - years ago before she became famous. Anyway enough about me. What about you?
KAT
You are cute... I mean you are curious. I.. I.. I.. work as a journalist and and and want to get into charity work. Are you here long? And where are you staying?

BENJAMIN
I went to look at a room and the neighbour told me terrible stories about the landlady and then told me he had a spare room. So I’m going to meet them tonight. So, I’m sorry, but I can only stay for a drink. Maybe we could do dinner later in the week.

KAT
Oh yes. That would be lovely.

Kat looks away and clinches a fist with ‘yes’.

INT. LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

Kat is watching TV. Jeremy rushes in. Clover follows.

JEREMY
Kat I found him.

CLOVER
(to camera)
This should be fun.

KAT
Who?

JEREMY
A guy. For the room.

KAT
Shouldn’t Rachel meet him?

JEREMY
She will. Tonight. He’s coming here. And he’s Purrfect.

CLOVER
(to camera)
Seriously?

JEREMY
Have you fed the cat?

KAT
She wasn’t here.
CLOVER
(to camera)
Liar.

Rachel enters.

JEREMY
Clover! Daddy’s got your special dinner.

RACHEL
I fed her earlier. Then she scratched me.

CLOVER
(to camera)
Another lie. It was a tickle.

JEREMY
She must have wanted her special food.

KAT
Rachel, Jeremy’s got something to tell you.

JEREMY
Yes Rachel, I found someone who is interested in the room. And he’s coming over to meet you tonight.

RACHEL
Don’t know if you noticed. The house is for sale. I’m going back home. Sorry guys. You need to tell the lodger he’s not lodging here. And I’ve got an interview for that job tomorrow. Looks like I’m a shoe-in.


JEREMY
(desperately)
But I’ve invited him... tonight.

KAT
Well you’ll just have to uninvite your new brofriend.

JEREMY
He’s cute.

KAT
And?
JEREMY
You might like him.

KAT
I’ve met someone actually. And I think it has long term potential.

JEREMY
Well do you want him to see you living in a hovel or in a nice house like this one?

KAT
She is determined to go back home and sell this house. She’s not going to like having a lodger shoved down her throat.

JEREMY
I'll get him to come over on Saturday. After the open house.

INT. KITCHEN. DAY. A FEW DAYS LATER.

Rachel is drinking brandy. Kat comes in.

KAT
Bit early isn’t it?

RACHEL
Rejection doesn’t know time.

KAT
Another agent?

RACHEL
The job.

Clover winks to camera.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
Apparently I’m on the wrong side of fifty. They were so nice in the interview then at the end something happened, they asked a really weird question about commitment issues.

CLOVER
(to camera, conspiratorially)
Film research....

Rachel takes another gulp of brandy. Jeremy comes in. He looks at Kat and mouths ‘what’s going on?’
KAT
(trying to sound sad)
Jeremy, Rachel has had some bad news. (beat) She didn’t get the job in Australia.

Jeremy has to hide his happiness behind Rachel’s back. Rachel turns and Jeremy puts on a fake sad face.

KAT (CONT'D)
And what about selling?

RACHEL
What’s the point? Stuck here.

JEREMY
Well I’ve got someone coming for afternoon tea. Maybe you could join us.

RACHEL
I’m already having my afternoon tea.

KAT
I think it would be good for you to socialise.

RACHEL
I think it’s better if I am out of the way. It seems I am invisible anyway.

KAT
I’d love it if you could make your cheesecake.

JEREMY
That’s one way to kill the … cat.

Clover looks to camera shocked.

CLOVER
(to camera)
He really does love me.

RACHEL
I thought you didn’t like my cheesecake.

KAT
(gulping)
I love it. It’s…. It’s…

JEREMY
A perfect blend of … sweet with sour.
RACHEL
If I’d known you both liked it so much I would have made it more often.

JEREMY AND KAT
Nooooo. It would be too much.... To ask.

RACHEL
Okay. I’ll make it. Take me off my misery. Who’s coming?

JEREMY AND KAT
Benjamin.

RACHEL
(drunkenly)
I knew a Ben. Once.

EXT. HOUSE. DAY
George is hiding bottles behind the bin. Ben arrives.

BENJAMIN
You need to take the labels off first.

George looks at him suspiciously.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)
So she doesn’t know what you’re drinking.

GEORGE
She never knows what I’m doing.

BENJAMIN
Oh she does. They always do.

The front door opens. Jeremy stands there. George is holding a bottle behind his back.

JEREMY
George don’t you have somewhere else to go. Like home. Nice to see you again Benjamin.

INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY
Ben and Jeremy enter the Living Room. Clover purrs at his leg. On the table is the cheesecake. Kat enters the room and stops. She and Ben stare at each other.
RACHEL (O.S.)
What does everyone want? Coffee?
Tea?

KAT
You?

Ben has recognised the voice.

BENJAMIN
I think I should go.

JEREMY
But you haven’t met Rachel.

BENJAMIN
I have... I mean I have another....

KAT
Date?

BENJAMIN
No. No. Not at all.

Kat looks confused. And conflicted. But then looks decisive.

RACHEL (O.S.)
So what will it be?

Ben is shaking.

KAT
A herbal tea for me.

JEREMY
A coffee for me. (looks to Ben)
And?

BENJAMIN
Is that cheesecake?

JEREMY
(shouting towards the kitchen)
The new lodger will have a flat white.

RACHEL (O.S.)
Like an Australian!

Clover jumps on the table and stares at the cake.

JEREMY
(panicked)
Clover. Don’t. I mean don’t you dare.
KAT
One piece might kill ... her...

JEREMY
... appetite for... dinner.

George enters carrying the For Sale sign.

GEORGE
Is the house for sale or not?

BENJAMIN
I think I need to go.

Rachel enters carrying a tray full of tea pot and cup, coffees. She sees Ben and drops the tray. Rachel runs from the room. Kat and Jeremy follow.

GEORGE
Is that cheesecake?

INT. KITCHEN. DAY
Rachel is having an anxiety attack. Jeremy pours a brandy.

KAT
Do you know that guy?

RACHEL
Where did you find him? On one of your dating sites?

Jeremy hands Kat a brandy.

KAT
Well um um...

JEREMY
He found us.

RACHEL
What?

JEREMY
He was next door and about to meet Voldemort when I saved him.

KAT
Yes that’s right. I didn’t have a date with him.

RACHEL
You had a date with him?

KAT
It’s over. Besides he is perfect ... for the room.

(MORE)
KAT (CONT'D)
And we love this house don’t we
Jeremy. He’s in the film industry
Rachel.

RACHEL
I am fully aware of what industry
he is in. What the hell is he doing
here?

KAT
On an exchange with the NFTS, ....
Which he just told us.

JEREMY
Did he?

KAT
You must have missed it.

RACHEL
Well he can’t live here.

JEREMY
Why not? He’s not weird, he doesn’t
have mother issues, he...

RACHEL
He has to go.

KAT
We love this house Rachel. You have
done so much with it.

JEREMY
And we love you. (beat) In a
platonic way.

CLOVER
(to camera)
It better be.

JEREMY
Besides I’ve taken the bond. So you
have to at least show him the room.

Rachel takes a gulp of brandy. Clover looks curious.

INT. LIVING ROOM. DAY

Ben sits there looking at the door, legs shaking. Looks at
his phone. George is gouging on the cheesecake. Ben is about
to get up when Rachel walks in. Clover jumps on the sofa and
scratches George.

BENJAMIN
Should I go?
RACHEL
No. I mean yes. I mean no. I mean stay. Sit.

Ben sits. Jeremy and Kat sneak back into the room. Rachel tries to be cool.

RACHEL (CONT'D)
So ... how long have you been in London?

BENJAMIN
Not long. A week. I was next door... when

JEREMY
He was saved from a fate worse than death. You know she who lives next door...

RACHEL
Yes Jeremy I am fully aware of who lives next door. And you thought you could just offer him a room in my house?

JEREMY
(to himself)
And I thought you were kind.

RACHEL
Sorry Jeremy did you say something?

JEREMY
That you were kind enough to at least let Benjamin look at the room.

RACHEL
Benjamin. Is that what you are calling yourself these days?

Jeremy stands there motionless.

CLOVER
(to camera)
He needs help.

Clover goes to Ben and purrs all over him.

JEREMY
Clover likes you.

KAT
Benjamin would you like more coffee?
GEORGE
(with mouthful of food)
He’s cool Rachel.

BENJAMIN
If I could just have the bond back.

JEREMY
Ahh. Yes. The bond. (thinking) I used it to help Rachel ...

RACHEL
Help Rachel?

JEREMY
Get... get... An Agent.

CLOVER
(to camera)
Liar liar pants on fire.

BENJAMIN
Six hundred quid to find an agent?

JEREMY
It’s London.

RACHEL
Six hundred? But the room is seven hundred.

JEREMY
Commonwealth discount?

KAT
No bond. No sale. I think we need to give Benjamin a chance.

Rachel stands there. A long pause.

RACHEL
Okay. He can stay.

BENJAMIN
I am right here.

RACHEL
He can stay for a month..

BENJAMIN
I am right here.

RACHEL
...and then I am putting the house back on the market. No more finding lodgers at discount prices, or hiding signs behind the bins Jeremy.
GEORGE
Yeah Jeremy. Who's skating on thin ice now?

Jeremy is about to respond when he sees that Rachel and Ben are having a moment. Jeremy looks bereft. Kat looks panicked.

KAT
Maybe selling isn't so bad Rachel.

RACHEL
It's only a month.

Another moment between Rachel and Ben.

CLOVER
(to camera)
Now that's something I can work with.

THE END
CRITICAL REFLECTION ON CREATIVE PRACTICE 3:

HAVE YOU FED THE CAT? A COMEDY SERIES FEATURING THE MAIN CHARACTERS FROM THE FILM THE ACCIDENTAL ACADEMIC

The aim of this creative practice

I set out to create a half-hour narrative comedy series which continues the unresolved issues between Rachel and Ben. The aim was to write a pilot episode where the main characters meet again, and establish a dramatic question (DQ): Will they get together?

The objective of Creative Practice 3 (CP3) was to find a balance between the melodrama of the unrequited relationship in the film and a new situation which has inherent comic situations.

However, when reworking a film to sitcom/narrative comedy, it is necessary to consider what ‘struggle’ or tension drives the repeatability. As discussed in Chapter Three, and applying that analysis to this CP, I needed to determine to what degree the DQ will govern the narrative arc of the series and if there will be some resolution in the concluding episode. Further, that the second TP must carry elements of a MP in that information is delivered, and which alters the direction of the narrative from being in the descent to turning at ninety degrees.

Developing this creative practice

With Rachel’s move overseas, it seemed logical to continue the unresolved relationship between Rachel and Ben. Being a comedy series about post-divorce love, Rachel and Ben would be the key characters, and as such Rachel cannot be a comic antihero, as I argued she is in CP1 (see Critical Reflection 1); thus in this CP she is not aware of the dynamics at play that keeps her in a situation where she repeatedly makes the same mistakes.

The pilot episode has a catalyst which introduces the main characters, the four divorced singletons, Rachel, Ben, Jeremy, Kat, along with Clover the talking cat, and Kat’s son George. The echo characters are Jeremy and Kat, with Clover and George fulfilling the role of truth-tellers. Rachel and Ben are now key characters, caught in a struggle to define their feelings for each other. Each of the characters and finding themselves divorced (some having left the previous relationship, while others did the leaving), they fear that they will not find love again. This theme is triggered in each episode.

Thus, when reworking a film narrative to a half-hour episodic comedy, I found it necessary to clarify the following:

- Which characters have an unresolved need?
- What underlying fears can be triggered with an episodic inciting incident?
- Is the situation a new one, or can the current situation create new tensions which underpin fears?
- Are the fears mirrored back to the main characters by way of echo characters?
- Is there is DQ or an overt ‘frame’ which underlies the tension? And does it have the promise of a resolution?
- How has the intervening time frame affected the characters?

Also, it needs to be asked, having decided it is a house-sharing situation, how does Ben come to be in the same house as Rachel. And whose house is it?

The overarching DQ for the series is centred on Ben and Rachel with episodic stories on the dating lives of the divorced singletons living together. Thus, the frame is not as evident as has been posited as being beneficial for the ensemble sitcom. To that end, *Have You Fed the Cat?* falls between the sitcom of repeated behaviour yet with a narrative arc and DQ that encompasses the series, informed by a theme on the nature of dating in midlife. CP3 is therefore a narrative comedy series centred on relationships, with a DQ informing both the series arc and episodic storylines.
Two drafts of the pilot were written, and in the first version, in the lead up to the MP, Clover hitches a ride to Jeremy’s work where she meets the office cat and, reluctant to engage with her, runs off; in pursuit Clover comes across Ben. When Jeremy catches up to Clover, he discovers that Ben is looking for somewhere to live. However, this MP scene was too deus ex machina in forcing the characters to satisfy the story, with Ben becoming a lodger, rather than the characters’ actions determining the plot – the MP needed to be rethought. Also, in the first draft Kat owned the house and it was suggested by the script editor that Rachel own the house as this raises the stakes for all the inhabitants.

In the second version of the script Rachel has decided to put the house on the market and Ben arrives next door for an interview as a lodger. Jeremy, having disposed of any potential buyers for Rachel’s house, now tries to win over Ben in taking the room in Rachel’s house by being less than generous about the next-door neighbour. Thus, at the MP/TP Jeremy has attempted to turn the narrative (and catalyst) away from the sale of the house rather than rely on an accidental discovery in a park; now both character have agency in their goal and are directly related. As discussed in Chapter Three, the TP enables a change in direction of the narrative, creating the rectangular shape of the narrative, while the MP delivers information.

Insights gleaned from this creative practice

In rewriting of these scenes, the exercise became practice-led research; the second version of the MP/TP is in this draft.

While the TP changes the direction of the narrative, the MP delivers essential information – Ben needs a place to live – and this gives Jeremy an idea that will delay, if not

This discussion of the second TP also being an MP enabled me to determine that the sitcom has a narrative structure of four acts with each of the TPs creating an act:
- Opening and inciting incident
- TP1 into Act Two
- TP2 into Act Three
- TP3 into Act Four to the re-situation and emotional stasis.
prevent the sale of the house. Having tested the principle that a series post-film should the sale
of the house. While I tested the technique that a series post-film should exploit unresolved
needs, I came to the realisation that this is best done in a situation which triggers
different/new flaws. Also, it needs to be considered how Ben and Rachel feel about seeing the
other for the first time in years. Are they both pleased? What has been the communication in
the intervening years? This was not considered in either draft and must be when further work
is done on the script. This draft set out to establish numerous relationships that have a DQ, and
which enables both seriality and tension that drives the series as well as within episodes.

Implications for practice
CP3 determines the principle that the second TP in the episodic narrative comedy delivers
information much like a MP, yet in this form of screen comedy the character acts in ways that
result in a change of narrative direction, as opposed to the character undergoing transformation
(even at the last minute as in film comedy). Thus, CP3 and the reworking of the scene that
contains TP2, validates that TP2 in an episode is most effective when it is also a MP which
delivers information, triggering a MP reversal (MPR); rather than confront their need in
response to the narrative, the character acts to alter the narrative in pursuit of their want.
Furthermore, CP3 verifies the principle that characters with unresolved needs are best suited
for the post-film TV narrative comedy series and is best served by some degree of seriality by
way of a DQ.

What are the implications gained from the theoretical chapter and writing creative practice 3?
As noted, developing a series from a film is more challenging as there needs to be tension
between the main characters to enable repeatability, and in some cases seriality. Although on
reflection I wonder if it is more difficult to develop a film from a series as the analysis of the
2016 Dad’s Army film elucidated. Regardless, the sitcom must ensure that the characters, in
their emotional arrestment, repeat the same mistakes, while the narrative comedy may enable
some degree of emotional growth by way of a DQ. I have argued that such tension can be found either within the second act of the film (as CP1 makes evident) or post the resolution, as CP3 has attempted to achieve. However, if there is no framing discourse or overt story ideology, then a narrative arc with a DQ, centred on the discordant relationship, enables (comic) tension within the episode as well as across the series. As the ‘frame’ of dating post-divorce is more nebulous in terms of status and ideology than that found in the ensemble sitcoms discussed in Chapter One, I offer that CP3 is governed by a ‘social’ frame (dating in midlife). Each of the characters have varying attitudes to this ‘frame,’ making it an ensemble comedy with seriality, enabled by relationships missteps. Further, CP3 testifies to the principle that a DQ enables comic tension by way of inter-relational dynamics, and more so if there is more than one relationship in play, as we see in the ensemble sitcom Friends (which has a ‘social’ frame and the need to grow up).

On a final note, and how the originating text, It’s Academic, the sitcom, might be capitalised on in a marketing campaign for the film:

*The Accidental Academic.*

‘The truth about Ben and Rachel is finally out.’

A comedy about love, loss and the confusion of middle age.

In creating a comedy series from the film:

*Have You Fed the Cat?*

‘Ben and Rachel are far from home – and house-sharing with other divorced singletons. Will any of them ever swipe right again?’

A magic-realist comedy series with a talking cat.
CONCLUSION

This thesis was guided by the question: *How can specific elements of character and plotting be manipulated to generate comic tension in three related forms of screen comedy: the TV sitcom, the feature film, and the half-hour narrative comedy?* Specifically, I set out to explore how comic tension is enabled through the narrative and related plotting that affect, and is affected by, character behaviour. I have examined the sitcom/narrative comedy-film relationship by way of developing three creative practices (CPs) which follow the journey of two characters across three different, yet related, narratives. To that end, this thesis evaluated the nature of comic tension in each form, elucidating principles that offered aspects to be considered in the development and transposition of characters from one screen comedy narrative to another.

Beginning with a formalist approach to determine narrative patterns, this thesis has analysed structural aspects of the midpoint (MP) in specific film comedies and turning points (TPs) in the episodic narrative comedy series to argue that character behaviour and plotting are intrinsically linked. This thesis has also determined a principle that some film comedies, in particular those having plots which deal with a discordant relationship, involve the protagonist being caught in a bind at the MP. I argued that such a bind, being the tension between a goal and unaddressed flaws (need) underscore comic tension in Act Two, specifically the second half. Thus, I posit that comic tension in the film is enabled by way of the narrative bearing down on the character to confront their need; attempting to subvert the narrative in order to serve their goal the character denies the challenge offered by the narrative until the crisis point at the end of Act Two. Such analysis illustrated aspects of comic tension and TPs in episodic narrative comedy series, including the sitcom.

Furthermore, this thesis critically examined the ensemble sitcom to argue that this form of comedy is not only able to harbour a comic antihero, but comic tension is enabled by way
of a discursive frame. However, I posit that the frame is not essential in developing the relational sitcom, or narrative comedy series. If no frame exists then I contend that the narrative comedy series is best governed by an overarching dramatic question (DQ), and when resolved the series ends. The echo character continues to play a vital role in both the sitcom and narrative comedy series, creating the comedic gap between them and other characters, as well manifesting the collective or individual unconscious fear, which may also be delivered by a frame, if one is in play. The role of the echo character in screen comedy is an area for further investigation.

**Comedy as a metanarrative**

Leger Grindon argues:

> Finally, and maybe most vital, the [romantic comedy] genre needs to draw upon related cultural phenomena, whether a hit play, a popular performer, political trends, shifting audience demographics, or the values and problems of the society at large.¹

This thesis offers that the comedy film, as a metanarrative, is best served by drawing on ‘related cultural phenomena’ as it enables characters to protest its restrictions, often by way of incongruity. The comedy film genre’s ability to encompass multiple forms of comedy tropes establishes its potential as a metanarrative under which sits a variety of plots that are comic, one being the relationship comedy, a term offered by Deborah Jermyn now consigned to the “relcom.” Similarly, the narrative comedy series can tap into shifting audience demographics by way of a DQ, rather than characters who simply rail against each other or in opposition to a discursive frame which, for some characters, is disempowering, and for others can be empowering. If the comedy film encompasses generic differences and tensions, I now argue that so too can the short comic narratives of the sitcom and narrative comedy series, particularly when they are situated within ideological frames.

THE CHAPTERS AND CREATIVE PRACTICES

Chapter One analysed the ensemble sitcom (having five or more main characters) to find that comic tension is best enabled by a frame which renders each character, to varying degrees, disempowered. Further, critically examining the antihero in the sitcom, this chapter and the first CP, an ensemble sitcom titled *It's Academic*, found that the comic antihero (Rachel) is most effective when at odds with the discursive frame (the marketisation of Higher Education). CP1 tested the principle that a discursive frame enables comic tension both inter- and intra-relationally, enabling a secondary comedic gap to that of the echo character. CP1 also explored the notion that the comic antihero’s entrapment is born of some loyalty to the gang, yet they are conscious of the frame that traps the group in a situation and which the antihero, in particular, believes is disempowering. The comic antihero’s relationship to the frame and existence in other forms of screen comedy is also an area for future research.

Chapter Two examined the MP in film comedies, primarily those with discordant relationships, to find that at the MP the protagonist, in some instances, is caught in a bind. CP2, a feature film, *The Accidental Academic*, set out to explore the transformational journey of two of the characters from the sitcom – Ben and Rachel. In developing the feature film, I utilised the sequence approach of Paul Gulino and David Howard’s application of Frank Daniel’s framework to align each sequence with the stages for comic plotting, offered by Billy Mernit and Keith Giglio. From this I discovered that *The Accidental Academic* sits firmly in the ‘relationship comedy’ oeuvre as well as being a comedy on the ‘margins’ in having older couples, ambivalent endings, neurosis and even a touch of gender confusion. It was the ‘uncertain ending’ in CP2 which enabled the post-text comedy series for CP3.

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Further, I posited that the tension between the comic antihero and the frame (as per Chapter One) chimes with the tension generated by the bind analysed in Chapter Two, giving insight to the nature of the characters’ relationships and any discord which prevents resolution.

The theoretical analyses in Chapter Two triggered an interest in unpacking the process which the character undergoes when being taken from the narrative structure of the sitcom (and a state of repeated unconsciousness) to film (becoming conscious and thus transformed). However, the comic antihero, as explored in Section One, already has some degree of consciousness or awareness (of the frame). Hence, I determined that it is the unconscious ‘need’ of the character which is brought to consciousness in response to the film narrative and which drives the character's transformational journey. Thus, the comic antihero, while conscious of the frame may not be conscious of their need, and which ironically may assist in such characters becoming free of their ‘entrapment.’

While CP2 was not completely successful as a comedy, more akin to a dramedy, (in that it had some comic moments interspersed in a dramatic story) I posit this is because the bind shifted from being that of Ben to that of Rachel. I reflect on this point in the critical reflection of CP2 to deduce that comic tension is better enabled by either one or both characters caught in a bind (not shifting from one to the other as happened) and which ultimately avoided the fact that neither had a bind related to an effective catch. Further analysis of the connection between the premise, theme and MP may assist in determining the nature and facilitation of the bind, as well as ensuring that the flaw is connected with a catch for the protagonist/s at the beginning of Act Two. Hence, I argue that the relationship film comedy is often determined by the existence of a bind wherein the protagonist is caught between the growing consciousness of a need and a want/goal at odds with the need; at the very least, the protagonist attempts to cling to one (the goal) whilst actively denying the other (the need) until the crisis point at the end of Act Two. As such, it is the tension between
unconscious and conscious states, as mentioned, and which may shed further insight into the nature of the bind; this is also an area for further research. For now, and in light of Chapter Two and CP2, I posit that the following aspects need to be considered when developing a film from an existing comedy series:

- Do all the characters migrate to the film?
- What is the relationship in terms of timeline of the series and the film?
- Which characters undergo transformation? What is the nature of the change in the characters? Which needs are confronted?
- What is the bind of the main character/s in the film text? How is it instantiated?
- Is the situation the same? If different, why? And how does that impact on the originating text if still in production?

Furthermore, and considering the aim of this thesis, I argue that those characters who deny their need in the sitcom have the most potential to change and therefore are best suited to be transposed to either the film, or from film to the comedy series when there are still unresolved needs for the character/s to confront. The study revealed that the second act contains the emotional struggle of the discordant relationship, and as such can be a starting point in ascertaining which characters to transpose from a film to a series. Further, CP2 bears out the proposition that CP1 sits within the second act of a feature film, the primary consideration of Chapter Three: developing a narrative comedy series from a film. To that point, this thesis has revealed that it is necessary for some emotional/discursive tension to be in play for a comedy series to emerge – either out of the second act or at the conclusion of the film narrative.

As noted in the Introduction, and borne out of this research, in the sitcom the situation challenges the character who then subverts the narrative (to ensure the re-situation), while in the feature film the narrative challenges the character to confront their need and associated flaws. I have argued that the film comedy character delays this moment to the crisis point at the end of Act Two, whereas the drama character begins to confront their need at the MP, triggering the MPR (midpoint reversal).
By way of critical examination, this thesis offers that when the situation remains the same in both the comedy series (sitcom/narrative comedy) and the world of the film, then the series sits within the second act of the film; when the situation changes, then the comedy series sits either before the film (prequel) or post the film’s resolution, but only when there are still unresolved issues that can inform a DQ or an ideological frame which is entrapping. I note at this point that the situation in the comedy series is often limited to a few sets, or locations whereas the ‘situation’ in a film is more akin to a larger realm – the story world. Hence, in the former it is the relationship between the ‘entrapping’ situation and character which enables comic tension, while in the latter it is the relationship between character and narrative born of a story world.

Chapter Three analysed films that spawned comedy series to find that when developing a series from a film it is those characters who deny the reality in either the same environment (such as 9 to 5, 1980 or The Odd Couple, 1968) or in an unfamiliar environment as CP3 does, wherein new flaws emerge in response to the changed dynamic and/or environment. However, it is essential to determine if the subsequent series is relational or an ensemble and to consider how the situation underscores comic tension.

In developing a narrative comedy for CP3, Have You Fed the Cat?, and being a post-film text, I decided to relocate the main characters from the film to a new situation (and country) with a DQ governing the series: will Rachel and Ben get together? The common fear which pervades the lives of each of the main characters in CP3 and underscores a less obvious frame: the nature of love post-divorce. However, if there is no framing discourse or overt story ideology, I argue that a narrative arc with a DQ enables tension within the episode as well as across the series; tension in the sitcom resides primarily within the episode to ensure the re-situation. Consequently, I offer that the narrative comedy series needs to find a balance.

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between the DQ which underpins the discordant relationship/s, and the framing discourse, if one is in play. As such, and, in this case, the DQ plays a larger role than the ‘frame.’

The Critical Reflections

The three CPs map the journey and evolution of two characters from one story world and its ideological frame to another narrative structure that demands transformation and onto a new situation wherein unfinished business is challenged.

Reflecting on each of the CPs, I was able to discern which aspects succeeded (such as the frame, the echo within the group, the MP and related TPs) and those aspects which were more challenging (the comic antihero, the bind and episodic TPs operating as MPs). The comic antihero in the ensemble comedy is particularly difficult to develop. As noted, I offer it is because such characters are aware of the disempowering frame, yet despite their attempts to demolish it, can only articulate the disempowerment that keeps them, and the gang, trapped in its gaze.

Analysing the CPs enabled clarification of practice-based approaches to the theoretical concepts in the dissertation chapters, giving rise to new propositions and insights. For me, the difficulty of practice as research is determining the framework to be applied to the (yet to be realised) practice. Whereas reflecting on a practice through a theoretical framework (as I did in my book) enables insight to trends and which has been offered in this thesis. However, working between practice and theory enabled me to ascertain the ‘narrative theory-comic tension-character behaviour’ accord. Thus, this thesis has analysed the character forced to confront their flaws, in which they are challenged by the narrative, to argue that the resulting tension enables comic performance.
CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This thesis brings new knowledge to the study of film comedy and related comedy series in that I have derived certain principles that offer some explanation for the success of specific types of comedies. Applying these principles to the CPs, I learned that ensemble sitcoms generate comicality when governed by a discursive frame, and that the echo character, in manifesting the collective fear, triggers internal pressure for the group in relation to the frame. In reflecting on the challenge of developing a comic antihero, I determined that the group could harbour such characters in an ensemble sitcom, and now offer that they may also operate in the ensemble film comedy. Furthermore, I deduced that film comedies about relationships can entrap the main character/s in a bind, in turn underscoring the comic tension in the second act.

Having argued that characters attempt to maintain both want and need in the relcom, the comedy series is therefore related to the film in the repeated denial by the character to confront their need in Act Two and is the basis for my argument that in some cases the sitcom/narrative comedy series sits in the second act of the film. Following on, this thesis finds that the comedy series is centred on some characters’ endeavour to actualise, some by way of a DQ and/or a discursive frame, and when acted upon, the series must end. Finally, the second TP in the comedy series episode is also a MP, and which forces the plot, at TP3, to return to the emotional stasis of the series – the re-situation. The tension, between character and narrative, is most intense at TP2, and can now be viewed as a form of bind. What connects all three forms of screen comedy narratives is the tension between characters’ desires, discordant relationships and, in some cases, the discourse of the story world and its ideology.

Exposing characters to situations and narratives which put pressure on their flaws is the challenge for all screenwriters, yet in offering the opportunity to laugh at life, we are released from the bind which entraps us in our own struggle to know who we are.
APPENDICES

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**A SELECTION OF NOTABLE LIVE-ACTION SITCOMS THAT WERE MADE INTO FILMS + FILMS TO SITCOMS (*)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE OF TV SERIES</th>
<th>YEARS</th>
<th>FILM TITLE</th>
<th>YEAR RELEASED</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Acropolis Now (Aus.)*</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Wogs out of Work (from stage play) The Wog Boy</td>
<td>1987, 2000</td>
<td>Stage play, film then sitcom then second film</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Anger Management*</td>
<td>2012-14</td>
<td>Anger Management</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>More than 10 years after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Are We There Yet??*</td>
<td>2010-13</td>
<td>Are We There Yet?</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Bad Education</td>
<td>2012-14</td>
<td>The Bad Education Movie</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Bad Teacher*</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Bad Teacher</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Bewitched</td>
<td>1964-72</td>
<td>Bewitched</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>More than 10 years after series. Film ends where series began</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Bless This House</td>
<td>1971-76</td>
<td>Bless This House</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Film during run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. The Courtship of Eddie’s Father*</td>
<td>1969-72</td>
<td>The Courtship of Eddie’s Father</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>Film based on novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Dad’s Army</td>
<td>1968-77</td>
<td>Dad’s Army Dad’s Army</td>
<td>1971, 2016</td>
<td>Both during series and more than 10 years after</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Doctor in the House* (franchise)</td>
<td>1969-91</td>
<td>Doctor in the House</td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Film based on novel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. The Farmers Daughter*</td>
<td>1963-6</td>
<td>The Farmers Daughter</td>
<td>1947</td>
<td>More than 10 years after series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Get Smart</td>
<td>1965-70</td>
<td>The Nude Bomb (aka The Return of Maxwell Smart)</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>10 years after series</td>
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<td>No.</td>
<td>Show</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>The Ghost and Mrs. Muir*</td>
<td>1968</td>
<td>The Ghost and Mrs. Muir</td>
<td>1947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Gilligan's Island</td>
<td>1964-7</td>
<td>Rescue from Gilligan's Island (made for TV movie) The Castaways on Gilligan's Island Made for TV movie The Harlem Globetrotters on Gilligan's Island (Made for TV movie)</td>
<td>1978</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>The Honeymooners With Jackie Gleason</td>
<td>1955-6</td>
<td>The Honeymooners (African American cast)</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td>House Calls*</td>
<td>1979-82</td>
<td>House Calls</td>
<td>1978</td>
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<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>How to Marry a Millionaire*</td>
<td>1957-59</td>
<td>How to Marry a Millionaire</td>
<td>1953</td>
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<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>The Inbetweeners + USA remake 2012</td>
<td>2008-10</td>
<td>The Inbetweeners Movie The Inbetweeners 2</td>
<td>2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Kath &amp; Kim</td>
<td>2002-4, 2007</td>
<td>Kath &amp; Kim telemovie Kath &amp; Kimderella</td>
<td>2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Leave It to Beaver</td>
<td>1957-63</td>
<td>Leave It to Beaver</td>
<td>1997</td>
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<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>The Likely Lads</td>
<td>1964-6</td>
<td>The Likely Lads</td>
<td>1976</td>
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<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Man About the House</td>
<td>1973</td>
<td>Man About the House</td>
<td>1974</td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Margie*</td>
<td>1961-2</td>
<td>Margie</td>
<td>1946</td>
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<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>McHale's Navy</td>
<td>1962-6</td>
<td>McHale's Navy McHale's Navy Joins the Air Force</td>
<td>1964-65</td>
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<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Meet the Browns*</td>
<td>2009-11</td>
<td>Meet the Browns</td>
<td>2008</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>In-Laws</td>
<td>2002-3</td>
<td>Meet the Parents</td>
<td>2000</td>
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<td>39</td>
<td>Mister Roberts*</td>
<td>1965-6</td>
<td>Mister Roberts</td>
<td>1955</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>Mister Smith Goes to Washington*</td>
<td>1962-3</td>
<td>Mister Smith Goes to Washington</td>
<td>1939</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>The Monkees</td>
<td>1966-8</td>
<td>Head</td>
<td>1968</td>
</tr>
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<td>42</td>
<td>The Munsters</td>
<td>1964-6</td>
<td>Munster, Go Home! The Munsters' Revenge (made for TV) Here Come the Munsters (telemovie)</td>
<td>1966</td>
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328
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>42</td>
<td><em>The Munsters' Scary Little Christmas</em> (made for TV)</td>
<td>1996</td>
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<td>43</td>
<td><em>My Favorite Martian</em></td>
<td>1963-6</td>
<td><em>My Favorite Martian</em></td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td><em>My Sister Eileen</em></td>
<td>1960-1</td>
<td><em>My Sister Eileen</em></td>
<td>1942-50</td>
<td>Film based on play and series based on short stories. Series more than 10 years after films.</td>
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<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>9-5*</td>
<td>1982-83</td>
<td>9-5 (Nine to Five)</td>
<td>1980</td>
<td>Film before series</td>
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<td>46</td>
<td><em>The Odd Couple</em></td>
<td>1970-75</td>
<td><em>The Odd Couple</em></td>
<td>1968-98</td>
<td>Based on 1965 play</td>
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<td>1982-83</td>
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<td><em>The Odd Couple II</em> (sequel to 1968 film)</td>
<td>2015</td>
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<td>49</td>
<td></td>
<td>1971-72-73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Made during and at the end</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
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<td>1972-74</td>
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<td>52</td>
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<td>1971-72-73</td>
<td>Made during and at the end</td>
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<tr>
<td>53</td>
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<td>1980</td>
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<td>1974-8</td>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
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<td>56</td>
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<td>1989-2001</td>
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<td>2004</td>
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<td>58</td>
<td></td>
<td>1962-5</td>
<td></td>
<td>1972-73</td>
<td>During the series</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td></td>
<td>1970-74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td>2005-12</td>
<td></td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Film made during series. <em>Veep</em> series in USA situation</td>
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<td>61</td>
<td></td>
<td>1982</td>
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<td>1986</td>
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<td>2014</td>
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<td>63</td>
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<td>2016</td>
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<td>2016</td>
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<td>64</td>
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<td>2018</td>
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<td>65</td>
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<td>2019-20</td>
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<tr>
<td>#1 (A)</td>
<td>Life of protagonist – point of attack, or inciting incident, Frank Daniel's approach in Howard <em>How to Build a Great Screenplay</em>. 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>#2 (B)</td>
<td>predicament, marking the end of the first act and setting up the main tension, Keith Giglio's approach – <em>Writing the Comedy Blockbuster</em>. 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>#3 (C)</td>
<td>first attempt at solving the problem posed at the end of the first act, Frank Daniel's approach in Howard <em>How to Build a Great Screenplay</em>. 2004</td>
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<tr>
<td>#4 (D)</td>
<td>leads to the First Culmination or Midpoint Culmination of a film – the first culmination may be a glimpse at the actual resolution of the picture, or its mirror opposite, Keith Giglio's approach – <em>Writing the Comedy Blockbuster</em>. 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>#5 (E)</td>
<td>the protagonist works on whatever new complication arose in at the first culmination; Sometimes this is a place in the story in which new characters are introduced and new opportunities present themselves. This, and Sequence F, are sometimes occupied primarily by subplots.</td>
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<tr>
<td>#6 (F)</td>
<td>Protagonist works toward a resolution of the main tension, and the dramatic question is answered; end of the sixth sequence thus marks the end of the second act; Second Culmination, like the first, can be a glimpse of the actual resolution of the picture, or, more typically, its mirror opposite.</td>
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<tr>
<td>#7 (G)</td>
<td>seventh sequence is often characterized by still higher stakes and a more frenzied pace, and its resolution is often characterized by a major twist.</td>
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<tr>
<td>#8 (H)</td>
<td>eighth and final sequence almost invariably contains the resolution - the point at last where, for better or for worse, the instability created in the point of attack is settled.</td>
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### MIDPOINT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sequences</th>
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<td>#5 (E)</td>
<td>the protagonist works on whatever new complication arose in at the first culmination; Sometimes this is a place in the story in which new characters are introduced and new opportunities present themselves. This, and Sequence F, are sometimes occupied primarily by subplots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6 (F)</td>
<td>Protagonist works toward a resolution of the main tension, and the dramatic question is answered; end of the sixth sequence thus marks the end of the second act; Second Culmination, like the first, can be a glimpse of the actual resolution of the picture, or, more typically, its mirror opposite.</td>
</tr>
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<td>#7 (G)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>eighth and final sequence almost invariably contains the resolution - the point at last where, for better or for worse, the instability created in the point of attack is settled.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
It has been said…

If you can’t do, then teach …

But, if you can’t teach then…

*It’s Academic*

A studio-based ensemble sitcom

Created by

Deborah Klika

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.
It's Academic centres on TV lecturer Rachel, 52, recovering from a bad divorce and Ben, 48, a once successful film director recovering from a breakdown. Running away from life, these two, once in a relationship, come face to face in the media department of the University of South Sydney, a middle ranking university spiralling down the league table.

A studio-based ensemble comedy set in the shifting sands of academia.

SET UP: Rachel Kozlowski, recently appointed team leader of TV Production, divorced, and Ben Baxter, filmmaker on the rise, interrupted by a nervous breakdown, surrounded by the grumpy and once successful documentary director Jack Kerr the idealistic new lecturer Brianna Williams and controlling Indigenous departmental administrator Luciana Fonseca.

The department is overseen by the Machiavellian Henry Upton whose brown-nosing of the rarely seen Dean Fiona Willoughby-Baxter knows no bounds.

Audience: Anyone who has worked in an open plan office fraught with politics or survived higher education as a student, academic or administrator, ages 30-75. 9.00 pm.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Rachel Kozlowski, 52, Senior Lecturer in TV, ambitious for her students to succeed, only problem most of them think the TV degree is the easy one. Rachel likes to be needed, which means she gives more to her students than she needs to. She also likes to win. Thinks she knows best. Can’t admit she is wrong. Loves to have a document with a number of words at 0 or 5. Her heart is in the right place but her ambition undercuts her. PhD on Love Island, ‘Guilty TV – how we need it yet reject it’. Hates spreadsheets. Lies to herself (and others when it suits her ambition) especially when it comes to …

Benjamin Braddock Baxter 48, Lecturer in film, had been a director, recovering from what people think is an attempted suicide. Sweet and confused; likes being with Rachel and finds excuses to be with her, without sending signals. Needs to be loved. Loves to see students develop. Has won some film awards for his commercial work and fears he is a one-trick pony. Afraid of life (especially failure, conflict and commitment). Tries to impress with technical knowledge. Wants to direct a feature. Loves hanging out with the students and telling war stories from his past and seeing them develop with their projects, often becoming versions of how he sees the world. The technicians treat him like a brother, which he craves. Wears muted colours and on off days, an old green T-shirt, looked after by …

Luciana Fonseca 35, (Aboriginal Italian descent) departmental administrator, knows how the game is played and plays some games herself. Passive-aggressive. The kitchen area is her battle ground and the stationery cupboard she guards like the jewel crowns. Dreams of working in marketing. Luciana has an assistant who changes with each episode. The body clock is ticking; wears bold colours and florals are her camouflage to hide in plain sight from… .
Henry Upton, 50, English Head of Department and line manager to Rachel, Ben, Luciana, Brianna and Jack. **Self-serving and vain** he wears purple suits or Harris Tweed suits. Had some success as a playwright in his 30s and drops names like confetti. Sees students as customers and a source of income much to the consternation of …

Jack Kerr, 59, (Irish descent) Senior Lecturer. Successful documentary producer frustrated with Higher Education and its trend towards marketisation. **Grumpy.** Like Rachel needs to be right – a source of both conflict and partnership between them. PhD in history of film. Goes to extreme lengths to help his students get jobs, interviews, make contacts. Published book on 1960s Hollywood films and no one is interested. Constantly crumpled. **Grammar Nazi.** Good to younger staff members, up to a point, especially …

Brianna Williams, 28, Associate Lecturer, hardworking, but no idea of the games at play. **Naïve.** Idealistic about teaching and HE. PhD in Journalism. **Eager to please.** A throwback to pre-feminism, she believes talent will always shine through, such as her approach to teaching and doing things like quizzes, team building exercises, apps to inspire the students, and Monday morning blogs. **Loves to create spreadsheets.**

Hans Winkler 39, lecturer in digital media and all that is internet. **Eccentric** Eastern European from a holocaust surviving family. Loud and abrasive, lives at the cutting edge of digital media. Dream is to have an Ada Lovelace award.

**SUPPORTING CHARACTERS:**

Fergal Dempsey 32, studio technician, in awe of Ben.

Sarah Charlton 35, Senior Lecturer in English. A poet, she is single and desperately seeking a husband online, voracious sex appetite. Constantly has a cold. Work wife to Henry.

Fiona Willoughby-Baxter 49, Dean, who has to implement policies of the VC, represents neo liberal HE discourse (or whatever will save her bacon). Communicates only through emails.

**OCCASIONAL CHARACTERS**

Julia Barsakova, 26, technician, savvy, smart and known as ‘Bossykova’; doesn’t suffer fools.

Angela, late 50s, café supervisor, runs it like a concentration camp, but don’t mention the war or Brexit, she’s German.

Mariam Hansen, 28, Graduate assistant, in love with Rom Coms. Can run a spreadsheet around any unsuspecting lecturer. Good friends with Julia, sharing female perspectives on the actions of academics and the system. They see it as a reality show.
**Simon Baxter**, 50, Ben’s brother, freelance producer and occasional lecturer, always on the prowl but rarely around. Wears flashy watches and shoes. Rarely seen.

**Francesco Vico**, 22, sound technician, finishing his major work, a documentary about refugees. A sharp dresser, Francesco falls in love easily and never completes anything. Eager. Follows Rachel and Brianna around like a puppy.

SETS: open plan office, Head of Department Office, University café.

Occasional: Tech’s office, Classroom.

SERIES 1 EPISODES

**Pilot It’s the Kilo Merger.**

Henry has announced that the film and TV degrees will be merged. Rachel and Jack decide to write to the union. Ben has returned from a leave of absence and has been paired with Rachel for the annual Kilo Challenge which she has won every year and intends to win again despite Ben’s inability to give up chocolate.

**Episode suggestions:**

**It’s the Teacher of the Year Award.**

Nominations are open for teacher of the year and Rachel wants to win, giving her a hat trick. Henry wants Ben to get it. Simon, (Ben’s brother) is off on a shoot, and along with Ben and Rachel all are short listed and the staff will now vote. Rachel thinks she has it in the bag.

**A film crew arrives.**

Former students have been commissioned by ABC to do an observational documentary of life in HE. Rachel attempts to guide the crew; they go to Jack for advice and follow Ben like he is a god.

**It’s Second offer round.**

Rachel and Ben are down for clearing duty and Rachel can’t stand Ben getting more calls and more acceptances than her, so she starts offering applicants accommodation.

**It’s the printer.**

The printer has been replaced and no one can get it to work through their computers; they ask Luciana to help out – but at a cost. There are four strange people in the office and no one knows who they are or why they are there. Ben has a plan to find out.
**It’s Open day**

At the open day Ben comes across his therapist whose son wants to go to the university. Rachel applies for a job overseas.

**It’s the Theory of …**

Rachel is ordered take theory out of the degree under review only to find that Ben is allowed to teach theory. Simon’s class goes into meltdown and he gets Ben to restore order. Rachel begins to see Ben’s gift for teaching and rethinks her overseas move.

**It’s the Student Survey**

The student survey is on and Henry asks Rachel to charm the students and Fiona asks Ben to take the students out drinking leading to disaster.

**FURTHER STORYLINES**

Simon is accused of sexual harassment by one of the students and Ben is forced to support him. Henry weasels his way out of the confrontation. Ben thinks a student is stalking him but all she wants is some advice.

Henry calls a staff meeting and tries not to use the R word (redundancy) when saying 15% cuts to the budget are needed if the university is to survive. The VC had reset the strategic plan for all lecturers to take on tutees. Rachel refuses. Ben is inundated with requests to be tutor for students. Rachel is incensed and sets out to lobby students to be their pastoral carer.

At a departmental meeting where Fiona discusses further cuts, the wine gums are handed out and the staff start talking like children.

Brianna needs to find a husband, so she can stay in the country. Rachel thinks Ben would be perfect choice. Ben gets a windfall from a distant relative.

The staff survey is on and the Dean has pastries sent to the media department as Henry takes Ben out for drinks.

It’s Patrick’s retirement afternoon tea. Henry asks Rachel to give a speech, only she has no idea who Patrick is and can’t find anyone who admits to knowing him.

The faculty strategy is out, and number one priority is recruitment. No one can remember the other four, when Henry does a quick straw poll he discovers Ben is the only one who knows the four strategies. Rachel tries to get Ben to tell her the answers and realises he is smarter than he lets on.

Rachel tries to introduce a studio-based program but is stopped at every turn by Henry. The techs find a way to get what she wants.

Rachel applies to go to a conference and is turned down only to find that Fiona gave Ben the gig and she is going as well.
Ben discovers that he has a sister he didn’t know about. Rachel discovers Jack was one of the reviewers for an article that she submitted and rejected.

Rachel’s ex-husband turns up and everyone falls in love with him, including Luciana and Brianna.

The department has to decide which films are chosen for the annual film awards. Rachel is determined that her students are included.

The department has been nominated for the learning onscreen awards and Francesco only has twelve tickets to the event. Rachel and Ben both want seven tickets for their students.

The staff survey is out, and Henry has held back the feedback from the department. Ben’s short film wins an award and Rachel can’t hide her jealousy.

The VC pays an unexpected visit to the department and Rachel flirts outrageously with him only to be outdone by Luciana and Brianna.

It’s the Faculty away day and Australia has made it to the world cup football. Australia scores as the Dean announces that the budget cuts will come into force in the next two months, the media faculty members roar with excitement as a goal is scored.

Numbers are down, and Rachel and Ben are ordered to do college visits where they try to outdo each other.

Rachel’s son turns up wanting Ben to help him with a project. Ben has a new girlfriend who is exactly like his ex-wife.

Ben’s ex-wife gets a job in the department as department administrator.

The students sign a petition against the Dean. Henry convinces Ben to placate them.

It’s Christmas and Rachel decides to try online dating only to find some interesting facts about Ben’s new girlfriend. The delivery of online shopping creates chaos in the office and Luciana takes drastic steps.

The central computing systems unit has closed down the student portal – the day before graduation and the students demand to know their results.

A new central email system for each programme is required to ensure students have a central address to send their work and queries to. However no one takes responsibility for it, causing bad reviews from students for lack of responses.

Francesco offers to do a class on how to win at interviews, bringing in trick questions to watch out for such as ‘will you have sex with me’.

The computers are down and technicians come to fix them, blowing into the portals and competing with each other to get computers working.

The students stage a sit-in and the lecturers are locked in the building. Rachel and Ben get trapped in the kit hub. When they are freed the students can’t remember why they held the sit-in.
THE ACCIDENTAL ACADEMIC – a comedy set in a university media department about loss, love and confusion in midlife. by Deborah Klika

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are products of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Premise: An out-of-work director, forced to work in the only place he can get a job, confronts the woman he blames for sabotaging his career 20 years ago.

Tone: Something’s Gotta Give meets It’s Complicated.

Log Line 25-40 words:

A comedy about an out-of-work director forced to work with the woman he blames for his breakdown 20 years ago as he struggles to accept the truth - about the past, her, and himself.

Pitch:
Ben, once a star director, agrees to be attached to a project devised by his entrepreneurial brother, Simon. Needing to pay rent until the green light, Ben takes a job at a university (thinking anyone can teach), where he comes across the woman he blames for de-railing his career; feelings, something Ben is good at keeping locked away, due to a disorder he denies, now bubble to the surface, threatening to erupt and de-rail him again. A comedy about misunderstandings and the disorder of mid-life.

The story in 3 sentences:

Ben needs a job to pay the rent and Simon offers him a gig directing green screen scenes in his film, which Ben rejects as he wants to be a ‘real’ director – directing actors. In the meantime Ben takes a job at a prestigious university media department teaching film practice where he comes across Rachel, the woman he blames for de-railing his career 20 years ago. When Ben discovers Simon has given the gig away he is forced to work with Rachel to salvage his self-esteem, only for Ben to fall hopelessly in love with her – but the past comes back to confront both of them.
The story in 3 paragraphs:

Act 1

Ben is being hounded by an ex-wife wanting settlement and is about to be evicted because of a neighbour’s dog. Ben needs a job, meanwhile his brother, Simon, offers him a directing green screen gig but Ben refuses, his goal is to direct real people. Hoping Simon will come through, and in need of an income, Ben decides to take a job at the university (anyone can be an academic). Ben bumps into Rachel, the woman he blames for his breakdown and which de-railed his career 20 years ago. In order not to be triggered again, Ben decides to take Simon’s gig only to discover he has given it away.

Act 2

Fiona, the Dean, makes a deal with Rachel: she will support Rachel’s application for deputy dean if Rachel mentors Ben. Fiona gets snoop dog Luciana, the departmental administrator, to spy on them (in comical ways) uncovering Rachel’s secret love of Dolly Parton, and Ben’s strange dashes to the men’s toilet. Ben tries to impress Rachel with disastrous results. However, the more Ben and Rachel work together and her competitiveness as a teacher is exposed, even Rachel has to admit that the students flourish under their combined tutelage. But it all goes horribly wrong in a directing actors class and Ben loses it in the pub with the students. Ben decides to end it all but then the dog wants to be walked. Waking in the hospital Ben is confronted by the therapist, his ex-wife and Rachel, who thinks he is back with the ex-wife.

Act 3

Simon offers Ben the directing gig which Ben rejects having accepted that he has a disorder causing him to sabotage his dreams and to build a new life. Rachel loses out on getting the deputy dean position to a career hungry incompetent, forcing her to confront her own lost dreams; she decides to accept a writing internship in London. Ben tells Rachel he was wrong to blame her. Rachel hopes he will come visit London; Ben says he might, but now the dog needs a walk.
One-page story.

THE ACCIDENTAL ACADEMIC is a comedy set in the world of Academia. It centres on a middle-aged filmmaker who comes face to face with the woman he blames for a breakdown twenty years earlier that (he believes) de-railed his burgeoning career.

BEN, 48, may appear cool as a cucumber, yet this facade masks the emotional volcano that emerges under pressure. When Ben is offered the opportunity to direct a film by his entrepreneurial brother, Simon, he believes this is the break he needs to get his career back on track. Hounded by an ex-wife for alimony, the landlady for rent, Ben is forced to take a job at the prestigious film academy, headed by Simon’s ex-wife, FIONA, 50.

On his first day Ben come across RACHEL, 52, the woman he blames for his breakdown twenty years ago, causing him and his career to spiral out of control; paralysis sets in and his teaching goes off the rails. Rachel, a serious academic imparting the gems of screen studies to her adoring students is oblivious to the impact she has on Ben, or anyone in fact. Rachel is ordered by Fiona to help Ben settle into teaching or she risks not getting the deputy dean position she covets. Trying to impress Rachel, Ben continues to stumble. While the students love Ben’s tales from LA, Rachel takes offence at his behaviour, in particular his popularity and socialising with the students. Meanwhile Rachel’s secret love of Dolly Parton is discovered by the perceptive and sarcastic LUCIANA, 39, the indigenous departmental administrator who knows where all the skeletons are hidden and relishes bringing them out to play. Sensing there is history between Ben and Rachel, Luciana sets out to find out what it is.

The more Ben and Rachel team teach the more the students flourish under their tutelage and the more Ben and Rachel flourish in each other’s company, despite the desperate attempts by newly minted academic BRIANNA, 28. Ben begins to fall for Rachel …..

Rachel asks Ben to help with a student who has symptoms they are both too familiar with. Realising he is now hopelessly in love with Rachel, Ben attempts to ask Rachel out only for Rachel to misunderstand the signals. Ben goes back to therapy and has to confront the secret that haunts him. When Ben finally finds the courage to tell Rachel he has a disorder, she shrugs it off. HENRY, 50, the unseen head of department, gets the deputy dean’s job, forcing Rachel to confront her own demons and lost dreams. Ben confronts Simon who offers him the actor directing gig which Ben rejects, realising that his gifts lie in teaching as Rachel realises she has taken the wrong path in her life.

THE ACCIDENTAL ACADEMIC is a comedy about the accidents we make in life and the opportunity to correct them when given a second chance.
Have You Fed the Cat? is set in a shared house in North London. It centres on Rachel, Kat, and Jeremy all divorced and wondering if they will ever swipe right again.

When a new lodger, Ben, moves in. Clover the talking cat discovers there is history between this interloper and Rachel. Curiosity killed the … romance… or did it?

Have You Fed the Cat?
A magic-realist comedy about divorce, middle-age, and unrequited love.

Created by Deborah Klika.

MAIN CHARACTERS

RACHEL, 54, who came from Australia to work on a soap but things haven’t turned out as she hoped. Messy, like her relationships. Pressed by Kat to go online dating, she prefers eHarmony because she likes taking surveys. Brought up to speed in all ways English by …

KATHERINE (Kat), 44, Journalist. Loves to organise people and their lives. One son, George, whom she loves to death. Always on dating apps. Dream is to work for a charity but the income won’t support her lifestyle. Avid entertainer, mother to George and owner of …

CLOVER the talking cat. Runs the house like it’s her kingdom, has firm views on why the women in this house are failing in their lives. In love with…

JEREMY, 35, writer and lodger. Works in publishing. Pines for his ex-wife. Fussy, tidy, and clean. Likes to boss Kat’s son….


BENJAMIN (Ben), 50, Australian filmmaker in London on a teaching exchange at the NFTS, hoping to get a big break. A dreamer, still recovering from the departure of the woman that has rekindled his flame …. Rachel.
SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

SERENA, Kat’s sister, 42, lives with her ex-husband; life is chaos and constantly asks Kat for money.

ASHLEY, Jeremy’s ex-wife, 30. Cries on Jeremy’s shoulder after each lover leaves her.

SETS: House (Kitchen, living, front hallway) local pub.

SERIES STORIES:

- Rachel and Ben’s relationship
- Rachel and Jeremy’s unrequited desires in work
- Jeremy and Kat’s search for love
- Clover’s relationship with the audience….

PILOT EPISODE (Episode 1):

“On the market”

Rachel needs another lodger to help pay the mortgage, failing to find a suitable candidate and having an offer of a 12-month contract back home in Australia, she decides to sell the house. Clover has other ideas, encouraging Jeremy to take down the for-sale signs. Clover decides this has to be stopped and she and Jeremy set about finding a lodger while stopping buyers at the door. As Kat continues her search for love, Clover gets into her dating app while putting an ad for a lodger on spareroom.com. When Rachel’s job offer falls through, Rachel agrees to meet the new lodger, only to discover it is Benjamin the man she left behind….

Storylines for subsequent episodes follow. Ben and Rachel must now confront their feelings for each other; **storyline in bold is through line for their relationship and B plot for each episode.**

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POSSIBLE STORYLINES FOR FURTHER EPISODES AFTER THE PILOT

Ep 2  
Kat encourages Rachel to go online dating, only to find Ben on Bumble. **Rachel does everything to avoid Ben but keeps bumping into him.** Kat is falling for Ben and Rachel gets jealous. A student flirts with Ben and he doesn’t know what to do and asks Rachel for advice. Jeremy’s ex-wife wants him to meet her new beau; Jeremy asks Rachel for advice.

Ep 3  
Rachel’s friend is convicted of manslaughter back in Australia. Jeremy feels the need to make up a story about his wayward youth. **Ben starts seeing someone from work. Kat and Rachel gang up on him.**

Ep 4  
Kat tries a new look. Rachel puts on weight. Jeremy splashes out on a new coat. Clover gets covered in paint. **Ben’s is accused of fraternising with the students and asks Rachel and Kat for help.**

Ep 5  
**After a disastrous blind date set up by Kat, Rachel realises she wants to be with Ben. So does Kat.** Rachel orders a new bed and Clover decides to “mark” it. Rachel sets off the fire alarm and Kat’s ex wants to get back together. **Ben has a disastrous date, and realises he wants to be with Rachel.**

Ep 6  
Clover spends the night on the streets. When she returns, she is coy about what she has been doing. **Ben and Rachel start seeing each secretly. Jeremy suspects something is going on and threatens Rachel that he will tell Kat. Rachel begs him not to and offers to do anything for him.**

Ep 7  
Kat’s sister Serena buys her new cushions for the lounge, but Kat thinks they don’t match. She calls for opinions from Rachel and Jeremy who calls Benji.

Ep 8  
Kat decides to help out a local youth shelter only to find her son George is the ringleader of a local gang. Rachel’s past catches up with her when a long-gone ex turns up. **Ben gets jealous and keeps popping in to borrow condiments.**

Ep 9  
**Rachel applies for a new job. Kat gets a new job – only problem is it is the one Rachel went for. Jeremy seat warms his ex-wife’s job in the hope she will come back. Ben gets an offer back home that he can’t resist/offer to direct a film in US. Rachel encourages him to take it. Jeremy knows she is lying.** Jeremy finds ways of making Ben talk …. about Rachel.

Ep 10  
It’s Christmas and Kat and Rachel are getting the house ready. Kat is expecting family. Jeremy’s ex-wife surprises him at work and Rachel’s son arrives. Kat plans a holiday with George who has plans of his own. **Ben arrives back and declares he wants to be with Rachel – back in Australia.**

Deborah Klika.
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1 Writers of Films and Programmes discussed in detail are listed in the Bibliography and listed in Screen Texts under titles.


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O’Meara, Radha. ‘Changing the way we think about character change in episodic television series.’ In Journal of Screenwriting. 6:2, 2015: 189-98.


SCREEN TEXTS


The Accidental Husband. Written by Mimi Hare, Clare Naylor and Bonnie Sikowitz. Directed by Griffin Dunne. Produced by Jennifer Todd et al. Yari Film Group, 2008.


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1 Increasingly recognition is given to series creators (the Showrunners), as such I have given preference to the creator, with the production companies, as the risk-taking ‘middle-man,’ broadcaster (as the ‘publisher’) then years of broadcast. Specific channels within broadcasters (e.g., BBC2, CBS2) are not listed. Individual episodes, where quoted in the main text, along with the writer are footnoted in the main text and listed in the Bibliography. Films are referenced by Writer, then Director, then Producer/s (if more than one then et al. is listed), followed by the distributor and the year of release, as is common in Chicago referencing.


The Bad Education Movie. Written by Freddy Syborn and Jack Whitehall. Directed by Elliot Hegarty. Entertainment Film, 2015.


Having a Life Worth Living. DBT Center, 2016.  

His Girl Friday. Written by Charles Lederer. Directed and produced by Howard Hawks. Columbia Pictures, 1940.


I Give It a Year. Written and directed by Dan Mazer. Produced by Tim Bevan et al. Studio Canal, 2013.


The Inbetweeners Movie. Written by Damon Beasley and Iain Morris. Directed by Ben Palmer. Produced by Christopher Young. Entertainment Film Distributors, 2011.


The Lady Eve. Written and directed by Preston Sturges. Produced by Paul Jones. Paramount, 1941.


Office Space. Written and Directed by Mike Judge. Produced by Daniel Rappaport et al. 20th Century Fox, 1999.


Rare Beasts. Written and directed by Billie Piper. Produced by Vaughan Sivell. 2021.


The Right One. Written and Directed by Ken Mok. Produced by Ken Mok et al. 2015.


Sleeping with Other People. Written and directed by Lesley Headland. Produced by Jessica Elbaum et al. IFC Films, 2015.


Sullivan’s Travels. Written and directed by Preston Sturges. Produced by Paul Jones. Paramount Pictures, 1941.


That Uncertain Feeling. Written by Walter Reisch and Donald Ogden Stewart. Directed and produced by Ernst Lubitsch. United Artists, 1941.


There’s Something About Mary. Written by Ed Decter, John J. Strauss, Peter Farrelly and Bobby Farrelly. Directed by Peter Farrelly and Bobby Farrelly. Produced by Michael Steinberg et al. 20th Century Fox, 1998.

The Thick of It. Created and Directed by Armando Iannucci. Produced by Adam Tandy, Armando Iannucci and BBC. UK: BBC, 2005-12.


