

# TELE-TEXTS

*Video Literacy, Television Texture  
and Serial Drama*

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*Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy*

The University of Leeds  
Institute of Communications Studies  
September 1993

*The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit  
has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.*

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# Abstract

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## **Tele-texts: video literacy, television texture and soap opera**

This study looks at television as a text and the way in which it is read, with particular reference to continuous narratives.

- *Video literacy* is defined as the competence possessed by viewers by which they comprehend moving picture media.
- *Television texture* is a term intended to indicate the nature of television output as a text.
- *Soap opera* is a popular term for a continuing drama serial that derives from the original association of the form with sponsorship by detergent companies.

Film theory has provided the basis for much of our understanding of moving pictures, but the film medium is increasingly being displaced by the electronic image. The metaphor of film language or grammar has proved to be difficult to sustain beyond a simple analogy because of fundamental differences between words and images. As an alternative, the notion of video literacy is proposed, and the act of viewing is seen to be an active mental process comparable to reading. The particular nature of the television text is discussed and broadcasting is shown to have developed distinctive narrative forms.

As an example of a particular form of television text, the soap opera genre is surveyed from its historical origins, with specific reference to British serials, and difficulties of definition are discussed. Although soap operas were originally targeted at women, the audience for contemporary serials is shown to be reasonably representative of that for television in general. As a case study, the long-running Yorkshire Television serial *Emmerdale* is selected for closer examination. A method of formal analysis is proposed, based on the structural composition of shots and scenes. This is used to compare the construction of four continuing serials, providing a description of the formal features that determine some of the key characteristics by which the genre is recognised.



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# Acknowledgements

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This project was supported by a number of individuals, without whose help it would not have been possible.

Firstly, for his invaluable assistance, I must thank my supervisor, Professor David Holdcroft, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, University of Leeds. I am also indebted to Nicholas Pronay, the founder and Director of the University of Leeds Institute of Communications Studies, and to Dr Brent MacGregor for his encouragement and support.

The study of *Emmerdale* was made possible by Yorkshire Television who were extremely generous in allowing almost unrestricted access to the programme. I must express my gratitude to executive producer, Keith Richardson, producers Stuart Doughty and Morag Bain, production supervisor Tim Fee, script editor Keith Temple, freelance directors Ric Mellis and Derek Bennett, and the entire cast and crew. I am also especially grateful to Kevin Laffan, the creator and original writer of the serial and to Vernon Lawrence, Controller of Drama for the ITV network.

For information and assistance regarding audience research, I am obliged to the Broadcast Audience Research Board and Audits of Great Britain, to Adam Smith, Assistant to the Chairman, Zenith Media Ltd, and to the staff of Media and Air Time Sales Ltd. I must also thank my transatlantic correspondents for providing me with details of American soap operas.

Acknowledgement must also be made to the librarians, archivists and researchers of the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds, the British Library, the Independent Television Commission, the BBC Written Archives Centre, and the British Film Institute, also to the many press officers and publicists who have provided invaluable assistance. Credit must also be given to University of Leeds Media Services for providing technical support.

I am grateful to Dr Stephen Gale and Hewlett-Packard European Research Laboratories for their most generous corporate donation of computer equipment under their strategic grants programme which made this research possible.

I must extend my thanks to the Institute of Communications Studies for providing accommodation and services for the duration of the project, to the staff for their assistance, and to my fellow students for their encouragement.

For providing me with the means to carry out my research I must also thank the BBC and Yorkshire Television, and the British Academy for awarding me a research grant. The project was completed while working as a Development Officer in multimedia at the University of Leeds.

Finally for their moral and practical support I must thank my parents, to whom this research is dedicated.

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*Video Literacy, Television Texture  
and Serial Drama*

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## Preface

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‘... Then he noticed there were no books, no newspapers, no writing materials. “The world has changed indeed,” he said.

He observed one entire side of the outer room was set with rows of peculiar double cylinders in racks inscribed with green lettering on white that harmonised with the decorative scheme of the room, and in the centre of this side projected a little apparatus about a yard square and having a smooth white face to the room. A chair faced this. He had a transitory idea that these cylinders might be books, or a modern substitute for books, but at first it did not seem so. ...

He puzzled over the peculiar cylinder for some time and replaced it. Then he turned to the square apparatus and examined that. He opened a sort of lid and found one of the double cylinders within, and on the upper edge a little stud like the stud of an electric bell. He pressed this and a rapid clicking began and ceased. He became aware of voices and music, and noticed a play of colour on the smooth front face. He suddenly realised what this might be and stepped back to regard it.

On the flat surface was now a little picture very vividly coloured, and in this picture were figures that moved. Not only did they move but they were conversing in clear small voices. It was exactly like reality viewed through an inverted opera glass and heard through a long tube. His interest was seized at once by the situation which presented a man pacing up and down and vociferating angry things to a pretty by petulant woman. Both were in the picturesque costume that seemed so strange to Graham. “I have worked,” said the man, “but what have you been doing?”

“Ah!” said Graham. He forgot everything else, and sat down in the chair ... in a little while he knew these two people like intimate friends.

At last the miniature drama came to an end, and the square face of the apparatus was blank again.

It was a strange world into which he had been permitted to see, unscrupulous, pleasure-seeking, energetic, subtle, a world too of dire economic struggle; there were allusions he did not understand, incidents that conveyed strange suggestions of altered moral ideas, flashes of dubious enlightenment. ... He had no doubt the story was contemporary, and its intense realism was undeniable. And the end had been a tragedy that oppressed him. He sat staring at the blankness.

He started and rubbed his eyes. He had been so absorbed in the later-day substitute for a novel, that he awoke to the little green and white room with more than a touch of the surprise of his first awakening.’

H. G. Wells (1899) *When the Sleeper Wakes*

H. G. Wells presented a prescient vision of a form of video literacy in his 1899 novel *When the Sleeper Wakes*, first published serially in *The Graphic* illustrated weekly newspaper, in which the hero awakes after two hundred years in a futuristic world where among many changes, literature has been replaced by moving pictures.

Writing only a decade after the birth of the age of film, there was no precedent for the medium he describes. Although there were short film narratives, there was nothing approaching the particularly literary conception of a self-contained drama including dialogue. The ambition to produce colour moving pictures of people that walked and talked stemmed from a spate of technological innovations in communication in the late nineteenth century. Yet it would be some time before all the elements fell into place to achieve such a vision. At that time, the language of moving images had scarcely reached the babbling stage.

The technology described would not have seemed unfamiliar to Thomas Edison. He had originally conceived of moving pictures as an accompaniment to his phonograph. As it happened the immediate commercial future of moving images lay in the projection of films to large theatrical audiences, so offering economies of scale. Lacking a suitable technology for audio amplification, film remained silent for over a quarter of a century. The introduction of synchronous sound was made possible by electronic amplification, the enabling technology which had also opened the door to radio broadcasting and subsequently television. Now offering an experience superficially similar to that described by Wells, television is essentially intended for domestic consumption, the screen is small and square, and the pictures are in colour, accompanied by sound. It is only comparatively recently, however, that the individual has possessed the technology to record sound and moving pictures and immediately replay the result. Although the technologies of television and video can be put to many uses, one of the most important uses to which they are put is telling stories. Through such narratives, the electronic screen offers viewers access to a particular form of realism, albeit 'reality viewed through an opera-glass and heard through a long tube'.

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*Part One*

**Theory**

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

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The banal and ritual remark of the conventionally literate, that TV presents an experience for passive viewers, is wide of the mark. TV is above all a medium that demands a creatively participant response.

(Marshall McLuhan 1964 *Understanding Media*: 336)

This study takes television as its text. The basic premise is that, contrary to popular belief, television is not a passively consumed medium. It is argued that, although moving pictures do not in themselves constitute a language as such, comprehension involves a certain competence or literacy. Television can be considered as a text that is read by the viewer. The television text is very different from the classic literary text, a form that has been shaped by the bound book. The broadcast distribution system of television involves a bias towards serial forms and the continuous drama serial or soap opera is the epitome of television as a text. Unique to broadcasting, it is the single most popular form of programming and although often held in low esteem, the genre deserves and demands critical consideration. The comprehension of such complex narratives requires considerable reading skills.

The study of modern communication media is necessarily interdisciplinary. The approach adopted here is informed by a number of critical disciplines drawing on linguistics, formalism, structuralism, semiotics, narratology and text analysis, all of which are loosely related fields that have in common their application in dealing with texts as systems of signification. In addition, it draws upon information theory and artificial intelligence approaches to cognition. The intention is not to provide a survey of these fields, nor to attempt to integrate them within a grand unified theory of communication, but to indicate a theoretical framework for the consideration of television as a text.

An attempt is made to situate a particular form of television text in its technical, historical, and commercial context. Unlike some previous work in this area, the perspective adopted is that of a practitioner with some small experience



in the world of television production, and rather less acquaintance with the more arcane discourse of academe. Much of what passes for study of the media runs the risk of reading like a reverential referential rhetoric that has very little resemblance or relevance to reality. That is not to say that this account is uninformed by theory, or a century of thinking about cinema, but rather that it is not considered necessary to carry all its baggage all the way. The hand luggage carried instead is a dossier of research based on readings in technology, language, history, audience analysis, and empirical study. The result may be a little eclectic, but it is based on a desire to understand better the nature of the television medium and the characteristics of a particular genre.

This examination of television as a text is divided into two main parts. The first section attempts to outline the theoretical background for the study of television as a text and distinguishes the differences between the feature film form predominant in cinema and the segmented narration more typical of television. The second section examines in practice one particular genre of television text, the soap opera, from its historical background through to particular programmes, with an emphasis on the commercial constraints and production pressures that partly determine its formal features. Each chapter has a specific focus and concludes with a brief summary. The final chapter seeks to summarise the overall argument.

It is not within the scope of this study to answer the most fundamental questions about how moving pictures are understood. In proposing the notion of video literacy it is not necessary to specify precisely how this may operate. The actual perceptual processes employed in viewing moving picture texts are incredibly complicated and are only vaguely recognised. To explain how television representations of the world are understood, it is necessary to understand how the world is understood. The more modest intention here is to illustrate some of the considerations that are involved in viewing television as a text. In so doing, it may be possible to make some suggestions about the nature of the television text and offer an approach to the problem of analysing particular programmes. In the end, this may raise more questions than it answers, but it is nonetheless necessary to take a first tentative step.



## Video literacy

The term 'video literacy' is introduced to refer to the competence that viewers demonstrate in the comprehension of screen media. The phrase, as far as can be established, is a neologism, although the television critic Michael Arlen refers in passing to 'the American vid-lit audience' in *The Camera Age* (1981).<sup>1</sup> Comparable to the phrase 'computer literacy' which is widely employed to suggest a certain competence in information technology, it is argued that in interacting with screen-based media, viewers also employ a certain literacy. The idea of a visual literacy is nothing new.<sup>2</sup> However, it is contended that the moving image involves a particular form of literacy. This has been recognised since the beginning of the film age, but in the video age it is all the more apparent.

The requirement to introduce the term video literacy comes as a result of changes in the technology by which the moving image is reproduced. The feature film remains a key component of the audio-visual industry, but the ecology and economy of the moving image culture are evolving. The electronic image has long since displaced the primacy of film as the primary medium for the presentation of moving pictures.

Since the second world war the number of cinema admissions in Britain has declined steeply from around 1,500 million visits a year to around 90 million, less than two per head of population, although there has been a modest rise in attendances in recent years. While the cinema remains popular among teenagers and young adults, with nearly nine out of ten going to the pictures at least once a year, over a third of the population do not visit the cinema.<sup>3</sup>

In comparison, the British watch broadcast television for an average of just over twenty-six hours every week.<sup>4</sup> In the UK, 99 per cent of households have a television<sup>5</sup> and video cassette recorders can now be found in 70 per cent of homes.<sup>6</sup> Around a fifth of the fifteen million households with a video cassette recorder hire a video tape in any one week, with nearly a million videotape rentals every day of the week in the UK.<sup>7</sup> The emergence of dedicated subscription movie channels now offers a further source of feature film entertainment to the growing number of homes equipped with satellite or cable television.<sup>8</sup> Household spending on television and video far exceeds that on books or newspapers and the retail video market now lags only a little behind the sales of all printed fiction.

Although many more movies are seen in the home than in the cinema, with around three thousand a year on terrestrial and satellite television, the theatrical



release remains crucial in introducing a feature film to its potential audience. Theatrical exhibition is now just one element in the distribution and marketing of the feature film product. Cinema box office returns are only one component of the feature film economy, although they can establish the commercial value of a product. Economic viability is now dependent upon the exploitation of secondary markets, with phased release windows for different distribution systems, from theatrical release, through video rental and retail, subscription satellite channels and finally terrestrial television. The feature film industry has responded to the threat posed by alternative forms of distribution and exhibition in such a way that it can make more money than ever before. Cinema, television and video are now engaged in a complex complimentary relationship. The cinema will survive by adapting itself to this new commercial climate. The cinema continues to provide a cultural reference point as well as a product that is capable of being distributed by electronic means.

## Film

The concept of a cinematic literacy has been suggested in relation to the medium of film, specifically by Robert Gessner in *The Moving Image: A guide to cinematic literacy* (1968) and Charles Eidsvik in *Cineliteracy* (1978). Indeed, the question of a 'film language' is one of the oldest chestnuts of film theory.

Language has always provided an attractive analogy for communication by means of moving pictures. Over the last century, the sophistication of moving picture technology has increased considerably. The same period has also seen an increasing sophistication in the theoretical consideration of language. As a result there has been a change in thinking about moving pictures in terms of language. Although under the close scrutiny of linguistics the language analogy appeared to break down, certain similarities can be sustained if moving picture communication is considered as discourse. It is through the use of images to communicate that which might otherwise be expressed in words that moving picture sequences can assume some of the attributes of language.

One of the difficulties in considering moving pictures as language in anything more than a metaphorical sense is that there are fundamental differences in the nature of words and images. There does not appear to be a vocabulary of images, still less an equivalent to an alphabet from which they might be composed. The comparison has been further confused by the frequent assumption that a photographic image is a direct analogue representation of reality.



Film was the first moving image medium and was soon recognised as a powerful means of communication. It is from the construction of sequences of images that moving picture media derive their unique form of articulation. Cutting between shots introduces discontinuities that can be used to manipulate the representation of space and time. This can be used for narrative effect. A series of images in a certain sequence can imply a narrative, while the same images in another sequence may appear meaningless. It is the narrative that supplies the logical connections between the images, but for this to be realised, the images must be organised according to particular procedures.

As the construction of films became more sophisticated, a form of filmic grammar emerged. Certain principles and procedures were institutionalised in the dominant system of production, resulting in a consistency in cinematic construction. This was codified in handbooks and manuals of film production.

The first film theorists often used language as an analogy in an attempt to validate cinema as an art form and elucidate its operation as a system of communication. In 1933 Raymond Spottiswoode described the aim of his book *A Grammar of the Film* as being 'to make as precise as possible the language and grammar which the film, as a prospective art form, has to acquire'.<sup>9</sup>

A common comparison with language was made between the shot as a word and the sequence as a sentence. Russian formalist theorists were the first to investigate film in terms of language, notably Sergei Eisenstein who employed language as one of many analogies in his theories of montage. The formalists were very much the forerunners of the structuralist movement and it was through the application of the principles of structural linguistics and semiotics that the discussion of film as a language received new impetus. The French theorist Christian Metz rigorously examined film as language and finally came to the conclusion that film is a language without a system. Instead he proposed a taxonomy of constructions, the *grande syntagmatique*, which introduced some important distinctions but has proved to be difficult to apply.

The idea of a grammar of motion pictures still persists in a looser, more metaphorical sense. Prescriptive manuals of production technique, such as Daniel Arijon's *A Grammar of the Film Language* (1976, 1991), continue to employ the metaphor of language. When directors talk of filmic 'grammar', they are referring not to a true linguistic syntax, but to a rudimentary set of conventions that are routinely used to structure motion picture sequences to preserve continuity, coherence and comprehensibility.



Film theory has produced a comprehensive consideration of cinematic language and literacy, but film represents only one aspect of visual communication, only one element in the contemporary culture of modern motion picture media. It is therefore necessary to distinguish the differences between moving picture technologies.

## Television

Long regarded as the poor relation to film, there is now a growing recognition that television is a suitable subject for study, although there is only a very weak methodological framework of critical theory. Cinema has by comparison produced an extensive literature but this is not necessarily directly applicable to television.

Among the large library of books devoted to the critical analysis of cinema, it is possible to find a few shelves that deal with television as a text. Key works might include Fiske and Hartley (1978) *Reading Television*, John Ellis (1982, 1992) *Visible Fictions*, Fiske (1987) *Television Culture*, and Robert Allen (1987, 1992) *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*. Among more popular books, the American television critic David Bianculli has produced *Teleliteracy: Taking television seriously* (1992), an anecdotal account that defines teleliteracy as 'the demonstration of fluency in the language and content of TV'.<sup>10</sup> The literacy of television is seen to subsist in the common cultural knowledge that television viewers have acquired.

The greatest weight of literature on television is related to concerns about the influences and effects of the medium. A recurrent theme is the presentation of sex and violence on the screen. The two are inevitably invoked together. The assumption persists that sexual and violent acts can actually be seen on the screen. In fact the screen simply reproduces representations that must be interpreted by the viewer. It should not be assumed that seeing something on a screen is the same as witnessing it at first hand, although that is not to deny that it may have a psychological effect. In any discussion of the alleged influences and effects of television it is necessary to preserve this distinction and recognise the role of the viewer in forming impressions based upon the glow of phosphor dots on the screen.

In contrast to film theory, television theory has tended to consider the television viewer in terms of the mass audience, rather than the individual, leading to a general neglect in attempting to understand the process of viewing and the production of meaning. While theories of film language and literacy have been



used to support the belief that cinema is a worthy medium capable of sustaining serious analysis, television has typically been seen as being diametrically opposed to language and literature. The term television literacy has often been used with qualitative connotations that imply critical discrimination and has been seen as something that can be taught in an attempt to minimise the impact of the medium.

The notion of television literacy has typically been raised in relation to the subject of television and children. A common cause of concern is that television is eroding standards of literacy and learning among children. In the face of growing concern over the presumed negative influence of television, there have been a number of powerful polemical attacks on television, particularly in the America where the problem was perceived to be most acute. The late seventies produced a number of popular books that suggested that television was not only bad but dangerous. Among the most popular diatribes were *The Plug-In Drug* by Marie Winn (1977), *The Show and Tell Machine* by Rose Goldsen (1977) and Jerry Mander's *Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television* (1978). The common conception in such criticisms was of the viewer as a passive victim of a powerful controlling medium that was dangerously addictive. The implication was that television was producing a generation of zombies.

The moral panic was followed by a substantial weight of earnest academic literature, which continues to grow daily. There was an initial assumption that the effect of television viewing on children could be studied as one would study a laboratory rat. Beneath this belief was an implicit behaviourist view that saw the act of viewing as a reflex response to a simple stimulus. The majority of studies that adopted a social-scientific approach invariably made enormous assumptions to construct elaborate experimental tests, the results of which are subjected to sophisticated statistical analyses which taken together proved largely inconclusive.

The hypodermic theory of mass media gave rise to a view of television as an infectious social disease that can be inoculated against through corrective education. Attempts were proposed to counteract the alleged effects and influences of television through instruction in critical viewing or receivership skills. The aims of the various media literacy curricula that resulted were primarily protective. The objectives of such schemes were to shield young viewers from the harmful effects of television, to control and reduce the amount of viewing, to appreciate television in a cultural context, and to introduce a more critical response to the medium through an understanding of technology and



techniques. The intention was essentially therapeutic, attempting to manage and re-direct the influence of television, promoting an awareness of its techniques to control its consequences. The intended result was the education of the critical viewer.

The term television literacy has become associated with a curricular approach to media education that emerged in America in the late seventies.<sup>11</sup> This literature is surveyed by David Buckingham in 'Television Literacy: A critique' (1989) and a British approach is described in David Buckingham's *Children Talking Television: The making of television literacy* (1993). Susan Neuman's *Literacy in the Television Age: The myth of the TV effect* (1991) also provides a theoretical overview of current curricula approaches to television literacy.

The term literacy carries with it connotations that are drawn from print culture. The apparently neutral notion of television literacy has often been based upon an implicit set of standards and value judgements about what constitutes 'literate' viewing behaviour, and is more concerned with encouraging the ability to discern and discriminate rather than with any analysis of the mental processes employed in all television viewing. Underlying many of the assumptions about television literacy is the idea that to be worthwhile, an experience must be consciously demanding and challenging. The presumption is that television viewing is basically passive, at least in comparison to reading print. Television literacy is consistently presented as the acquisition of a specific set of skills that are mastered in childhood and simply become automatic. Significantly, there is no similar widespread concern that competence in spoken language quickly becomes automatic, rendering the subject open to potential corruption through exposure to social intercourse. It is not an apparent concern of print literacy curricula that the reading of written material will somehow cease to be a conscious effort and will become a subconscious activity, transparent to any engagement with the text itself.

While the concept of television literacy is anchored to children's viewing, it remains difficult to discriminate between an ability to comprehend the medium itself and the level of general cognitive development. Psychologists have shown that the ability to understand that a narrative may be fictional may not be available until after the age of around seven. Complete comprehension of complex forms of narrative involving multiple plots and temporal complexity does not come until even later. A complex realistic fictional narrative demands a comparatively sophisticated viewer response. It is quite likely therefore that younger viewers are



unable to access certain readings of television texts that require complex inferences or the determination of moral positions. As a result, in dealing with young children it may be difficult to discriminate television literacy from normal cognitive development.

Following in the tradition of Marshall McLuhan's famous elliptical aphorism 'the medium is the message', one particular approach to television literacy turns its attention from questions of content to the formal features of television as a symbol system. Television is seen as imposing particular information processing requirements on the viewer. From one point of view, these can be seen as being very different to those required in reading print. From another point of view, reading and viewing can be seen as involving common procedural processes.

## **Video**

The notion of video literacy is introduced to make the distinction from the previous approaches to cineliteracy and teleliteracy and some of their associated prejudices. Moving pictures are no longer restricted to the cinema and television. Video literacy relates to the perception and comprehension of moving image media in general and is not restricted to any particular technology, but in particular it alludes to the electronic reproduction of moving pictures.

The audience response to moving images has become increasingly sophisticated in recent decades, largely as a result of technological developments. This may involve something as simple as recording a television programme for later viewing or using a camcorder to capture a moving picture record of a personal event. Satellite transmissions direct to the home are now taken for granted. As a result the whole culture of the moving image is changing. As communication and information technologies converge, advances into the digital domain are set to revolutionise our relationship with the moving image, making true interactivity a possibility while rendering increasingly problematic the perception of a photorealistic representation as a truthful reproduction of reality. As both technology and viewer expectations increase in sophistication, it is increasingly anachronistic to base the theory of the moving picture on the photomechanical medium of film.

The problem of defining the specificity of video is that it potentially includes both cinema and television, and it will go on to assimilate other media. Just as the early theoreticians of film struggled to establish the essential nature of film, as opposed to photography or theatre, so any theory of television or video faces a



problem of definition. It appears that as technological communications progress, each medium attempts to accommodate its predecessors. Video literacy therefore also implies cineliteracy and teleliteracy. Although he does not employ the phrase 'video literacy' directly, writing in *Timeshift: On video culture* (1991), Sean Cubitt argues that 'Video's readers are already intensely "literate". The codes and conventions of moving image media, now almost a hundred years old, are dense and complex. I would argue that there is a kind of Chinese Box effect in the history of twentieth century media, TV subsuming film, video subsuming TV.'<sup>12</sup> Cubitt goes on to define this literacy in terms of competence: 'In video, a competence is that set of acquired skills, so deeply embedded we scarcely know we have them and rarely stop to value them, which allow us to distinguish between a newscast and an advert in a split second, or to follow complex narrative structures of flashbacks and fantasy sequences, relating them back to the fictional present of the narrative'.<sup>13</sup>

The concept of competence has a special meaning in modern linguistics, referring to the intuitive knowledge that a user has of a language. Applied to video literacy, competence would refer to the understanding a viewer has of the codes and conventions that make visual communication comprehensible.

More recent approaches to television literacy, influenced by contemporary work in cognitive psychology and literary theory, have begun to regard the viewer as an active producer of meaning. Reader-response theories of literature have been applied to the reception of television texts, notably by Robert Allen (1987) in *Channels of Discourse* and Tony Wilson (1993) in *Watching Television: Hermeneutics, reception and popular culture*. The notion of passive viewing appears increasingly untenable, because it does not account for comprehension and still less does it explain the influences and effects that television is presumed to produce. To account for comprehension, the viewer must be understood as being a more or less active participant. The act of viewing requires that television's signals be received and decoded.

Despite the belief that reading is more cognitively demanding than television viewing, there is little evidence to support this. On the contrary, for the literate individual, actually reading written text can become an almost automatic activity. The same is true of television literacy. As a result, the competencies involved are frequently overlooked. Television viewing is not simply a passive reaction to a stimulus on the screen but can be seen as a highly complex cognitive activity. Many of the higher level demands of viewing the television text are comparable to



those involved in reading the written text, requiring complex inferences to be made.

Comprehension involves extensive and diffuse knowledge about the organisation of our experience. A complete account of the viewing experience would present an impossible problem of artificial intelligence. Any attempt must therefore be more modest in its ambitions. What is here termed video literacy does not therefore attempt to completely account for video comprehension, but it does seek to demonstrate the active nature of viewing.

## Television texture

While it may not be possible to sustain the literal analogy with language, moving picture sequences may still be approached in terms of discourse. A stretch of discourse that demonstrates some coherence is termed a text. A text is typically thought of as a verbal structure, but by extension it can refer to any system of communication. Television is an example of discourse, not simply in the verbal language that it contains, but also as a complex stream of communication, operating at many different levels, employing many different codes. The term television texture is used here to refer to the quality of television as a text.

In the case of the moving picture text, it is suggested that this texture is exhibited not only in words, but in the structural arrangement of shots. These are the primary units of moving picture construction. A series of shots generally coheres into a larger unit, which can be thought of as a scene. These scenes are basic narrative building blocks which in turn form sequences and episodes.

The intelligibility of a text is dependent upon a system of codes that are common to the community of communicators. A text is simply coded information. To be understood, a text must be read. The meaning of a text is not inherent in itself, but is produced through an interaction with the reader. Form and content are not neatly separable. It is not possible to strain the content of a text through its texture. The texture of a text partly constructs the content.

The television text is very different to conventional literary texts. The literary text is generally thought of as a closed form. Classical narratives are built around resolution and closure. The television text is more extensive and diffuse, with a tendency towards serial forms. These are either built around continual repetition or resistance to closure. The very nature of the television text renders it unresponsive to conventional critical strategies. With few exceptions, most television criticism is often a vague and impressionistic form of journalism.



## Serial drama

The genre of the continuing drama serial is a narrative mode that is highly characteristic of broadcasting. Commonly and contemptuously called 'soap opera', through historical association with the sponsorship of detergent manufacturers, the continuing serial is a low-prestige form of commodity fiction. This mode of narration developed on commercial radio, but it has since been adopted and adapted by television to become one of its primary forms of narrative presentation. Soap operas are among the most consistently popular programmes on television, and have recently enjoyed a remarkable resurgence. At the same time, soaps have increasingly come to be seen as a legitimate subject of scholarly study and this has produced a small but coherent body of criticism.

As well as a raft of academic articles, there have been a number of book-length works on the subject of soaps. Although it focuses mainly on radio soap operas, Robert Allen's *Speaking of Soap Operas* (1985a) is an admirable attempt to explore the historical relation between television and radio both as industries and narrative forms. In the past, criticism of soap opera largely sought to explain the popularity of the genre through the inadequacy of its audience. Part of the resurgence in academic interest has been as a result of feminist criticism that has attempted to assert the soap opera as a feminine narrative form. Many of the key textbooks, such as Muriel Cantor and Suzanne Pingree's *The Soap Opera* (1983), and Christine Geraghty's *Women and Soap Opera* (1991) have been written from this perspective. Yet the phenomenal popularity of soap opera is not restricted to certain sections of society. The soap opera audience is reasonably representative of television viewing in general which in turn is typical of the population. Given that soaps are so widely watched, there is considerable interest in attempting to understand what this process involves.

As a fictional narrative mode, soap opera offers an intriguing comparison and contrast with film theory's analysis of the feature film, the narrative fiction form which has to date dominated our notion of motion picture media. At one level, the continuing television serial borrows many of the conventions of classic cinema, especially melodrama, yet in terms of narrative construction it cannot satisfactorily be analysed in terms of the norms associated with the feature film. Film theory attempts to apply standards of literary criticism to the cinema, concentrating on a canon of classics, and conveniently ignores the domination of contemporary commercial cinema viewing by massively marketed Hollywood



blockbusters. In comparison with the considerable body of theory that the cinema has produced, there is a paucity of theoretical consideration of television in general and even less with respect to the construction of continuous serials. It is important that consideration of popular culture does not concentrate on examples of excellence, which then become legitimised and elevated above their original status. It is equally necessary to investigate more mediocre media products. The title of a book like Jerry Palmer's *Potboilers* (1991)<sup>14</sup>, which discusses soap operas among other forms of popular fiction, is indicative of a growing sympathy that popular forms are worthy of serious study.

One of the main problems faced when confronting the phenomenon of serial drama is one of definition. It is difficult to decide what constitutes the soap opera text. If it is defined as the sum of all the preceding episodes of a particular serial, the resulting text may extend for hundreds of hours in duration, in some cases stretching back over decades. Even then it is not complete, for it continues to be open-ended. Yet the text is not consumed in this complete form. It is unlikely that any viewer will have seen every episode of a particular serial. Any delimiting definition of the text is necessarily arbitrary. To take a single episode, or even a sequence of episodes, is to pluck them from their context and attempt to apply implicitly the critical principles of the closed form.

The extent of the text has always presented a problem inherent in the empirical study of the mass media. One quantitative approach that has been adopted is that of content analysis, counting occurrences of items and events in a sample for purposes of comparison and contrast. Examples of this approach have compared the incidence of death and disease in serials with that of the population and determined, not surprisingly, that the soap world is a dangerous place. Some soap studies have even neglected the text itself to enumerate features based on plot descriptions in magazine digests.

Such an approach is simplistic in assuming that content can be extracted from context and exist independently of form. This ignorance of form is unfortunate, particularly since some formal features are particularly amenable to quantitative analysis. One of the most important formal dimensions of moving image media is the way in which they unfold as temporal texts. Television texts are assembled according to certain formal procedures. What is required, therefore, is a method of taking visual texts to pieces to appreciate how they are constructed in an attempt to understand how they operate.



The approach taken here is to investigate the construction of the television text in terms of its shots. These can be characterised according to composition, type and function and measured in terms of duration with considerable accuracy. A methodology is described by which a moving picture text may be represented as structure within a relational database. This provides a tool by which time-based texts may be navigated for the purpose of analysis and offers a quantitative method for analysing some of the formal features of television texts. This offers a measure by which different episodes, programmes and genres may be objectively compared and contrasted. In attending to the detail of the construction, it is also possible to learn more about how such texts construct their impression of realism.

One of the attractions of genre criticism is the potential to identify structural similarities between different narratives. A genre such as soap opera is typically conventional to a degree that offers the possibility of reaching at least a tentative definition of its technical and structural organisation. In identifying certain common characteristics, it is possible to recover some of the principles intuitively employed by the producers of the text. By considering the main generative principles by which the serial text is constructed, it may be possible to account for the meaning and pleasure produced not just by a particular episode selected for analysis, but for any possible hypothetical episode.

The Yorkshire Television rural serial *Emmerdale* was specifically chosen as a case study for a number of reasons. After more than two decades, it is the second longest-running serial on British television and can point to an unbroken heritage back to the tradition of the original American radio soap operas. The only British serial to make the transition from daytime to prime time, the programme has been repositioned to compete with the more successful continuing contemporary domestic drama serials. While *Coronation Street*, *Brookside* and *EastEnders* and even *Crossroads* have all been the subject of some academic study, *Emmerdale* has scarcely received any critical attention.

The producers of the programme were extremely generous in allowing almost unrestricted access to the programme to facilitate this study. This involved extensive fieldwork observation of the entire production process and interviews with a number of production personnel. In addition, scripts, production records, story synopses, press releases and cuttings were also examined, together with an archive recording of the premiere episode. A contemporary sample of episodes from one month, together with original scripts, was then studied in detail and compared with the other three main British serials. Finally, the professional



perspectives of a number of those involved in the production of the programme were recorded.

The intended result is a snapshot of a particular type of programming taken at a critical time in British broadcasting. It is based on one of the most comprehensive and accurate empirical analyses of a particular television genre yet undertaken. The statistical study of formal features such as durations and characteristics of shots and scenes reveals certain key characteristic qualities of serial drama. While it may not be possible to reduce a programme to a formula, some important generalisations about its composition may be made. The television text is seen to be closely related to the circumstances of production. The structure of the television text can also be seen to be centrally important to the way in which it is interpreted. The methods adopted in this study, which combine quantitative inquiry with a qualitative critique, may offer a new approach to the study of the television text.

## Summary

The concept of literacy in moving pictures has been previously recognised but variously defined. A central concern has been a comparison of moving pictures to language. While the attempt to find a linguistic equivalent to a grammar has previously failed, moving pictures can be compared to language at the level that language is used for communicative purposes in the form of texts.

The literature on television is small compared to that of film. While there has been a widespread concern about the alleged influences and effects of the medium, there has been comparatively little consideration of how it is that viewing television produces meaning and pleasure.

Television literacy has hitherto been seen largely in prescriptive terms that are not entirely divorced from critical opinions about what constitutes literate and therefore presumably valuable viewing. The wider subject of video literacy proposed here attempts to describe the nature of the competence involved in comprehending moving picture narratives.

Television can be treated as a text. The act of viewing is far from passive, involving considerable reading skills similar to those deployed in comprehending and interpreting a written text. The self-contained narrative of the feature film is closely allied to our expectations of literary texts. Taken as an example of television as a text, the continuing drama serial, or soap opera, offers an interesting contrast. It illustrates many of the formal characteristics of television.



The selection of a particular text as a case study allows a closer analysis of the way in which the structure of the text arises out of the system of production and consumption. In so doing, this study also reveals something about how all visual narratives operate and proposes a new approach to the study of moving picture texts.

## Notes

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- 11 Foster (1979) *The New Literacy: The language of film and television*; Cohen and Salomon (1979) 'Children's Literate Television Viewing: Surprises and possible explanations'; Dorret *al.* (1980) 'Television Literacy for Young Children'; Anderson (1980) 'The Theoretical Lineage of Critical Viewing Curricula'; Wright and Huston (1981) 'The Forms of Television: Nature and development of television literacy in children'; Corder-Bolz (1982) 'Television Literacy and Critical Television Viewing Skills'; Salomon (1982) 'Television Literacy and Television vs. Literacy'; Baron (1985) 'Television Literacy Curriculum in Action: A long-term study'; Oslon (1986) 'Television Literacy: A comment'; and Abelman (1988) 'The ABCs of TV Literacy'.
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## *Chapter 2*

# **Moving Pictures**

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The justification for introducing the term video literacy must be that the electronic moving image can be seen to be fundamentally different from moving pictures produced by photographic film. This is inherent in the technological possibilities of electronic communication, which are quite different from the photo-mechanical medium of film. These differences have led to distinct aesthetic emphases. To date, much of our understanding of the nature of the moving image has been derived from film theory. A true understanding of television will require a paradigm shift. Therefore, before attempting to address the distinctive nature of the television text, some consideration must be given to the nature of moving picture media.

Moving pictures present the most powerful medium of mass communication since the invention of printing with moveable type. For over a century the privileged mode for recording and reproducing moving images has been a mechanical technology based upon photographic film. Although it would be as premature to predict the demise of celluloid as to propose the redundancy of paper, the photo-mechanical medium of film arguably represents an anachronistic and effectively obsolete means of presenting moving pictures.

Attempts to establish the formal identity of moving images have been based consistently upon the photo-mechanical specifications of the film medium which has remained largely unchanged in almost a hundred years. Much of our theoretical understanding of how moving pictures communicate meaning has been based upon film. Having rapidly evolved from a side-show entertainment to a theatrical narrative medium, the cinema as a social and commercial institution has become characterised by a particular highly conventionalised commodity, the movie, a form that has become synonymous with moving images. Yet the cinema is not a unique commercial application of the technology of moving pictures. The fictional feature film is only one form of moving image and photographic film is but one of a number of contemporary media for audio-visual communication.



Theories that base an aesthetics or psychology of audio-visual texts upon the division of a continuous flexible strip of film into a series of frames may soon acquire simply historical status. The production of meaning and pleasure by a feature film can no longer be attributed solely to the situation of the cinema audience collectively seated in a darkened auditorium.

Traditional film theory has largely failed to take account of the very rapid technological progress that has taken place outside the cinema. The conditions under which moving pictures are consumed have changed. Electronic media have largely overtaken film as delivery systems for the moving image. In turn, digital technology is increasingly replacing analogue systems, offering new opportunities, and presenting new problems. The digital image potentially differs as profoundly from the photographic image as the photograph differs from the painting. As information and communication technologies converge, the material basis of film appears to be increasingly irrelevant to the production of meaning and pleasure by moving images.

## **Moving images**

The presentation of moving images requires some form of technological support. All forms of moving picture communication rest on a perceptual illusion. At certain frequencies, a stroboscopic display is perceived as a continuous image. If a series of successive images is presented at an appropriate rate, the impression will be received of a single moving image.

The perception of apparent movement has been customarily accounted for by the inadequate and inaccurate concept of the 'persistence of vision'. While this might account for the impression of a continuous image, it fails to explain why the successive images do not appear to be superimposed. In fact, two distinct properties of the visual system can be identified: flicker fusion and apparent motion.<sup>1</sup> Flicker fusion occurs above certain frequencies and results in the impression of a continuous image. Apparent motion is the product of various visual characteristics which are collectively called the phi phenomenon.

Visual perception is not simply a matter of the projection of an image upon the retina. It operates through the highly complex integration of information presented to our entire sensory system. As a result it is possible to construct impressions from limited cues on the basis of very restricted data. The task facing the visual system is to assign form to that data by processes of inference. Human visual

perception involves complex mental mechanisms, which are only barely understood.

Moving picture media engage the same pre-conscious perceptual processes employed in our normal interaction with the surrounding environment. Our visual perception of the real world is derived from a series of glances which are integrated to give the impression of a continuous, coherent, and consistent environment. The technological reproduction of apparent movement is an illusion that relies upon these mechanisms of perception.

A crucial consequence of the way in which the visual system operates is that the image presented by moving picture media need not be of a single continuous scene. Changes in viewpoint appear to invoke complex inferencing mechanisms which attempt to form a cohesive, coherent, and consistent whole on the basis of the discontinuous data presented. This would seem to be an extension of the mechanisms employed in normal perception which integrate a series of glances to build up a picture of the surrounding environment. While abrupt changes in viewpoint do not reflect a natural mode of perception, providing that the visual information does not appear to be contradictory, it can apparently be accepted as convincing.

It is this ability that allows moving picture media to function as something more than mere moving images. Changes in viewpoint allow the manipulation of attention and interest, the presentation of a scene that is vastly larger than the view on the screen, and the presentation of scenes that have may never have existed in one place or indeed may never have existed at all. Moving pictures are presented over time and therefore have a temporal dimension. Changes of spatial and temporal viewpoint allow moving picture media to operate in a narrative mode. A sequence of moving images becomes a form of articulation.

Moving image media can produce an illusion that appears real, but is in fact a construction. Moving picture representations in no way reproduce reality. Rather they reproduce sufficient perceptual cues for the viewer to receive a convincing impression that can be recognised as reality. The reproduced phenomena are necessarily incomplete, needing to be unified and completed by the active participation of the perceiver.



## Film

Realistic moving images were made possible by the development of celluloid, which provided the material carrier medium for a sequence of photographs. When film first facilitated the photographic moving picture, the phenomenon was remarkable in itself. The ability to capture a moving image and reproduce it was an enormous step forward in the technology of communication, offering novel narrative opportunities. Although it presented a powerful illusion, the silent monochrome moving image could not be confused with reality. For many, the lack of synchronised sound and the absence of colour constituted the aesthetic of the medium as an art form. The technologically inevitable development of synchronised sound and colour were viewed with suspicion. In spite of the subsequent developments of sound, colour and widescreen pictures, the fundamentals of film, in its material basis as a sequence of frames in a flexible strip of film, have remained remarkably constant.

Walter Benjamin, writing in his essay on 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936),<sup>2</sup> considered that mechanical reproduction failed to reproduce the authenticity of the original work of art: 'One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art.'<sup>3</sup> He argued that changes in the economic mode of production led to change in the nature of art and perception. The question of whether photography was an art had prompted much futile argument but did not raise the primary question of whether the very invention of photography had not transformed the entire nature of art. Film theoreticians soon asked the same ill-considered question with regard to cinema, but the difficulties this raised were even more acute. The illusion of reality created in cinema was as a result of cutting together multiple fragments so that in the film the meaning of each single picture appears to be prescribed by the sequence of all preceding ones. Benjamin concluded that for contemporary man the representation of reality by the film is incomparably more significant than that of the painter.

Photography is an analogue form of reproduction. The process of photochemical recording ties the reproduction directly to the object represented. The photographic image has been seen as an imprint of reality, a factor that has defined the aesthetic and evidential value of still and moving pictures. The highly influential French film theorist André Bazin, one of the keenest advocates of a



realistic aesthetic of film, saw the relationship between the photographic representation and reality as the key to the film medium. He regarded the photographic image as an objective record, the relationship between the object and its photographic representation being not arbitrary, but intimate and existential. In an often quoted early essay he discusses 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image' (1945), ontology being the philosophical consideration of that which exists: 'For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man. ... This production by automatic means has radically affected our psychology of the image. The objective nature of photography confers on it a quality of credibility absent from all other picture-making.'<sup>4</sup>

This is a classic statement of the case for cinematic realism. The analogue nature of photo-mechanical reproduction is seen to underwrite the intrinsic integrity of the image. Bazin saw a transference of reality from the original to its representation and believed that ideally the film image should be a transparent translation of reality, although perfect transparency must be accepted as impossible. According to his view of film history, a series of technical innovations advanced cinema closer to realistic representation. Writing on 'The Evolution of the Language of the Cinema' (1950-55),<sup>5</sup> he outlines a history of cinema editing which supports his view that the development of the cinema was towards realistic representation. The tendency to see cinematography as an analogue reproduction of reality has produced a predominantly realistic aesthetic of cinematic representation. Filmic forms that do not fit this mimetic aesthetic, such as animation, have been marginalised by film theory.

Photographic images seem to involve some form of analogical correspondence to objects in the empirical environment known as reality. Images therefore appear to be natural and their meaning seems uncomplicated. However, images can also function symbolically. A roadside sign does not necessarily function through the similarity of its image to reality. A red triangular border may represent a warning, while the silhouette of a man digging with a shovel may indicate roadworks. The meaning of such a sign is not directly obvious. It must be learned. The sign is operating as part of a code. In this case it is the Highway Code, copies of which may be obtained from all good stationers and knowledge of which may be tested by a driving examiner. However, not all codes are as explicit as this.

To a greater or lesser extent, all artificial images are dependent upon codes, that is to say conventional systems of signification. The production of an image



involves codes of composition. Conventional photographic images translate three-dimensional reality into a two-dimensional representation. The optical system of the camera produces a perspective representation that reproduces certain conditions of perception in the viewer and makes the reproduction appear convincingly realistic. This is nevertheless a culturally based conventional mode of perception. To the Renaissance artist, perspective offered an exciting new mode of representation. To the modern individual, surrounded by photographic representations that conform to such optical behaviour, it appears normal because the visual codes involved have become naturalised to the point at which they appear transparent to our perception. In the case of moving pictures, the codes that structure the organisation of viewpoints in time and space have only come to be employed within the last century. Nevertheless, they can be compared to a system of perspective that operates in the additional dimension of time.

So powerful are the impressions produced by moving pictures that it can be mistakenly assumed that the process is transparent, that the screen is simply a window. Moving image media are capable of producing an illusion of realism such that we momentarily accept their representations on the level of reality. Yet the moving image reproduction is no more than a constructed representation of reality.

The finished film is a photo-chemical mechanical reproduction. Like a book it is in a sense a printed object. Yet the distance and the difference between the representation and reality are evident in the case of language. A book can be considered to consist of words and letters that operate in a formal system. A word is an arbitrary entity in that it rarely resembles that which it represents. A written text, however realistic, cannot be confused with reality. It is not possible to mistake a menu for a meal. The text of a realistic novel does not reproduce empirical reality. It presents a particular representation of a realistic world. Language is clearly a form of code that cannot be confused with reality itself. Images and words appear to function differently as symbol systems.

The study of how symbol systems represent meaning is known as semiotics or semiology. In 1690, the philosopher John Locke wrote in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* of 'Semiotike, or the doctrine of signs... the business whereof is to consider the nature of signs the mind makes use of for the understanding of things, or conveying its knowledge to others.'

In more recent times, the American pragmatic philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce proposed a science of 'semiotics' in which signs could be classified



according to three categories: indices, icons, and symbols. The indexical sign involves a causal existential link. The iconic sign represents by means of similarity or resemblance. The symbolic sign involves an entirely conventional link. However, it would appear that photographic images are capable of functioning across all three categories. A photograph may involve an existential link with its subject, may represent through its resemblance, and may also function as a symbol. A distinction may be made between the levels of denotation and connotation. An image may denote that which it signifies while also carrying secondary significations through connotative associations. Although this distinction is of some analytical value, in practice it may be difficult to distinguish the literal and associative meanings of a sign.

The Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, seen as the founding father of modern linguistics, suggested that the study of language might have wider application, and proposed that linguistics might become a prototype for a general science of signs, which he independently dubbed 'semiology'. Linguistic approaches have subsequently been used to analyse images as systems of signification.

The problem in attempting to understand the production of meaning by images in this way is that words and images appear to fundamentally differ in kind. As Saussure suggested, words are abstract arbitrary symbols that derive their meaning from a social consensus called language. Images are not entirely abstract arbitrary symbols because they derive their meaning from some degree of similarity to objects in the environment called reality. The status of the image has led to enormous confusion and controversy in the search for the equivalent of a visual language.

Language is a specialised form of communication. Written language is an artificial mode of communication, in that it requires some form of material support, albeit something as simple as pen and paper. Written language is a form of code. By encoding information in this way, it can be transmitted through space and time. The introduction of technology, such as printing, allows this information to be efficiently disseminated. It is therefore possible for many people to read something that was written in another place or time by someone they have never met.

Photography for the first time allowed the same possibility with pictures, initially in still photographs and subsequently in moving images. The photographic image is a printed artefact. The nature of its production requires that



it is completed at some time in the past. The photographic image can only ever be a record of something that may have happened. The realism of a photograph can strongly suggest that it actually happened, even though this impression may be a carefully constructed illusion. The process of constructing a film allows sophisticated manipulation of the representation of time and space. Nevertheless, the photo-mechanical moving image can never represent something that is actually happening at the moment.

Despite its apparent realism, the photographic moving image is paradoxically distanced from the original. The photo-mechanical nature of the reproduction introduces picture noise in the form of photographic grain and image vibration, while the quality of the picture progressively deteriorates due to defects that increase with wear. These traits, although integrated by our perception, and filtered through accustomisation, subconsciously draw to our attention the impression of film as a photo-mechanical reproduction of reality and contribute to the sense of 'pastness' which is felt to characterise the photographic image. It is precisely these features which foreground the film as a work of creative construction, so contributing to the critical view of film as an aesthetic artefact or even 'art', allowing a film to be accorded quasi-literary status. The tangible material nature of film as a physical product offers a conception of moving images that cannot be easily applied to modern electronic media.

## Television

Electronic moving images operate in a fundamentally different way to photographic film. Electronic systems do not depend upon a system of recording. While film provided a method of recording and replaying moving images, television was conceived as a means of transmitting moving images and accompanying sound through space to a remote receiver. For a long time, television was dependent upon film for the transmission of recorded images and as a result was not seen as a medium in its own right. Comparisons between photographic and electronic screen media may be inappropriate. Television, technically and historically, as an apparatus and institution, is an electronic broadcast mass medium that has almost as many similarities with radio as with cinema.

The concept of television preceded the capability to deliver a working system. The transmission and reproduction of sound and later pictures were the logical development of nineteenth century developments in photography and



cinematography, together with the telegraph, the telephone, and wireless telegraphy. The telegraph offered the first opportunity of instant communication at a distance. It was essentially an early binary communication system, employing a code of dots and dashes to vary a signal that was either on or off. The telephone that replaced it was an analogue system in which the voltage signal varied proportionally to the sound pressure at the microphone. The advantage to the user was that there was no need to employ a code or an intervening human translator. The system of electronic coding was transparent to the user. For the first time an untrained individual could deal directly with a communication channel and engage in instant two-way communication.

Work in wireless telegraphy led to the development of radio communication, which was originally employed in military applications. The first civilian radio stations transmitting speech and music emerged shortly after the First World War, leading to the development of the broadcast model of communication with a single source transmitting to many receivers. Radio became an important mass medium for information, education and entertainment, as well as a lucrative commercial industry.

Like radio, television is a broadcast telecommunication technology. It involves a process of scanning, by which the spatial dimensions of a scene are transposed into a temporal sequence of images transmitted as a continuously varying coded signal. Initially, mechanical methods of scanning a scene were proposed, such as using a spirally perforated spinning disc or a revolving mirrored drum. The basis of an electronic system was the cathode ray tube and the development of the vacuum valve amplifier. Even after the first electronic television image sensor was developed, pioneers such as John Logie Baird persevered in the pursuit of intermediate film and electro-mechanical scanning systems.

Born of radio, television's social and commercial application echoed that of sound broadcasting. Not surprisingly, given their heritage, the first generation of television receivers, with their small black and white screens, were styled like contemporary radios. Although the phrase 'radio with pictures' is a derogatory description of television, this single inheritance informs the medium's appeal of immediacy and air of impermanence.

Economic and engineering considerations dictated the top-down structure of the broadcasting pyramid, with the system's intelligence residing almost entirely before the transmitter, and the receiver as a dumb slave terminal. This reflected



the technical and institutional structure of radio and established the form of television as a public service and commercial entertainment, as an information medium and as a cultural force of mass appeal.

The scarcity of the radio frequency spectrum shaped the technology of television, limiting the system of transmission, the resolution of the picture, and the number of available channels. The cost of early electronic systems required that the receiver remain relatively unsophisticated, turning analogue signals directly into the sounds and images to be represented. This in turn demanded that strict synchronisation be preserved between the transmitter and receiver, based on the transmission of alternate fields locked to the timebase of the mains frequency, resulting in perceptible flicker. With the introduction of colour, it was necessary to compress and code the colour components in order to reduce the channel requirements and maintain compatibility with monochrome systems, resulting in colour artifacts. Being based on an analogue system, which is prone to interference and generation loss, these defects may be amplified each time the image is processed or recorded.

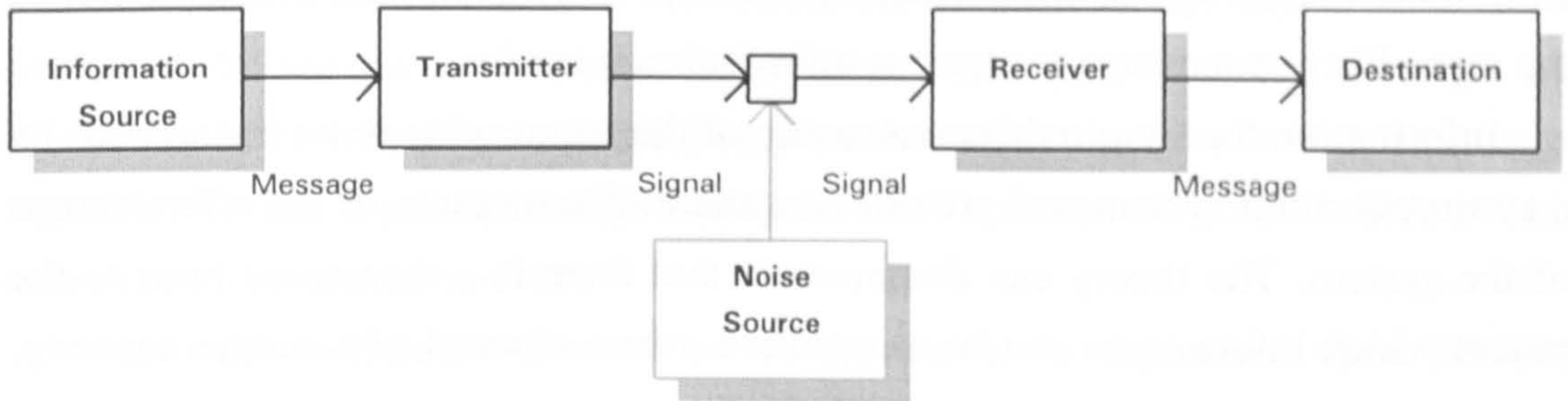
The quality of television pictures as currently viewed in the home falls far short of the capability of an ideal system, although this is not to neglect the enormous progress made in improving the quality of television reproduction. The qualitative limitations of the broadcast picture are not inherent in television reproduction *per se*, but in current transmission standards. These have been limited by the finite radio frequency spectrum available for broadcasting, and the requirement for backward compatibility with the enormous installed user-base of receivers. There is now little opportunity to improve the domestic television picture given these standards.

The electronic transmission of information is dependent upon standards that are common to both the transmitter and receiver. The signal capacity or bandwidth of the communication channel imposes a finite limit to the rate at which information can be transmitted and therefore the quality of the signal. Electronic communication technologies therefore exploit perceptual phenomena in order to reduce the channel capacity or bandwidth required to transmit messages. The quality of the system is deliberately engineered to the lowest possible bandwidth consistent with a required quality of reproduction.

A key contribution to our understanding of communication systems was made by Claude E. Shannon, whose 'Mathematical Theory of Communication' was published in 1948 and reprinted together with an introductory exposition by



**Figure 2.1**  
**General communication system**  
 Schematic diagram



Warren Weaver in 1949.<sup>6</sup> Shannon was primarily concerned with the engineering aspects of communication in electronic systems, not in terms of signals as such, but in terms of communication as a signalling system. Weaver observed that the model he proposed was sufficiently general to have wider implications for the consideration of communication in general.

Shannon considered that any communication system consisted of an information source, a transmitter, a communication channel, a noise source, a receiver, and a message destination. The information source produces a message or a sequence of messages. The transmitter encodes the message in some way either as a set of symbols or as a continuously varying signal, to produce a signal suitable for transmission. The channel is the medium used to transmit the signal, which may be subject to interference or noise. The receiver decodes the signal to reconstruct the message. The destination is the intended recipient of the message. The applicability of this model of communication to a television system, which involves a transmitter, a channel, and a receiver, should be immediately apparent. This model of a communication system is shown schematically in *figure 2.1*.

The capacity of any communication channel to carry information is finite. This suggests that information can be considered as a measurable quantity. The term information is employed in a special sense, distinct from signification, and should not be confused with meaning or content. It does not consider the semantic aspect of communication. The concept of information is related to the communication system as a whole and is conceived in terms of statistical probability.

The more likely a message is, the less information it carries. Information theory provides a mathematical definition of information as a measure of unpredictability, which takes into account the number of symbols occurring in a



system and the probability of their appearance. Information is therefore defined in terms of uncertainty, that is the degree of randomness or entropy. Conversely, the degree of predictability, or redundancy, enables the signal to be discriminated from noise and so allows the correction of errors in transmission. In simple terms, the more likely a message is, the less information it carries.

Information theory provides a measure of the commodity to be transmitted by a communication system and provides a quantitative measure of the effectiveness of the system. The theory can demonstrate that there is a theoretical limit to the rate at which information can be transmitted over a channel of a certain capacity. Information theory is essentially independent of the kinds of symbols being considered. It can be applied to discrete, continuous, or mixed systems. In discrete systems, the message and the signal consist of a sequence of discrete symbols, as in telegraphy. In continuous systems the message and the signal are both treated as continuous functions, as in conventional radio or television. In mixed systems, discrete symbols are encoded in a continuous signal, a method used for digital transmission.

The smallest unit of information is the binary digit or bit. In the binary system a one or a zero may be taken symbolically to represent any two choices. Information can therefore be measured in terms of the number of binary digits need to encode it. This says nothing about the importance or significance of the information. The significance or meaning of each bit of information is part of an external system.

As suggested by Weaver in his original preface, beyond its immediate application in the field of engineering artificial communication channels for which it was originally proposed, the information model of communication has important implications for mass media research generally. Assuming that the human perceiver can only correctly decode new information at a finite rate, an artwork might be defined as a cultural message that is sufficiently complex that it never entirely exhausts its potential information content.

Communication may be seen as involving a process of encoding and decoding. The codes may belong to the level of transmission, or they may belong to the level of signification. A television signal is coded at many levels. Some of these are codes of transmission, which operate independently of content, for instance the manner in which colour and sound channels are modulated into the television signal for transmission. The television message is also coded as a system of representation. It is not meanings that are transmitted, but simply a



signal that must be decoded. According to information theory, a communication system does not transmit meanings, simply coded information. As Stuart Hall has observed in his article on 'Encoding and Decoding in Television Discourse': 'A raw historical event cannot, *in that form*, be transmitted by, say, a television newscast. In the moment when a historical event passes under the sign of discourse, it is subject to all the complex formal "rules" by which language signifies. To put it paradoxically, the event must become a "story" before it can become a *communicative event*.'<sup>7</sup>

While the technical transmission of the signal is dependent upon certain standards common to the transmitter and receiver, there is no sense in which a television receiver can be considered to understand the signal. The codes by which the messages produce meaning are much more diffuse. Meaning rests on a set of conventions that are common to the human transmitter and receiver. In human terms, the meaning of a message is informed by systems that are external to the communications channel, such as systems of language, culture, and other shared knowledge. These codes are exceedingly complex. A machine capable of deciphering these codes correctly could not currently be conceived. It is clear, however, that the process is not a simple passive transformation, but requires considerable decoding.

The codes of transmission must carry sufficient information to trigger the appropriate processes of inference. The television image is carried by an encoded signal that is engineered to provide an image that is sufficiently representative to satisfy the perception of the viewer. The conventional television image is significantly lower in resolution than the film image. The relative image qualities of film and video can be compared to those of a photographic print and a coarse screened lithographic reproduction. Both are coded forms of representation. A newspaper photograph sufficiently satisfies our visual perception to produce a convincing representation of the subject. Closer inspection reveals that the image is an optical illusion composed of countless dots of varying dimensions. Yet the act of viewing a photographic print and a photo-mechanical reproduction cannot be considered to be substantially different. The measurable data contained in a reproduction is less important than the communicative purpose to which it is put.

Paradoxically, despite its imperfections, the television image appears subjectively more naturalistic than that of film. This has less to do with objective factors such as resolution than with the association of television with the representation of a simultaneous distant reality. The credibility of the electronic



image rests not so much upon fidelity to a past event, as upon an impressionistic representation of the potentially contemporaneous. The strong realistic impression produced by television stems partly from the capacity to represent directly a remote event. The image on a television screen can benefit from an impression of realism by association, since the same box in the corner brings us the news and sport as well as soap opera. This property of television as a method of communicating moving pictures cannot be overemphasised. It is not a feature of the image itself but of the delivery system. As a vehicle for communication traffic, television is a medium, it is not an art form, nor does it generally aspire to be one, but that is not to deny the importance of its messages. Although it is capable of mixing modes, the unique ability of broadcasting to represent remote events simultaneously continues to underlie the 'live' aesthetic of television.

## Video

The invention and social application of radio and television as broadcast communication media preceded a specific method of electro-magnetic recording. Broadcasting offered a channel of transmission. As live media radio and television could transmit gramophone records and films respectively, but they did not have access to a specific electronic storage medium. This has had profound implications for the formal development of television.

The first commercial video recording system went on sale as early as 1935. Based on a gramophone connected to a Baird thirty line television, it used discs with a playing time of six minutes on each side. The comparatively late emergence of an electronic method of recording television is a result of the bandwidth or information capacity required to record high resolution moving pictures. It was eventually made possible by the development of magnetic tape recording. The first black and white videotape recording was demonstrated in 1951, while the first colour recording was shown in 1953. These early devices required impracticably high tape speeds, a problem that was solved by using rotating recording heads that traversed the tape.

The first videotape transmission took place on 30 November 1956 when CBS recorded the live New York show *Douglas Edwards and the News* for rebroadcast on the West Coast three hours later to compensate for the time zone difference. The primary importance of video recording remained as a time-shift device, in which respect it was a superior and direct replacement for film recording. Within



two years, many American prime-time television programmes were being recorded in colour and video recorders were introduced into service in Britain.

Creatively the immediate impact of video recording as a production tool was limited as edits had to be performed manually under a microscope in the manner of a film splice, using a fine magnetic powder to make the individual video tracks visible. Lack of international standardisation, compromises in technical quality, and the non-availability of portable recording equipment further restricted the application of videotape. As a result, film remained the only practical medium for much recorded production. It was only with the replacement of physical splicing with the introduction of electronically controlled dub editing that videotape became used routinely as a production tool. Frame accurate video editing was eventually made possible by the introduction of electronic time code. The ability to edit videotape accurately produced a recording medium that could be used creatively in its own right. Video recording has since transformed the texture of television output.

Recorders using two-inch wide tape were replaced by one-inch machines from the mid seventies. Portable three-quarter-inch machines began to be accepted for electronic news gathering. By the mid-eighties, broadcast standard half-inch machines emerged, allowing the camera and recorder to be incorporated in a single compact unit. A device that initially had to be bolted to the floor could now be conveniently carried on the shoulder, providing a direct replacement for film cameras.

It was only with the development of video recording that the electronic reproduction of moving pictures could be separated from the technology of television transmission. The progressive down-scaling of video recording equipment led to non-broadcast applications, and subsequently domestic use. The first commercial home video recorder was launched in the mid-seventies, and by the end of the decade, as colour television sales and rentals bottomed out, hardware manufacturers discovered a new untapped market. The confusion of recording standards was rationalised by the emergence of a single dominant format, fed by the increased availability of pre-recorded tapes. Reflecting the original function of video as a time-delay medium, another equally important domestic application was in time-shift recording of off-air broadcasts for later viewing. Since its domestic introduction, the penetration of video recorders in the consumer market has been explosive and extensive. The very availability of domestic video has modified the nature of the television transmission. The



impression of irreplaceability is lost. The viewer is able to recover at least some control over the television text.

The technical quality of domestic video is relatively poor. The resolution of the average home video is about half that of broadcast television, which in itself represents an enormous compromise on an ideal television system and falls far short of that of film. Although there are sound technical reasons for these standards as presently defined, these are not insuperable restrictions. Technical standards in telecommunication technologies are inevitably largely defined by economic imperatives. The success of a communication technology depends upon market penetration, which tends to push products towards the lowest common denominator. Consumers sacrifice quality for the sake of convenience.

While there is a continued demand for the high quality, large-screen theatrical presentation of movie material with high production values, audiences appear to appreciate the choice of viewing offered by electronic distribution, whether by terrestrial broadcasting, cable and satellite, or home video. The commercial success of the domestic video recorder, which reproduces an image substantially inferior even to that of broadcast television, suggests that viewers attach greater importance to the ability to schedule their own viewing than to image quality alone. The breadth of choice offered by new delivery systems also substantially modifies the relationship of the audience to broadcaster, and that of the viewer to the television screen. The availability of un-cut, commercial-free feature films for home viewing points to the potential for video systems that will more closely deliver the quality of the cinematic experience.

## High definition television

The central distinction between cinema and television has typically been made on the grounds of image quality. The promise of true high definition television, with a broader image aspect ratio, over a thousand video scan lines, and an image free from colour artifacts, threatens to reduce the distinction between film and television on grounds of picture quality. The prospect of a considerably enhanced electronic image that is subjectively comparable with film suggests an urgent necessity to revise our aesthetic estimation of television according to this improved technical quality. The traditional film theory view of television, founded on the view of a feeble box that crudely struggles to attract attention, will be considerably undermined. In the future, one way or another, the television window on the world is likely to open wider.



The 4:3 (1.33:1) aspect ratio of television with which we are so familiar and which has done much to influence the way in which television presents our view of the world, was originally based upon the dimensions of the standard Academy aperture film format. With the advent of larger and wider film formats, largely designed to compete with the threat of television, this has become an increasingly awkward format for presenting feature film material. The 16:9 (1.77:1) dimensions of high definition television formats are more compatible with widescreen movies and arguably better accommodate the aspect ratio of human vision.

Although 35mm photographic film stock has a claimed equivalent resolution twice that of any proposed high definition television system, in practice the resolution of the image seen on the cinema screen is significantly lower than this and high definition television can appear subjectively comparable in quality to film. In particular, the electronic picture is free from vibration and image imperfections associated with the mechanical medium of film.

However, for the moment at least, film remains the privileged medium for prestigious productions. Despite its deficiencies, film remains unmatched in terms of picture quality, exposure and colour characteristics. The distinctive visual texture and highly valued 'film look' provided by cinematography connote high production values by association, conferring special status on that which they reproduce. An established universal world standard, film continues to offer considerable advantages as an acquisition medium. Meanwhile, electronic technology offers benefits in special effects and post-production. The disadvantages of film as distribution medium may mean that in the future the image on the screen may increasingly also be electronic. Although the first commercial high definition television systems have been based on essentially analogue transmission television technology, high definition television represents an opportunity to implement an all-digital system.

## Digital delivery

With high definition television waiting in the wings, the world of motion imaging is already engaged in a digital revolution. Conventional television is an inherently analogue technology. Until relatively recently, this was the only available option. In recent years, many elements in the communication chain have increasingly migrated to the digital domain. Television is now beginning to talk the language of computers. Bit by bit, the electronic image is turning digital. Only the domestic



receiver remains resolutely analogue. Although the transition will not be immediate, there can be little doubt that in the future television will be based upon digital technology.

An initial incentive to develop digital devices in television was prompted by the requirements to synchronise different television systems and convert between incompatible transmission standards. Together with the development of satellite communications, this facilitated the transmission of live pictures from around the world. The same technology allowed moving pictures to be rescaled and manipulated, offering new special effects for picture transitions. It made possible the instant incorporation of electronic captions and graphics. In short, like video recording, digital technology transformed the texture of the television image.

The advantages of digital video are comparable to those of the digital audio compact audio disc over a conventional vinyl record. Analogue media can be characterised by a process of imprinting, storing information through a process of transcription which transfers the configuration of one physical material into an analogous arrangement in another medium. Digital media, by contrast, store information in terms of formal relationships in abstract structures, a series of ones and zeroes in a specific sequence, transmitting tokens rather than traces of the original event. Since these tokens are mathematically rather than materially based, they can be transmitted and manipulated with great flexibility and robustness. While analogue reproduction invariably involves some form of generation loss, and is prone to interference, digital technology offers an apparently transparent form of replication, creating perfect copies that are effectively clones of the original. In the digital domain, every copy is effectively indistinguishable from the original master. Error correction and concealment can be used to mask any defects, so creating the impression of an apparently perfect reproduction of the master.

Digitisation is the logical progression of the process of dissection that began with the film frame, in which each picture of a moving scene is exposed sequentially. To transmit this image, it was necessary to scan it to produce a single continuously varying signal. In the digital image, each scan line is further divided into smaller picture elements or pixels, each having a brightness and colour value that can be represented as a series of binary digits. Unlike the random pattern of crystals that produces film grain, each pixel is ordered as an individually addressable unit within the picture.



Most modern video cameras begin by recording an image on a matrix of pixels on a solid state imaging sensor. This offers performance that is in most respects superior to that of conventional tube cameras, which exhibited many undesirable characteristics. Modern electronic cameras require lower levels of lighting, do not have many of the undesirable image artefacts associated with tube cameras, and offer a superior dynamic range of contrast, approaching that of film.

Digital video recorders are increasingly employed in broadcast production. Digital video recording is free from cumulative distortion, enabling pictures to be copied over many generations, for instance to create multi-layered composite effects which would not otherwise be possible. Since digital pictures are simply sequences of numbers, they can be mathematically manipulated in hitherto unheard of ways. Computer animation techniques can allow one image to be progressively metamorphosed into another, a transition known as morphing, an effect impossible in the analogue domain.

Digital video also offers the potential for random access storage using computer technology. Video tape, by its very nature, imposes a linear process upon video editing which is unnecessarily restrictive compared to film which can be cut and re-cut at will. Editing is not necessarily a linear process, although videotape technology has made it seem so. Non-linear digital video editing offers a liberation from this linear approach. Freed from the constraints of the serial storage medium of videotape, it allows instant access to stored pictures, combining the flexibility of film with the convenience of tape in the audio-visual equivalent of the word processor. Although tape will remain a primary recording medium for some time, magnetic and magneto-optical disc and eventually solid state storage may slowly take over. Digital storage will supersede the tape recorder. In the world of moving images, computer companies will increasingly call the shots.

Digital signal processing is currently employed at many stages of the broadcast chain up to the transmitter, and indeed in many modern receivers. Although many programmes are still produced using analogue equipment, every broadcast picture will at some stage be processed in the digital domain. Digital transmission is the final link in the chain for end-to-end digital reproduction. Although digital sound and text data are currently carried in the broadcast signal, the transmitted picture itself remains resolutely analogue. In the future, the television set is likely to evolve from a limited analogue receiver to become a high-powered digital signal processor. The television display tube is the last



vestige of vacuum valve electronics in an age of solid-state semi-conductors. Flat panel display technology is advancing, but as yet cannot match the quality of the television tube. Nevertheless, video imaging can no longer be defined simply by reference to the cathode ray tube. The wall-sized screen is not here yet, but it is undoubtedly coming.

A conventional television image can be considered as comprising a matrix of nearly half a million pixels. Although it is colloquially said that a picture is worth a thousand words, a single television frame consists of around a megabyte, or eight million bits, of digital data. At twenty-five frames a second, this puts enormous demands on communication bandwidth, requiring a thousand times the communication capacity of a telephone voice channel.

The practical foundation of digital delivery systems requires a reduction in the amount of data to be carried. Since the information is in numerical form, it can be compressed mathematically by reducing redundant repeating elements. Since a digital image is simply a series of numbers, it is possible to employ a number of sophisticated mathematical transformations to reduce the amount of data that must be stored or transmitted. As moving images consist of a series of sequential images, it is possible to eliminate data that is repeated between sequential frames, yielding substantial compression ratios.

The very concept of a moving image in terms of sequential frames may be a hang-over from cinematographic film. The division of a moving image into a series of static frames is an arbitrary one imposed by analogue mechanically based systems. If an image can be digitally stored at the receiver, this data can be repeatedly re-displayed, so that only information regarding moving elements need be refreshed.

Digital video compression offers enormous potential for increasing channel capacity, allowing more channels to be transmitted within a given signal bandwidth. Further, since digital signals require lower power levels and are less prone to interference from neighbouring channels, more frequencies become available. Potentially therefore, many more channels could be terrestrially transmitted than at present.

The transmission of television pictures through the air as radio waves, either from terrestrial transmitters or from satellites, is a very wasteful use of the finite resources of the radio-frequency spectrum. Fibre-optic systems, which use laser light to send digital signals down a tiny glass thread can carry an enormous amount of information by comparison and we are nowhere near approaching the



theoretical limits of the capacity that might be achieved. Such systems could be the basis for a new generation of electronic super-highways into the home. Fibre-optic distribution, combined with digital compression, could deliver hundreds or even thousands of simultaneous channels, resulting in further audience fragmentation and the development of narrowcasting. This has serious implications for the economic structure of the industry.

## **Multimedia**

The preservation of signals in the digital domain has important consequences for the integration of communication and information technologies. Once in digital form, heterogeneous dynamic data such as sound and moving pictures, together with words and numbers, can be stored and transmitted in a common format. Progress in computer technology is currently facilitating a convergence of communication and information systems. Some of the most powerful communication technologies of our era are fast flowing towards a fusion, combining the display of the television with the connectivity of the telephone and processing power of the computer. The synergy at this intersection is one of the next objectives of the computer revolution. Multimedia, the integration of dynamic media, such as audio and video in an interactive computer mediated form, the combination of the most powerful information technologies of the century, promises a new medium greater than the sum of its parts.

As communication and information technologies converge, the humble dumb terminal that is broadcast television may yet evolve interactive intelligence, to become the smart television or 'intellivision'. Television technology as currently defined, is an anachronism. The 'smart' television would be a new consumer computer appliance, offering manufacturers a potentially vast new marketplace. It offers the possibility of a new medium, opening up new forms of intelligent interactive video applications. Just as the personal computer has overthrown the monopoly of the mainframe and the dumb terminal, so will the architecture of broadcasting structures be forced to change. The first steps towards this vision are already being taken.

The age of digital reproduction offers a new approach to the moving image and new opportunities for distribution. The apparent indifference of the broadcasting industry to the implications of this echoes the initial lack of concern voiced by film and radio industries to any threat from television. The screen medium of the next decade, in the next millennium, may be a digital video



'telecomputer'. Whether the future of television lies with the computer or vice versa, the hardware components are likely to be very similar, if not identical. It is conceivable that television broadcasting could be largely subsumed by a wider computer and telecommunication industry. Conventional broadcast television faces the very real threat of relegation to the role that radio currently occupies as a secondary communication medium.

Information technology may be considered as just another communication medium. Yet it is potentially the richest medium of all. It may encourage new forms of publishing and distribution, through technologies that encourage us to think of multimedia texts in terms familiar from books, rather than from broadcasting. In such a context, video literacy may become a true literacy, through which the reader may actively interact with an audio-visual text. Multimedia desktop publishing will allow individuals to author audio-visual texts, using tools that were previously the province of professionals. This possibility offers a radical alteration in the way in which we communicate.

Unlike analogue forms of reproduction, which represent a 'pseudo-reality', the digital domain potentially offers access to a 'virtual reality' simulation, which need not refer to real-world objects or events. The digital image is by definition no longer an analogue representation of reality. It is a model representation, an algorithmic image. Each pixel is simply a unit of value, which need not derive directly from a real-world scene. The digital representation is a mathematical model. A series of ones and zeros, it cannot be confused with the reality it represents. The digital representation is quite literally a code. That which is recognised as a representation of reality need never have existed in that configuration. The origin of this virtual reality could equally be a computer model, as in the case of a flight simulator, whether it is a full-size simulation or a computer video game. The ability to simulate virtual reality is restricted only by computer power and our ability to model real objects and their behaviour. True virtual reality involves a combination of intuitive interaction with an immersion in an artificially created environment. It offers the ultimate in telepresence. The ability to interact with a virtual environment is something that cannot be achieved in an analogue medium such as film, based on a mechanical technology and a linear format. The demonstrable potential to construct a virtual reality representation independent of any real world referent illustrates that to an extent every representation presents a virtual reality.



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Virtual reality need not imply the use of strange gloves and helmets. Many television images do not mean anything by reference to the perception of the real world. Television output is increasingly punctuated by computer graphic sequences that present moving images that have no analogue in the real world. The latest innovation in television news has been to show the newscaster in a virtual reality set, in which only the desk actually exists, the remaining components having been generated electronically. This is followed by a weather forecast featuring the composite electronic image of a presenter apparently standing in front of a false-colour satellite image animation of the world, on which are superimposed weather symbols. Such a composite image, although it appears credible, is a digital collage, a graphic representation that has no previous existence in reality.

Virtual reality is nothing new. As long as there have been recorded media, it has been possible to reproduce a representation that did not actually exist in the real world. This is known as fiction. A fictional representation is recognised as in some way realistic if it can be related to referents in empirical reality. In this sense a factual representation is no different. The distinction between factual and fictional media representations is only one of degree. Every factual or documentary representation is a construction. All narratives construct their own reality. The television news should not be confused with reality. It is a narration about reality. We take its truth value on trust.

The urgent requirement to disengage television from film theory is underlined by the impending development of new forms of interactive audio-visual media. Television and video are capable of reproducing feature film material, albeit at compromised quality. However, the electronic media are capable of forms of narrative representation to which film does not have access, by virtue of their instantaneity and contemporaneousness. Digital media are further able to offer random-access, non-linear, interactive capabilities. Unlike an analogue sequential medium such as film, interactive digital media are free of the linear constraints of conventional narrative forms. The future may belong to the synthesised or algorithmic image, and the non-linear text. Multimedia is a demonstration of the way in which the digital domain breaches the boundaries of previously self-contained media, requiring a new interdisciplinary approach the study of communication. The ability to sample and synthesise sounds and images digitally makes the malleability of these media appear novel and renews concerns about the relationship between the representation and that which it represents.



The distinction between analogue and digital is of fundamental importance to our appreciation of the aesthetics of reproduction. The digital image is a mathematical model of the represented object. It may be manipulated mathematically, modified transparently or may even be completely synthesised. The status of the digital image is therefore different to that of the analogue representation. The moving image in the age of digital reproduction stands in a different relation to reality. The quality of photographic realism is no longer a guarantee of authenticity.

It would clearly be a great mistake to found an aesthetics of television on the analogue nature of its images. If television is understood as a communications medium, from the perspective of information theory, its aesthetic principles and properties can be more appropriately understood.

## Summary

Moving image media involve systems of signification and transmission. The signification of meaning by a system of signs is the subject of semiotics or semiology. The transmission of signals is the province of the engineering theory of information. Traditionally, the two fields of the sign and the signal have been divorced by the disciplinary divide between arts and sciences. Any modern understanding of communication needs to address both.

Both signification and transmission involve systems of codes. Language is a mode of communication that clearly involves a system of coding. Written language can be reduced to a sequence of symbols. The process of coding appears to be less evident in the case of images. Photographic images appear to communicate directly, by virtue of a degree of similarity with that which they represent. All analogue forms of transmission maintain the mystical mythology of analogy.

Increasingly, as a result of the requirement to represent moving images numerically in order to store and transmit them in the digital domain, our understanding of the nature of the moving image is changing. Digital reproduction is characterised by a process of sampling, reducing a signal to a large number of discrete binary components. This makes explicit the unambiguous existence of a code. The code is entirely arbitrary, a code of transmission which can be imposed on any form of information. Binary code is a *lingua franca* by which any information can be communicated, providing it can be encoded and decoded and that the communication channel is of sufficient capacity.



Information theory demonstrates that in principle all communication can be coded, whether it is transmitted as an analogue or a digital signal. Although digital transmission is an explicit form of code, ultimately information must be converted into analogue form for human perception. To be understood, a communicated message must be decoded, firstly at the level of transmission, by the television reception apparatus, secondly at the level of signification, by the viewer who also receives and decodes the television signals. The codes of transmission are imposed by the technological system. The codes of signification are inherent in an external system of relations based on language, culture and shared knowledge.

An understanding that all communication is encoded and decoded, both in terms of technological transmission and human production and perception, allows an appreciation that the comprehension of communication is an active process on the part of the recipient. The act of viewing can be seen as an act of information processing. Rather than being recognised as reproductions of reality, moving images can be seen as communicating information, which is decoded by reference to experience of reality.

All moving image media construct their representations. While they may appear superficially to be transparent reproductions of reality, this is simply an illusion. They too are coded messages, offering an encoded representation of space and time. The concept of realism implies a correspondence of the representation to reality. This is dependent upon the quality and nature of the coding, both at the level of transmission and signification.

The realism of a particular representation exists in its relationship to the perception of empirical reality. The intuitive perception of this degree of correspondence is not wholly dependent upon the fidelity of the medium. Realism cannot be equated with resolution. An image signifies not simply through its analogue similarity, but through a system of meanings. Objects in images are recognised in much the same way as objects are recognised in the real world. A picture of a horse is not understood simply because of its similarity to a particular horse, but because it fulfils certain characteristics by which horses can be recognised. It may or may not be possible to identify the particular horse of which it is a picture and that may or may not be important to the meaning of the image.

The ability to see images as meaningful is closely associated with the human intellectual and linguistic capacity to make meaning of the empirical world. It is in this context that moving images have often been held to possess some of the properties of language.



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## Chapter 3

# Film Language

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The concept of film as language is as old as film theory itself. It is one of the most powerful, popular and persistent metaphors for filmic construction and it permeates the classic texts of film theory. The techniques of classic cinema codify a set of rules for the production of motion picture sequences that appear to constitute a form of film grammar, but this does not necessarily imply that film can therefore be considered as a language.

### **The continuity system**

The narrative techniques of motion pictures were developed in the first two decades of the twentieth century as primitive single shot moving pictures evolved into multiple shot narratives and finally feature films. The classical film style developed in response to the requirement for a routinised system of efficient industrial mass production of narrative fiction films. This became organised along factory lines as a system of centralised planned production. As the complexity of construction increased, systems of organisation evolved to stabilise the unique ability of the medium to manipulate time and space in support of narrative. The principle of continuity emerged in response to the demand to create coherent narratives out of sequences of shots. The concept of continuity developed from a general notion of narrative unity to a specific system employed to ensure spatio-temporal coherence from shot to shot. The guidelines filmmakers consciously established became the 'continuity system' which is fundamental to the structure of the classic cinema film. It involves the application of a set of protocols and procedures that guarantee a conventional impression of spatio-temporal continuity and coherence. Although the continuity system is only one particular organisational strategy for motion picture sequences, it has become accepted to the extent that its operation appears almost transparent. Indeed, one of the features of the continuity system is that it effaces the marks of its own production. Classical construction crystallised through the stabilisation of production practice,



which was assisted by the emergence of the continuity script and the studio system of motion picture production. The continuity script became the blueprint for co-ordinating the construction of the film. This allowed the more economic and efficient practice of shooting out of story continuity. It became normal practice to shoot exteriors first, followed by interiors. It was the role of the continuity clerk or script assistant to ensure smooth continuity between shots and scenes. The continuity script helped achieve the coherent representation of causal logic, time and space that are trademarks of the classic feature film.

The consolidation of the conception of classic cinema was a product of industrial and economic factors. After the First World War, the American film industry faced reduced European competition. This was a crucial determinant in the emerging dominance by the largest domestic market of the world film industry. Increasingly production became centralised, with the production, distribution and exhibition of films organised into a small number of large corporations. This vertical integration, which began in 1918 and extended until it was outlawed in 1948, dominated the period of classic cinema. It allowed the considerable risks of production to be underwritten by the steady income from exhibition of large numbers of films. The consequence was a mature oligopoly in which a limited number of producers shared the main market. The long-term result was the effective elimination of any real level of competition between these corporations, which continued in mutual co-existence. The inevitable tendency was a certain homogeneity of production.

American entertainment cinema defined a particular commodity, the fictional feature film, composed of a coherent narrative, running for about ninety minutes. This was designed to have broad appeal. Fundamental differentiation was provided by the twin institutions of the star and the genre systems, which emerged to provide a basic subdivision of the mass market into different types of film. This conception of cinema defined the popular assumption of what a film should be.

The historical hegemony of Hollywood as the dominant motion picture production industry led to the normalisation of practices, which have become conventional through repetition and institutionalised to the degree that they form the principal structural system employed in constructing motion picture narratives. If motion picture sequences can be considered to have a 'grammar', it is grounded in the continuity system of classic cinema.



## Film grammar

The basic techniques of filmic construction evolved through a process of conscious experimentation and imitation. While narrative structures were borrowed from other forms of story-telling, film editing presented a new aesthetic challenge specific to the medium. Direct cuts between shots were potentially disruptive and disorientating.

The earliest primitive films consisted of a single shot, corresponding to a discrete narrative event. In the first multiple shot films, each shot continued to represent a single episode of the narration. The first films to dissect a single scene into a number of shots appeared around the turn of the century. The earliest of these typically employed a mask representing a view through a magnifying glass, telescope or keyhole to illustrate what would now be called the optical point of view of a particular character. Later, naturalistic framings such as windows were commonly included to indicate spatial relationships. Eventually, the point of view shot became sufficiently conventional to be used without such framing devices.

Another innovation was the practice of the cut-in from a long shot to a closer view of the same action. Initially these close-ups were taken along the same axis. Later close-ups were taken from different angles. This presented the problem of preserving consistent spatial relationships, in particular to maintain screen direction. The solution was to shoot the action with a view to editing according to a specific system. This system was intended to control the potentially disruptive impact of editing, smoothing the flow from shot to shot in order to tell a story clearly and coherently. Most of the principles of continuity cutting which are routinely employed in motion pictures today were in operation by about 1917, which can be regarded as the beginning of classic cinema.<sup>1</sup>

Continuity cutting functions to preserve coherence by implying spatio-temporal relationships between shots and minimising visual disturbances at the edit point. While in theory it is possible to join any two moving images, professionals working with moving picture media distinguish between good and bad cuts. It is considered that certain combinations of shots do not cut. That is to say that such cuts appear to be visually distracting. In most cases, this is due to effects resulting either from cutting between shots that are insufficiently different in their contours or from cutting between shots that result in unwanted apparent movement.



Where there is a cut between two shots that include common elements, these shots may be said to be overlapping. The image overlap, that portion of the scene which is included in both shots, allows their spatial and temporal relationship to be determined. However, many shots, or even the majority of shots, do not overlap in this way. In this case, no purely sensory information can be used to connect the two images. It is necessary to infer the relationship between the two. This requires the legitimate assumption that the sequence of images was created with a coherent narrative or expositional purpose. The intelligibility of a sequence depends upon the inclusion of visual clues which enable the identification of the relative locations of subsequently presented views.

One of the strongest suggestions that two spaces are connected is provided by an eyeline match. That is to say the direction in which a character is seen to be looking provides a strong cue to the next shot. Our desire to see that which is seen by the character provides a psychological motivation for the cut. It also provides cues about the spatial relationships between the shots. By following the eyeline the viewer can imagine a vector in three dimensional space which connects the two views.

The simplest form of eyeline match cuts to a shot from a character's optical point of view. We are shown the actual viewpoint of that character from exactly the same space. The point of view shot represents a temporary shift of narrative perspective to the subjective viewpoint of a particular character. An example might be a view through a window.

Another type of eyeline match cuts to a view approximating to a character's field of vision. In this case, the view is simply associated with the viewpoint of the character. This represents a semi-subjective level of narration. This is generally employed in dialogue situations where a cut to the actual point of view of one character, simulating eye contact, would appear to present the other character directly addressing the camera. This is generally taboo in the continuity system and is one of the means by which the means of production are suppressed in the narrative.

An alternative variation is associated with a character's field of vision but includes part of the character in the foreground. This is often known as an over the shoulder shot. This offers a less subjective level of narration, placing the spectator in an ideal viewing position, which explicitly specifies the spatial relationships of the characters. Each of these variations provides a different degree of identification with the character and a different level of narrative subjectivity.



If a single eyeline provides a strong spatial cue, then a matched reverse eyeline on the other side of the cut can create an even stronger spatial anchor for the spectator. Once the spatial relationships between the shots have been initially established, subsequent returns to these viewpoints can be quickly recognised. This is the principle of the shot and reverse shot pattern, one of the most prevalent figures in classic continuity spatial system. Even in the silent cinema, this became a basic device for covering interactions which were partially conveyed through dialogue intertitles.

The match on action preserves spatio-temporal continuity by extending an action on either side of the cut. An action that precedes a cut continues in the next shot. This causal continuity implies a continuity of time and space.

One of the most fundamental procedures of continuity cutting is the preservation of screen direction. Generally speaking, if an object is on the left of the screen in one shot, it should be on the left of the screen in the next. If movement across the screen is from left to right in one shot, it should continue from left to right in the next. This basic principle of coherence continues the scenography of the proscenium theatre. While the visual attention of the spectator may move around the scene, it is constrained in such a way that continuity of screen direction is preserved. In practice, this means that this placement is limited to a semicircle in front of the action.

According to the system of continuity cutting, a typical dialogue between two characters will generally include an establishing shot to indicate the context and spatial relationships of the action. This will be followed by an alternating series of shots. Generally these will favour the speaker and cuts will tend to follow the tempo of the dialogue exchange. Occasionally it will be more important to see the reaction of the listener. Often this pattern of shot and reverse shot starts in medium shot and moves closer over the course of the sequence. The alternation of similar shots has a cumulative effect in establishing spatial relationships and allows the shots to be registered rapidly. This basic pattern is a fundamental formula which is the foundation of most dialogue scenes.

The concept of a line of action is employed to ensure a systematic representation of space to maintain viewer orientation. Accordingly, the space of the scene is constructed along one or more axes of action. *Figure 3.1* illustrates the operation of continuity cutting in plan view.



**Figure 3.1**

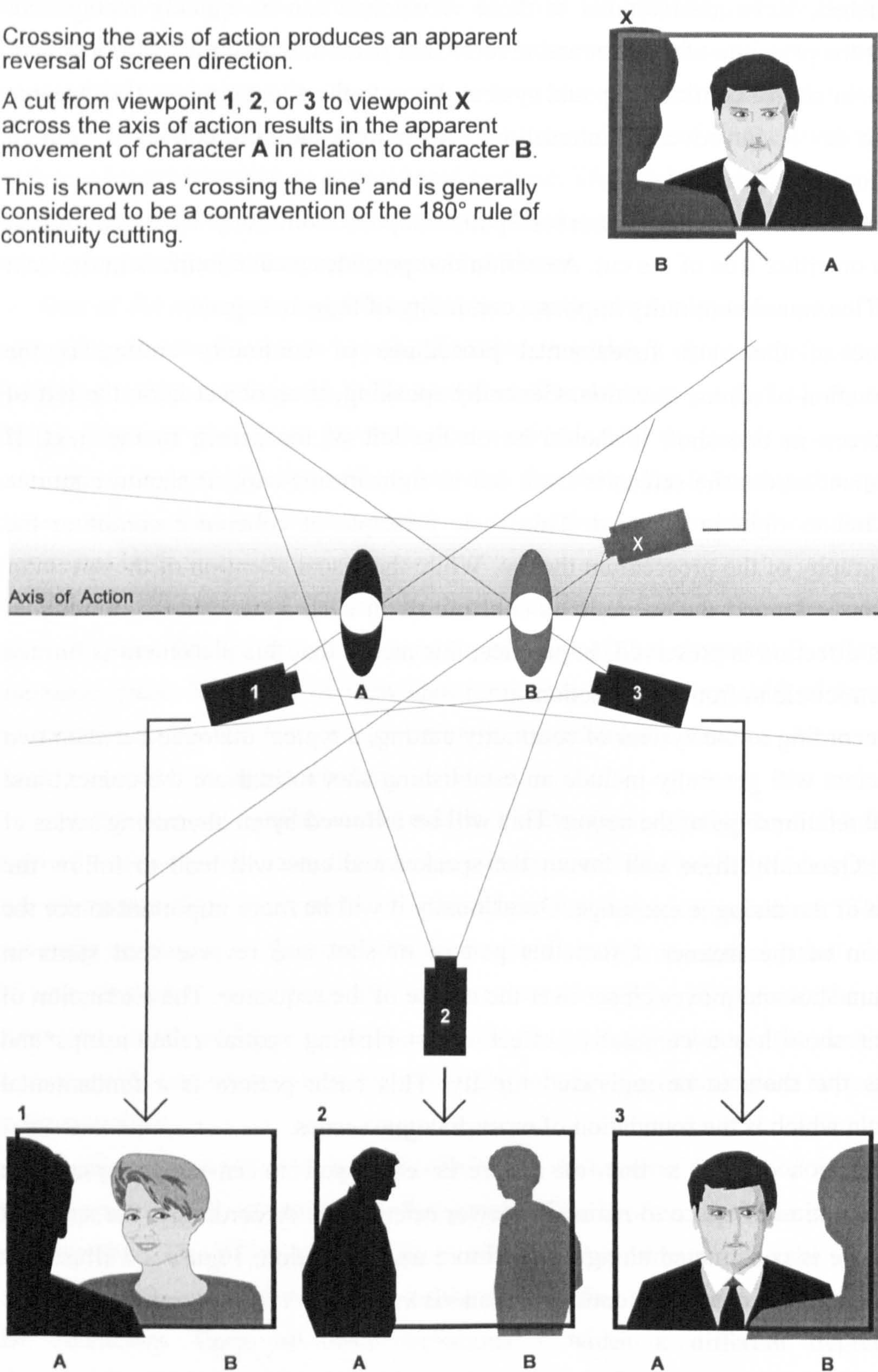
**Continuity cutting**

Typical dialogue scene set-up (single camera production)

Crossing the axis of action produces an apparent reversal of screen direction.

A cut from viewpoint **1**, **2**, or **3** to viewpoint **X** across the axis of action results in the apparent movement of character **A** in relation to character **B**.

This is known as 'crossing the line' and is generally considered to be a contravention of the 180° rule of continuity cutting.





In this case, characters A and B are conversing. The axis of action is an imaginary line connecting the eyeline of the two characters. According to the system of continuity cutting, the camera can be placed at any point on one side of this axis of action. This principle has become inscribed in the so-called 180° rule which is fundamental to continuity cutting.

A typical series of shots would be provided from camera positions '1', '2' and '3'. Position '2' provides a medium two-shot of the two characters in profile. Position '1' provides a close shot over the shoulder of character A, favouring character B. Position '3' provides a complementary close shot over the shoulder of B, favouring A. Position 'X' indicates a similar shot from a taboo viewpoint from across the axis of action.

Cutting together shots from points '1', '2' or '3', or indeed any position to one side of the axis of action, will maintain continuity of screen direction: character A will remain on the left of character B. However, a cut from point '1', '2' or '3' to point 'X' would result in an apparent reversal of screen direction: character B would appear to be on the left of character A and the eyeline would be reversed. This is known as 'crossing the line' and is considered a violation of the system of continuity cutting. The apparent sudden spatial shift produces a 'jump cut' which is potentially disorientating.

The secret of single camera shooting is that it allows camera placement anywhere within the constraints of the continuity system. A jump cut between viewpoints on the same side of the axis of action will be avoided provided they are more than 30° apart in the horizontal plane, an angle that has been found to produce viewing angles that are sufficiently differentiated. Another feature of this system is that it serves to hide the production mechanism. The shot from position '1' includes the space occupied by the camera when it is at position '3', while a shot from '3' includes the space occupied by the camera at point '1'. When these viewpoints are cut together in sequence, the mechanism by which we see the scene is rendered invisible. This gives the impression of transparent narration.

The 180° rule is not as restrictive as it might first appear. There are a number of legitimate ways in which the line of action can be crossed. A viewpoint directly on the line can be used as a transition to neutralise screen direction. Movement of the camera or the action of the scene can establish a new line of action. It is therefore possible to move between two or more axes of action to cover a complex scene. Continuity cutting simply ensures a consistent and coherent representation



of spatial relationships. Providing there is no ambiguity about spatial relationships, it is perfectly possible to cross the axis of action.

When shooting with a single camera, as is usually the case in film production, the camera is moved from position to position and the action, or a portion of it, is repeated for each set-up. This allows for each shot to be ideally composed and lit. A routine number of camera set-ups ensure consistent coverage of the action from a variety of angles and allow maximum flexibility in editing. The result is a cinematically reconstructed representation of the scene.

A narrational consequence of continuity cutting is that changes of shot are apparently motivated by the flow of the narration as presented by the characters. The viewer's mobility in space suggests that all relevant information is being presented, making the narration appear transparent. The narration is always outside this shot and never visible in the next. The analytic mode of editing works to control the attention of the viewer. By setting up expectations about the next shot, then fulfilling them, it becomes transparent.

The concept of constant screen direction and the 180° line of action can be extended to maintain screen direction even when cutting between related action in separate spaces. Thus in order to preserve screen direction, if a character exits to the right, that character should enter the next scene from the left. Such codified cues assist the viewer in constructing a cognitive map of spatial relationships. This was the basic logic behind the chase sequences that were so popular in the early silent cinema.

Continuity cutting implies that space and time within a scene are continuous. Any time that is elided is not generally structurally important. When cutting between two non-continuous spaces, temporal continuity becomes ambiguous. There is nothing inherent in an image that signifies a temporal relationship. It is not necessarily clear whether time has passed. Temporal elision is allowed, but not specified. The general assumption, unless otherwise explicitly signalled, is that there is a sequential temporal progression. Flash-backs or flash-forwards are typically indicated by conventional cinematic devices, which treat the image or the soundtrack in a way that suggests that it is unusual, for instance by using a ripple effect or a sepia tint.

Where there is temporal progression, the degree of temporal elision can often be inferred through the narrative logic by which events are assumed to take a certain amount of time, even though this may not be reflected on the screen. If there is a cut from one space to another space and then back to the original space,



it is often possible for the viewer to infer the degree of temporal elision in the interval and this in turn suggests a temporal framework in which the action at the other space may have taken place. If the interval is presumed to be insignificant, there is a strong suggestion that the intervening action is approximately concurrent.

Systematic alternation between lines of action implies an overall time frame which can be used to suggest simultaneity. Spatial discontinuity is subordinated to a higher level of narrative cohesion. The result is a more or less omniscient viewpoint, giving the viewer a knowledge of the relevant causal, spatial or temporal narrative information, which is not restricted to that of any one of the characters presented. This can be used to create suspense.

The maintenance of multiple lines of action offered a solution to the problem of how to sustain action in a longer film. This form of parallel construction was made popular by D. W. Griffith who referred to it as the cut-back or cross-cutting. The system of continuity cutting appeared to be so central to cinematic construction that it became a commonplace to consider film as a new language with a particular grammar of its own. A 1917 account credited Griffith with having 'wrought out the grammar of this new language in the world of art'<sup>2</sup> and he has since been celebrated as the father of film.

While the constantly shifting viewpoint that is presented through the procedures of continuity cutting does not equate with any natural mode of visual perception, it is sufficiently similar to satisfy the viewer. It ensures that spatial relationships are represented coherently and consistently, so allowing the viewer to maintain an unambiguous orientation.

One of the earliest serious attempts to investigate the psychology of filmic perception was produced by the psychologist Hugo Munsterberg in his book *The Photoplay: A psychological study* (1916): 'We want to study the right of the photoplay, hitherto ignored by esthetics, to be classed as an art in itself under entirely new mental life conditions.' Munsterberg asks 'What psychological factors are involved when we watch the happenings on the screen?'<sup>3</sup> He concludes that the conventional explanation of persistence of vision is inadequate and that the impression of depth and movement in motion pictures are illusory constructs of our consciousness: 'Depth and movement alike come to us in the moving picture world, not as hard facts, but as a mixture of fact and symbol. They are present and yet they are not in things. We invest the impressions with them.'<sup>4</sup> Munsterberg then considers the role of attention, memory and imagination, and



emotion in our comprehension of the photoplay. He believes that 'While the moving pictures are lifted above the world of space and time and causality and are freed from its bonds, they are certainly not without law.'<sup>5</sup> He concludes 'The massive outer world has lost its weight, it has been freed from space, time, and causality, and it has been clothed in the forms of our own consciousness.'<sup>6</sup> Munsterberg was important for his emphasis on the role of the spectator and remains significant and original for this despite subsequent advances in modern psychology.

The system of continuity cutting appears to furnish a form of film grammar, according to which sequences of shots may be assembled in such a way that they do not present apparent contradictions in spatial and temporal relationships. The degree to which there appears to be a film grammar, which may be described as a formal system of rules, has encouraged the comparison of film to language.

## Film language

At the time at which classic cinema was becoming formalised, views were emerging about language as a structural system. The foundation of much modern linguistics was established by the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, a Swiss professor of linguistics, whose *Course in General Linguistics* was posthumously published in 1915. Saussure's work shifted attention away from the study of the historical origins and evolution of language toward the study of language as a social system of structural relations. Saussure saw language not as an innate faculty but as a social institution. He observed that the relationship between a word and that which it represents is arbitrary. The word 'ox' signifies not a real ox but the concept of an ox by virtue of relationships of similarity and difference to other words.

Saussure distinguished *langage*, the capacity to communicate, from *langue*, the underlying 'language system' of conventional rules including syntax and semantics shared by a community, and *parole*, actual observable communication or discourse. Messages are signified or communicated in *parole* by means of a system of signs. Signs can be considered to comprise the concept represented, the *signifié* or signified, and that by which it is represented, the *signifiant* or signifier. The relationship between the two is that of signification and produces meaning. This linguistic sign forms the basic unit of communication within a community. The governing conventions of a language system are arbitrary, there being no intrinsic relationship between a word and the concept it designates. Signs produce



meaning through syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations. These can be thought of as relationships of chains and choices. The syntagm consists of signs whose relationship is one of combination in a linear sequence. The paradigm consists of signs whose relationship is one of substitution. Together the syntagm and the paradigm can be considered as horizontal and vertical axes of signification. These two dimensions can be applied to language at the level of phonology or vocabulary. The result is a conception of language as a network of interrelated structures and mutually defining entities.

Such a view of language was an important influence in the development of formalism and subsequently structuralism, which as their names suggest focus on the formal and structural features of language, literature and culture.

### Formalism

New thinking about language was reflected in Russian formalism, which emerged from the foundation of the Moscow Linguistic Circle in 1915 and flourished in the years following the October Revolution of 1917. Formalism sought to establish the theoretical object of literary study by examining the 'literariness' that distinguishes literature by reference to the formal features of texts. Literature was seen not as a reflection of reality but as an organised structure of signification. Its object is not regarded as mimetic realism but 'defamiliarisation'. Formalism proposes a distinction between the original raw material or *fabula* of a story and the plot or *syuzhet* as it is transformed into a narrative. Content is seen as being an inseparable function of literary form rather than something separable from it or perceptible through it. The techniques of narrative transformation include episodic composition, double-plotting, retardation, and attracting attention to the techniques of narration. Significantly, it appeared that precisely such techniques were to be found in film.

Russian filmmakers theorised a system of *montage*, emphasising the constructive nature of joining moving pictures and suggesting that the viewer should actively interpret interrelationships between shots. This was supported by an intellectual ideology that saw this process as being fundamental to the production of meaning. This was very different to the emerging classic cinema of continuity cutting which attempted to conceal the process of editing, subordinating it to the narrative construction. Where editing and cutting imply a process of trimming or reduction, montage implies a process of construction. This



very different aesthetic produced a theory of film, which included the first substantial consideration of the analogy between film and language.

### *Eikhenbaum*

Formalist film theory was effectively founded with the publication in 1927 of a volume entitled *Poetika kino* or *The Poetics of Cinema* edited by Boris Eikhenbaum.<sup>7</sup> This sought to establish the specific characteristics of film as an art form and examine the language of film in terms of editing or montage. It posited a 'poetic' use of film parallel to the 'literary' use of language. Thus Eikhenbaum sees the role of montage as providing 'a sort of syntax of film'.<sup>8</sup> He proposes the allusion to language not in order to bring cinema closer to literature but by way of a legitimate analogy, just as one might speak of a musical phrase or musical syntax. The language of film is compared to the concept of 'internal speech', a process of perception proposed by the psychologist Lev Vygotsky.

Eikhenbaum argues that the basic unit of articulation in film is the shot, since the mechanical division of a film into frames which is the basis of the illusion of cinema is not perceived by the viewer. Central to a theory of montage is that each shot must stand in some relation with the next, based upon the principle of temporal and spatial linking. Eikhenbaum observes: 'Every art, the perception of which proceeds in time, must contain within itself an articulation, in as much as it is, to a greater or lesser extent, a 'language'.<sup>9</sup> It is suggested that shots are linked to form cine-phrases, comparable to musical phrases. The linkage of shots or phrases forms the construction of the cine-period. This analogy has often been misinterpreted in terms of a simplistic statement of the supposed equivalence of the shot to the word and the sequence to the sentence.

Eikhenbaum argues that the spatial and temporal relationships between shots form the basic articulation of montage, producing a semantic link between shots in the perception of the spectator. The potential for elision offered by montage creates a specifically cinematic sense of time and space. Since this need not correspond to the fully extended time and space of real perception or theatrical presentation, this has stylistic or syntactic significance. Eikhenbaum argues that the viewer thinks in terms of space. Filmic perception is therefore founded not on naturalism 'but a special sort of cinema logic, at the basis of which is the principle of spatio-temporal continuity.'<sup>10</sup> The ellipses between shots, he argues, are closed by internal speech, but this process requires a certain coherence in terms of norms and devices understood by the spectator. It is also necessary that the transitions



are sufficiently motivated. The general basis of such motivation is seen as a principle of association, including devices such as contrast, coincidence and comparison. Eikhenbaum concludes that 'further investigation of this problem must be done on a laboratory basis.'<sup>11</sup>

### *Pudovkin*

Vsevolod Pudovkin, in his 1929 textbook *On Film Technique*, describes a number of practical experiments performed by Lev Kuleshov, cutting together existing footage from various sources to create an impression of continuity in an attempt to systematise the principles of editing.<sup>12</sup> The most famous of these experiments demonstrated that the perception of the expression on an actor's face appears to be determined by the shots that precede and follow. A neutral close-up of an actor was cut together with three different shots: a plate of soup, a dead woman, and a child. The result according to Pudovkin was that viewers exclaimed at the actor's ability to convey the varied emotions of hunger, sadness, and affection. It appears that viewers constructed a concept of the sequence and attributed to it an appropriate emotion. This phenomenon, although it had previously been applied intuitively by early filmmakers, has been informally dubbed the 'Kuleshov effect.'

Pudovkin went on to develop a theory of montage by which meaning was constructed by expectation, inference and association. Shots are compared to bricks in a wall, or links in a chain. Pudovkin proposes five distinct types of 'relational editing': contrast, parallelism, symbolism, simultaneity, and leitmotif. A comparison is made between the word and an image, and the phrase as a combination of images. Editing is seen as providing the logic of film and the language of the film director. Montage is not simply a method of joining separate shots. It provides a method of guiding the perception of the viewer.

### *Eisenstein*

Sergei Eisenstein proposed a theory of intellectual montage concerned with creating new meanings rather than supporting narrative. He considered the communicative force of cinema lay in the emotional and intellectual effect of combining images. For him, conflict between shots created meaning through combination. Eisenstein's consideration of film as a language is scattered among his collected essays.<sup>13</sup>

Writing on 'The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram' (1929), Eisenstein regards the Oriental ideogram, which generates meaning through



combination, as a model of cinematic montage. Basic concepts are combined to produce new meanings, which can be regarded not as the sum but as the product of their meanings: 'the picture for water and the picture of an eye signifies 'to weep'; the picture of an ear near the drawing of a door = 'to listen'; a dog + a mouth = 'to bark'; a mouth + a child = 'to cry'; a mouth + a bird = 'to sing'; a knife + a heart = 'sorrow', and so on. But this is montage!'<sup>14</sup>. However, even at the level of analogy, this model of cinematic signification is rather simplistic.

Eisenstein is dismissive of Pudovkin and Kuleshov's comparison of shots to bricks. His metaphors for montage involve electrical charges, atomic particles, and biological cells. He sees the shot as a cell and montage as a process of conflict and collision, as if shots possess a potential energy, which becomes kinetic when they are brought into contact. He compares the montage of shots to the series of explosions in an internal combustion engine driving the film forward. Eisenstein regards this conflict, an expression of the dialectical principle, as central to every art.

Eisenstein extended the dialectical principle to the shot itself. In 'A Dialectical Approach to Film Form' (1929), Eisenstein describes the concept of visual counterpoint, from which he believed a syntax of film might be derived. He considers counterpoint in terms of a graphic conflict of planes, volumes, space, and light, of tempo, choice of lens, and camera angle. These elements he proposes constitute a tentative film-syntax. Although admitting that his intellectual montage form is most suitable for the expression of ideologically pointed theses, Eisenstein suggests that it holds the promise of a totally new form of film expression through which ideas, systems and concepts might be directly expressed. However, he is clear that the film frame can never be compared to a letter of the alphabet, but must always remain a multiple-meaning ideogram.

In 'Methods of Montage' (1929) Eisenstein considered five levels of montage: metric, rhythmic, tonal, overtonal, and intellectual. However, Eisenstein did not attempt to apply rigorously a linguistic analogy and was generally rather vague in his remarks on film language.

The introduction to the cinema of synchronised sound profoundly affected cinematic construction, and was largely incompatible with Eisenstein's theories of montage, in which images alone provided their own language and rhythms. The accommodation of sound created a more rigidly defined spatio-temporal structure, as synchronous dialogue and atmospheric sound effects contributed to a sense of continuous time within a scene. With the arrival of synchronous sound,



continuous sound carried across a cut provided a further powerful cue to signal spatio-temporal continuity.

In his essay 'Film Language' (1934) Eisenstein is rather more concerned with maintaining the standard of literacy in film diction, which he sees as threatened by artless sound films. He goes on to suggest that an analysis of shot sizes, camera angles and lighting, deriving from the demands of the style and the character of the film's content, would serve as an exact analogy to an analysis of the expressiveness of phrases and words and their phonetic indications in a literary work. He concludes 'It is time with all sharpness to pose the problem of the culture of film-language.'<sup>15</sup>

In 'Film Form: New Problems' (1935) Eisenstein becomes increasingly interested in the idea that beneath speech and writing lay an underlying language of interior monologue, 'the syntax of inner speech as opposed to that of uttered speech'.<sup>16</sup> He considers this internal reasoning to be based on principles of construction which also form the systems governing the composition of works of art.

It was when writing on 'Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today' (1944) that Eisenstein explicitly compared the shot to the word and the scene or 'montage phrase' to the sentence. He compared the development of cinema to the development of language as a progression from primitive 'word-sentences' into sentences made up of separately independent words. Eisenstein saw intellectual montage as communicating ideas by way of a special film language, by way of a special form of film speech.

While Eisenstein remains the best known theorist of montage in relation to language, his writings do not constitute a coherent theory of film. Marginalised to a great extent by the emergence of the Hollywood movie as the predominant film form, the importance of Eisenstein's theories has become rather peripheral to the narrative cinema, but they remain relevant to avant-garde texts, and non-narrative symbolic forms such as certain television commercials and music videos. Although many of the formalist's analogies between film and language or 'inner speech' may seem in retrospect rather unsophisticated, they acknowledge the spectator as an active producer of meaning, a view that foreshadows more modern thinking about cinema, but which until relatively recently film theory has tended to ignore. Much of the formalist contribution to film theory remained untranslated for several decades, but it presaged the structuralist approach to cinema that became immensely influential in France in the sixties.



### Structuralism

Structuralism was formally instituted by the Prague Linguistic Circle in 1929, partly as a reassessment of Russian formalism, which was by then subject to political repression. While formalism focussed on parole as manifested in the work of literature, structuralism emphasised the role of langue and the sign system. This approach was based upon the foundations laid by Ferdinand de Saussure. However, it was not until the sixties that structuralism became a significant influence. Like formalism before it, the aim of structuralism was to attempt to define universal principles of literary structure using linguistic techniques and so transform literary studies into a scientific discipline. It was also argued that the articulation of other cultural forms, such as myths and folk tales, could be analysed linguistically.

In an attempt to apply a more literal analysis to the film language analogy, a new generation of film theorists employed an approach derived from structural linguistics. One of the main problems of treating film language as anything more than a metaphor is that images and words appear to be fundamentally different in character. The relationship of a photographic representation to reality is apparently different to that of language. The photographic representation is produced by a process that links it directly to its subject. This ambiguous status of the photographic image has been the focus of much debate when discussing the film language analogy.

### Barthes

Roland Barthes discusses the nature of the photographic image in his essay 'The Photographic Message' (1961). Following André Bazin in his suggestion that the photograph is like a fingerprint of reality, he argues that while there is a reduction between the object and its image, this does not amount to a transformation or a code: 'Certainly the image is not the reality, but at least it is its perfect *analogon* and it is exactly this analogical perfection which, to common sense, defines the photograph. Thus can be seen the special status of the photographic image: *it is a message without a code...*'.<sup>17</sup> Barthes sees connotation, in terms of artistic choice, framing, and technical treatment, as a form of coding of the photograph, but contends that connotative procedures are not units of signification and are not strictly speaking part of the photographic structure.

Barthes expands upon this in 'Rhetoric of the Image' (1964): 'In the photograph—at least at the level of the literal message—the relationship of



signifieds to signifiers is not one of 'transformation' but of 'recording,' and the absence of a code clearly reinforces the myth of photographic 'naturalness': the scene *is there*, captured mechanically, not humanly (the mechanical is here a guarantee of objectivity).<sup>18</sup> Human interventions in photography, such as choices of composition, are relegated to the level of connotation rather than denotation. The analogue nature of film as an objective recording has proved to be a major stumbling block in the search for a film language.

Barthes reflects upon the conception of a 'cinematographic language' in an interview in *Cahiers du Cinéma* (1963). The model of all languages appears to be *parole*, that is articulated language based on a system of signs that are non-analogical: 'The cinema, on the contrary, presents itself at first sight as an analogical (and moreover, continuous) expression of reality; and it is not at all clear how you go about introducing into an analogical and continuous expression an analysis of a linguistic type.'<sup>19</sup> On the prospect of identifying the structural foundation of editing, Barthes concludes, 'What would be interesting, I think, would be to see whether a cinematographic procedure can be converted, systematically, into a signifying unit; whether the structural procedures correspond to units of filmic reading. Every critic's dream is to be able to define an art by its technique.'<sup>20</sup>

### *Metz*

The most thorough consideration of cinema as a language was first addressed by Christian Metz in 1964, with the publication of an article entitled 'Le Cinéma: Langue ou Langage'.<sup>21</sup> This was incorporated in the work that was translated into English in 1974 as *Film Language*.<sup>22</sup> This volume documents some of the difficulties Metz faced in a discussion of film as language.

The attempt by Christian Metz to move away from vague metaphors, to adopt a rigorous new theoretical approach borrowed from structural linguistics, marked a watershed in the consideration of film as a language. To distinguish the metaphor of film language from an actual language system, Metz turned to Saussure's distinction between *langage* and *langue*. The concept of cinema as a *langage*, language in the sense of a communication process, presented little difficulty. This was the broad language analogy drawn by earlier theorists. To examine cinema as a *langue*, a specific language system, would be to identify and define the system of signs involved and the syntax and semantics governing them. Metz concedes the difficulty of applying a linguistic analysis to film: 'When



approaching the cinema from the linguistic point of view, it is difficult to avoid shuttling back and forth between two positions: the cinema as a language; the cinema as infinitely different from verbal language. Perhaps it is impossible to extricate oneself from this dilemma with impunity.<sup>23</sup>

Narrative is considered by Metz to be central to the operation of film syntax. Rather than understanding a film because of its syntax, he argues that the narrative force of the plot will always lead us to understand the specific devices by which it is articulated. Film montage and narrativity are, according to Metz, inseparably related to a perceptual phenomenon peculiar to motion pictures. Referring to the so-called 'Kuleshov effect', Metz writes: 'It is as if a kind of induction current were linking images among themselves, *whatever one did*, as if the human mind (the spectator's as well as the film-maker's) were incapable of not making a connection between two successive images.'<sup>24</sup> He concludes that the famous experiments simply demonstrate the existence of a 'logic of implication' inseparable from the film's narrativity, through which the image becomes language.<sup>25</sup> Montage and narrativity 'are only the consequences of that current of induction that refuses not to flow whenever two poles are brought sufficiently close together.'<sup>26</sup> If the cinema is a language, it is so over and above any effect of montage, and it has become language because of the stories it has told.

Metz examines the differences between words and images. A defining universal feature of verbal language is the property of 'double articulation'. This implies that languages have two levels of structural organisation. The economy with which a limited number of sound units can be combined to produce an indefinite number of sense units is the key to the productivity of verbal language.

Metz finds that 'the cinematographic language in itself exhibits nothing resembling the double linguistic articulation.'<sup>27</sup> The set of possible images is potentially open since the elements in an image can be continuously varied to produce an indefinite number of different images. It is therefore impossible to construct a dictionary of discrete definitions. Where there is no double articulation, Metz hesitates to find language. This leads to the conclusion that cinema is 'a language without a system.'<sup>28</sup> This recalls Barthes' conclusion that the photographic image is a message without a code.

Since images and words are fundamentally different, the commonplace view of film language that compares the shot with the word and the sequence with the sentence cannot be upheld. Metz argues instead that the shot is a unit of



equivalent magnitude to the sentence, while the sequence is a complex segment of discourse.

Metz defines five differences between the filmic shot and the linguistic word:

- 1) Shots are potentially infinite in number, unlike words since the lexicon is in principle finite.
- 2) Shots are the invention of the creator and have no pre-existence, unlike words which pre-exist in lexicons.
- 3) Shots present the receiver with an undefined quantity of information. They cannot be completely described in natural language.
- 4) Shots are assertive, actualised units. The image of a house does not signify the concept of a house but must represent a particular house.
- 5) Shots depend only to a small extent for their meaning upon the paradigmatic contrast to other shots that might have occurred at the same point along the syntagmatic filmic chain (since the other possible shots are infinite in number).

If each shot is equivalent in magnitude to a statement, the 'grammar' of cinema would appear to be a rhetoric, since it is concerned with the ordering of minimum units that are free in length and internal composition. This elevates the articulation of cinematic sequences above the upper threshold of linguistic analysis: 'The cinema begins where ordinary language ends: at the level of the 'sentence'—the filmmaker's minimum unit and the highest properly linguistic unit of language... it is immediately and automatically situated on the plane of rhetoric and poetics.'<sup>29</sup> Cinema art, Metz suggests, 'resembles literature rather than language.'<sup>30</sup>

As a result, Metz is obliged to broaden his semiotics of cinema from the study of linguistics to the study of 'image discourse'. Metz suggests that in confronting the problems of narration, cinema produced a body of specific signifying principles at which point 'cinema became narrative and took over some of the attributes of a language.'<sup>31</sup>

Metz introduces from Étienne Souriau the key term *diegesis*, meaning the fictional world of the film, its characters, events, and the space and time they occupy.<sup>32</sup> Film language concerns the manipulation of these elements. In order to remain intelligible, there must be a certain regularity in their construction: 'How does the cinema indicate successivity, precession, temporal breaks, causality, adversative relationships, consequence, spatial proximity, or distance, etc.? These are central questions to the semiotics of the cinema.'<sup>33</sup> It is in these respects that



cinema differs from still photography: 'Thus a kind of filmic *articulation* appears, which has no equivalent in photography... Lacking absolute laws, filmic intelligibility nevertheless depends on a certain number of dominant habits: A film put together haphazardly would not be understood.'<sup>34</sup>

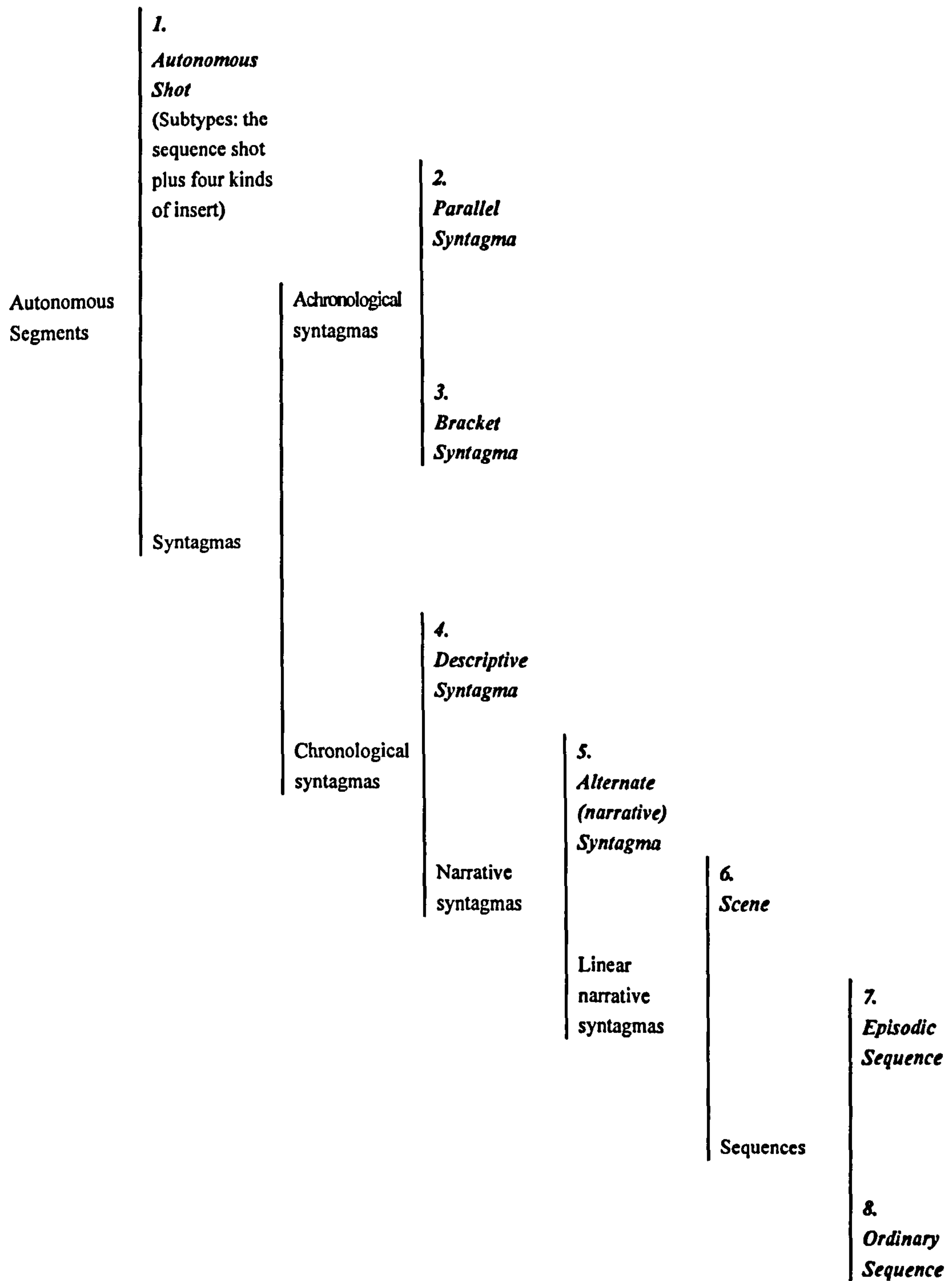
Unable to pursue film semiotics along the paradigmatic dimension of the image, because he found nothing in film to correspond to the word, Metz is therefore led to develop his semiotics of the cinema along the syntagmatic axis, which he regards as being at the centre of the problems of filmic denotation. Film language might therefore be found in the conventions of montage. While no film image entirely resembles another, the majority of fiction films share certain features of their narrative construction. This has gradually emerged and stabilised to become conventional through a process of repetition.

### *Grande syntagmatique*

It is to the articulation of successive shots and sequences that Metz turns for a syntagmatic study of the semiotics of the cinema. Metz attempts to identify the codes that govern the 'syntactic' combination of images in terms of the spatio-temporal logic of the narrative. The syntagmatic sequence of one shot followed by another can signify relationships of causal effect, temporal continuity, or spatial continuity. Given the unique ability of motion pictures to manipulate space and time, the value of Metz's system is its attempt to identify segments according to their treatment of narrative in terms of spatio-temporal manipulation. Elements are described according to the presence or absence of spatial or temporal relationships as defined by the diegesis or narrative context. Syntagmatic analysis involves isolating and identifying autonomous segments from the chain of narrative events. The determination of such segments necessarily relates to comprehension of the narrative context, which must in turn bring to bear experience of previous motion picture texts.

Metz constructs a taxonomy of eight different segments based on a series of binary oppositions, which he presents as his large syntagmatic category of the image track, the *grande syntagmatique*, a system of classification to allow any film's narrative to be formalised. The eight syntagmatic types are summarised in *figure 3.2*, reproduced from *Film Language*.<sup>35</sup>

Figure 3.2  
Christian Metz's *grande syntagmatique*





### *Autonomous Segments*

The text of a film can be considered as comprising autonomous segments. These can be divided into single autonomous shots, and syntagmas composed of several shots.

1) *Autonomous shot*: A single-take shot which presents an 'episode' of the plot. The only instance where a single shot constitutes a primary, and not a secondary subdivision of the film. Compare the case of the sentence, which is a smaller structural unit than a paragraph, although a paragraph may contain only one sentence.

There are two subdivisions of autonomous shots: the sequence shot occurring *between* other autonomous segments, and inserts occurring *within* other autonomous segments.

a) *Sequence shot*: The long take of the modern cinema, in which an entire scene, displaying unity of action, is treated in a single shot which preserves continuity of time and space.

The four types of interpolative shot, collectively termed inserts, are identified according to their function, which is generally comparative.

b) *Non-diegetic insert*: An image having a purely comparative or metaphorical function, showing an object that is external to the action of the film, e.g. an image intended as a visual metaphor.

c) *Subjective insert*: An image of an absent moment depicting a character's state of mind, e.g. images of memory, dream, fear, or anticipation.

d) *Displaced diegetic insert*: An intruded image of another spatially displaced diegetic action, e.g. in a sequence showing the pursuers, a single shot of the pursued is inserted.

e) *Explanatory insert*: An image removed from its empirical space and presented in the abstract space of a mental operation for explanatory purposes, e.g. a close-up of a detail of a scene.

The remaining seven elements are syntagmas composed of more than one shot. These may be distinguished as being either achronological or chronological, according to the absence or presence of a temporal relationship of the signifying shots as signified by the diegesis.

### *Achronological Syntagmas*

Of the non-chronological syntagmas two types can be distinguished according to the presence or absence of systematic ordering:

- 2) *Parallel syntagma*: A systematic alternation of two or more 'motifs' consisting of contrasting descriptive shots of direct symbolic value but with no precise spatial or temporal denotative relationship, e.g. shots of rich and poor, city and country, calm and storm.
- 3) *Bracket syntagma*: A series of very brief consecutive shots, possibly linked by optical effects, representing typical examples of a large whole, but with no precise temporal relationship.

### *Chronological Syntagmas*

The remaining syntagmas are all chronological. Here the distinction may be drawn between description, where there is a relationship of simultaneity, and narration, where the temporal relationship is one of consecutiveness.

- 4) *Descriptive syntagma*: A series of spatially and temporally co-existent shots representing different aspects of the same action or locale without any suggestion of succession and therefore functioning descriptively.

### *Narrative Syntagmas*

The four remaining types are all narrative syntagmas, there being an element of consecutiveness in the temporal relationship, so advancing the action of the diegesis. The distinction may be made between an alternating temporal succession and a single linear progression.

- 5) *Alternate syntagma*: An alternation of two or more series of temporally consecutive shots, where the temporal relationship between series is one of simultaneity. This is generally referred to as parallel construction or cross-cutting, and in the case of accelerated parallel montage is specifically intended to generate suspense, e.g. alternation between shots of pursuers and the pursued.

### *Linear Syntagmas*

The remaining syntagmas display a single successive temporal relationship. This may be either continuous or discontinuous.

- 6) *Scene*: A series of shots, demonstrating spatio-temporal continuity, with no (significant) diegetic break, similar to a 'scene' in the theatre. Although real time may be condensed through ellipsis, no story time appears to have been lost, e.g. conversation scenes with continuous soundtrack dialogue.



### *Sequences*

The remaining syntagmas are temporally discontinuous sequences. In this case the screen time of the filmic signifier does not correspond to signified diegetic time. Here the distinction may be made between discontinuity that is either structurally significant or insignificant.

- 7) *Episodic sequence*: A series of shots, possibly linked by optical effects, demonstrating an organised temporal discontinuity as a principle of structure and intelligibility such as the chronological progression of a single large event over time, e.g. shots showing the deterioration of a marriage over time.
- 8) *Ordinary sequence*: A series of shots of continuous action with discontinuous time, where the diegetic breaks do not form the ordering principle and are not denotatively significant. The narrative simply skips the moments that have no direct bearing on the plot, e.g. an escape sequence.

This tabulation was begun in 1966. At this stage it simply enumerated six main syntagmatic types. These were revised to form the table published in *Film Language*. Of the translation of an empirical and inductive classification into a deductive system, Metz makes the dubious claim that it gives 'a better outline of the *deep structure* of the choices that confront the film-maker.'<sup>36</sup> He admits that this particular formulation could be susceptible to further revision.

Metz follows his description of the *grande syntagmatique* with a structural analysis of one film, *Adieu Philippine* (1962). Directed by Jacques Rozier, a former television director, this film contains several sequences illustrating forms of live television, including the production of a play, *Montserrat*. Critics have observed that the segmentation derived is not entirely unproblematic and illustrates some of the difficulties of the distinctions employed by Metz. Although the *grande syntagmatique* has produced a significant body of critical literature, it has failed to produce a comparable body of cinema criticism.<sup>37</sup>

The distinctions defined by which Metz arrives at his taxonomy remain useful. A segment is composed of one or more shots. It is either chronological or it is not, either simultaneous or consecutive, either episodic or continuous. That said, almost everything remains to be said. Many of Metz's distinctions appear to be internally inconsistent and contradictory. The classification of an autonomous insert is unsatisfactory since it could be argued that no single element can be entirely structurally independent. The definitions of the bracket and descriptive syntagmas are so close that differentiation may seem specious. The same might be



said for the parallel and alternate syntagma and episodic and ordinary sequences. Presented as a structure of the 'image track' the *grande syntagmatique* makes little or no reference to dialogue or the soundtrack which are important features leading to the delineation of units. Metz has little to say about the sequence shot and significantly he has little to say about the organisation of shots within a syntagma, an area in which continuity editing provides perhaps the most pertinent principles and protocols of cinematic articulation. In the end, he has very little to say about any possible relationships between syntagmas or how they contribute to the articulation of the film as a whole.

The claim that the *grande syntagmatique* represents a deep structure is highly questionable. Such binary classifications can be employed simply to devise elegant structures. The idealised binary tree structure bears very little relation to the actual comprehension of motion picture sequences. It is restricted to retrospective analysis rather than being a model of any mechanism by which a viewer might confront a motion picture text. Metz suggests that there may be a certain motivation in the logic of these patterns of intelligibility that is not entirely arbitrary and therefore can be learnt quickly, but he does not present any evidence of this.

Metz's scheme is admittedly dependent upon narrative and the definitions of units are made with reference to narration. It is temporally driven, distinctions are made on the basis of temporal relationships, but these can only exist at the level of the plot rather than at the level of the image. Yet it ignores existing work on the principle of narrative organisation, such as the work of Propp, Lévi-Strauss, Greimas, and Barthes, in favour of its own definitions. That said, many of the spatio-temporal structures distinguished in the *grande syntagmatique* are equally applicable to other narrative forms and are not central to the specificity of cinema.

The principal value of the *grande syntagmatique* is heuristic. It raises, even if largely through its own limitations, important questions about narrative time and space. It provides at least a more rigorously analytical approach than most of the cinema criticism that passes for theory and presents a necessary starting point for any analysis of motion picture narratives. Perhaps the most important contribution of *Film Language* is not the *grande syntagmatique* but the demonstration of the difficulty of dealing with film as a literal language.

In *Language and Cinema* (1971) Metz concedes that the *grande syntagmatique* may merely be one of many cinematic codes, specifically a sub-code of editing within a certain tradition. The *grande syntagmatique* loses its



monolithic centrality as the central system of film narration and is redefined as a particular sub-code of editing corresponding to classic cinema between 1935 and 1955, that is to say from the maturity of the sound film to the arrival of widescreen.

The pluricodic conception of cinema as a combination of codes allows Metz to disengage from the search for a single language system. The *grande syntagmatique* is no longer presented as the *langue* of cinema, but as one of its structural codes. Codes may be either specific to cinema, such as editing, or shared with other cultural forms and media, such as composition. Codes may have subcodes, such as intellectual montage, continuity editing, or modern *mise-en-scène*. The movement from a linguistic to a pluricodic conception of cinema concludes the search for a specific *langue*. 'Cinematic language' is now defined as the sum of codes and subcodes supported by the cinema. In terms of set theory, the configuration of cinematic language can be considered as a conceptual Venn diagram of related codes. A particular film can be considered as a textual system, the structured network of codes around which the meaning of the film coheres.

The primary reason for the apparent failure of the rigorous application of a linguistic analysis to the cinema has been the tendency to see the filmic image as an analogic reproduction of reality. The inability to discriminate minimum units or discern a double articulation stems from a failure to recognise the photographic image as coded. Metz, like Barthes and Bazin, fails to admit that any form of reproduction involves a transformation.

The linguistic conception of the sign offers a doubly articulated system in which the sign is arbitrary, unmotivated by the referent. An image, it appears at first sight, stands in a different relation, being partly motivated by its referent and partly arbitrary. However, a photographic image can no longer be considered as an analogue of reality. An image is a coded representation that reproduces sufficient conditions of perception necessary to satisfy our normal perceptual processes. An image cannot stand in its own right, but must be communicated by means of codes of transmission. An image may be represented in black and white, as a system of lines or dots, as in a newspaper reproduction. It is a coded representation, the codes of which cue our perception of the image and constrain the way in which it read.

The *grande syntagmatique* attempts to describe the temporal systems of filmic narration, but Metz is silent about the spatial systems involved in structuring image sequences. One of the most important codes of spatial representation in two



dimensions, as well as the best understood, is that of perspective. Central linear perspective provides a system that describes the translation of three-dimensional space into a two-dimensional representation in a consistent and predictable manner.

Perspective organises spatial representation for a single privileged viewpoint. For the Renaissance this provided a scientifically founded system for seeing order and coherence in the world, amounting to an artistic ideology. It has been argued that the camera simply reconstitutes this system.<sup>38</sup>

Perspective implies that there is a transformation between the original object and its representation. This is a mathematical transformation based on the fact that light travels in straight lines. The camera cannot but employ this fact. Perspective is an artificial convention, one that is culturally founded and which must be learnt, but it is only as conventional as representing a three-dimensional subject on a two-dimensional surface. Perspective is an analogue code. Similarly, the very act of framing is an act of codification, based on aesthetic principles of composition which are culturally inherited. The acceptance of a close-up image of a human head, projected on a wall-sized screen, is also a cultural convention.

The potential ambiguity inherent in perspective representations is the basis of many well-known optical illusions. A single perspective projection allows for an indefinite number of configurations of objects in space. All technological reproduction involves a loss of dimensionality. However, moving images uniquely create a dynamic representation of spatial relationships. That is why movement can create a powerful sense of planar depth. The scope that motion pictures offer for subject and camera movement reduce the ambiguity of the perspective image, furnishing additional information that allows the viewer to make accurate hypotheses about spatial relationships. The conventions of editing allow the sequential presentation of multiple viewpoints, so offering further information about spatial arrangement.

The system of spatial continuity in motion picture sequences can be compared to the role of linear perspective in organising spatial relationships in still images. Instead of organising space for a single privileged viewpoint, it systematises the organisation of space for a sequence of optimum viewpoints. It provides the spectator with a systematic representation of space. Just as perspective is not a necessary precondition for the comprehension of still images, so spatial continuity is not the only possible system of organisation for moving images.



One criticism of a conception of cinema as a formal organisation of codes, is that this hypothesis fails to address the role of the spectator. In his later work, Christian Metz attempts to involve the spectator more centrally in his theory. This is an example of a more recent psychoanalytic theory of film, which employs a metaphoric rather than analogic relation between cinema and language. This is based upon the re-interpretation of Freud in structural linguistic terms by the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, who is credited with the observation that the unconscious is structured like a language. This view affords comparisons with the early Russian formalist ideas that film produces a form of 'inner speech'.

In 'The Imaginary Signifier' (1975)<sup>39</sup> Metz addresses the perspective code in terms of the effect of identification it produces in the spectator. The ambiguous phrase 'imaginary signifier' refers to the Lacanian 'mirror phase' of identification in child development. Metz argues that the process of identification with the camera viewpoint in the cinema is the product of the entire cinematic apparatus which, through the system of perspective, situates the viewer as the site of organisation which lends coherence to the image. The viewer is therefore positioned as an invisible voyeur.

The simple equation of the optical viewpoint of the camera and the spectator's identification with the camera is inadequate to describe the complex relation between the spectator and the screen. If the viewer literally associated their viewpoint with the optical view of the camera, they would become thoroughly disoriented by the process of cutting which effectively throws the viewer around in three-dimensional space. Were it not for some principle of continuity and coherence this would be unintelligible.

In an essay entitled 'History/Discourse: A Note on Two Voyeurisms' (1976)<sup>40</sup> Metz applies to film theory the linguistic distinction between *histoire* and *discours* that derives from the work of Benveniste. Metz suggests that classical narrative cinema attempts to disguise its first-person, present tense *discours*, in order to present itself as third-person, past tense, *histoire*. The codes of classic cinema attempt to hide the 'marks of enunciation', the selection and arrangement of shots, which point to the film-maker as the enunciator or producer of the fiction.

It is not particularly helpful to suggest that the codes of classic cinema operate to hide the marks of their production. While this may be a feature of classic cinema, it gets us no nearer to an understanding of the mode of operation of these codes.



The psychoanalytic approach has been a focus for much recent feminist film theory.<sup>41</sup> Psychoanalytic theories have served to reconstitute the somewhat obscure linguistic discourse of modern screen theory in the equally arcane jargon of an imaginary discourse.<sup>42</sup> Despite a shift away from Saussurean linguistics towards a psychoanalytic model, many of the basic problems of the film language analogy remain. Important questions about the psychology of the perception of motion pictures have become subsumed in psychiatric investigations of proposed spectators. Dressed in these new imperial clothes, such theories appear naked to practical problems relating to the production of meaning in motion pictures. The appeal to language as a metaphor for the operation of the mind is no more specific or scientific than the early suggestion that the meaning of motion pictures was filled out through a process of inner speech.

Metz never satisfactorily investigates the organisation of individual shots. One reason is that he has trouble in identifying a linguistic equivalent for the shot. However, while it is not possible to identify a shot with a word, that is not to say that a shot cannot be part of a paradigm. Metz does not appear to recognise the possibility that there could be functional categories of shots which operate within a sequential structure. There is a broadly accepted production terminology to describe the functions of certain shots as cutaways or establishing, reaction, or point of view shots. There would appear to be some scope for systematically describing such functions, which are central to the articulation of moving picture sequences, but he chooses to ignore them.

Metz's analysis of montage bears little relation to the realities of film editing as a production process. The paradigmatic poverty he finds seems to stem from the belief that the paradigm must consist of the open set of possible images at any one point, although he later appears to accept the possible importance of paradigmatic structure. The difficulty disappears if one considers instead a paradigm of the closed set of images of an event available to the editor.

The classic continuity system of cinema that he is attempting to describe is routinely based upon the model of an event reconstructed from a variety of viewpoints, such as the master shot, two-shots, singles, close-ups, reverses and cutaways. By ignoring these categories in the pursuit of academic analysis, the semiotician risks disregarding the very system upon which conventional cinematography is founded.

Anyone concerned with the creative craft of editing is continually presented with paradigmatic possibilities. In the case of a dialogue scene that has been shot



according to the routine procedures of the classic continuity system, a number of shots corresponding to the dialogue or action to be represented are available to the editor. The question the editor therefore asks is 'Who do we want to be on at this point?' The choice is constrained, firstly by what would be relevant and appropriate, and secondly by the material available. There may, for instance, be a choice between showing the character who is speaking or the character who is presented as being addressed. The choice is clearly one of paradigmatic substitution from a vertical set of alternatives within a linear temporal syntagmatic sequence.

The availability of alternative shots at any particular point is invisible to Metz's model. In practice it might be argued that competence in comprehending motion picture sequences consists in an awareness that at any one time the viewer is being offered a shot from a paradigmatic set of possibilities.

'Literacy' is therefore acquired through developing a knowledge-base through exposure to material. Comprehensional competence can be achieved intuitively without an explicit knowledge of the codes of production. This knowledge remains largely unarticulated because the asymmetric nature of the mass media restricts consumers of audio-visual material from being producers. Codification of this knowledge base is an act of analysis that is only partly begun.

At the same time that Metz was elaborating his linguistic analysis, Susan Sontag, writing on 'Theatre and Film' in *Styles of Radical Will* (1966),<sup>43</sup> provided a refreshingly simple statement of the mechanism of filmic construction. Sontag saw the connection between shots, rather than the shots themselves, as units of cinematic construction: 'the distinctive unit of films is not the image but the principle of connection between the images, the relation of the "shot" to the one that preceded it and the one that comes after.'<sup>44</sup> This principal of connection operates through spatial relationships: 'Cinema (through editing, that is, through change of shot—which is the basic unit of film construction) has access to an alogical or discontinuous use of space.'<sup>45</sup> This is not simply related to the convincing construction of otherwise impossible scenes: 'The most "realistic" use of the motion-picture camera also involves a discontinuous use space, insofar as all film narration has a "syntax," composed of the rhythm of associations and disjunctions'.<sup>46</sup> At each cut, a question is posed in the mind of the viewer: 'In the cinema, narration proceeds by ellipsis (the "cut" or change of shot) ... but the change of shot can provoke questions, the simplest of which is: from *whose* point of view is the shot seen?'<sup>47</sup>



## Summary

Classic cinema practice produced a system of continuity cutting which serves to guarantee the consistent representation of time and space. This system is established in production practice and enshrined in handbooks of film direction and editing. Such is the dominance of this system that it has become known as a form of film grammar. Such a term suggests that moving picture communication can be considered as a form of language.

The notion of a language of film has always been immediately appealing but it fails under any close analysis. In seeking to grant moving images the dignity of language, theorists have largely ignored many of the principles by which images sequences are actually constructed in order to make linguistic comparisons. One of the most basic set of principles of filmic construction is the continuity system. Whether this grew out of custom and practice, or whether it embodies fundamental principles of the representation of spatio-temporal continuity, this system has largely been ignored by those theorists seeking to find linguistic structural systems. The same may be said of the perspective system, which is fundamental to the representation of depth in two dimensions. The bias towards language, which is relatively poor at describing spatial relationships and rather more sophisticated in indicating temporal relationships, has served to obscure the complex spatial organisation involved in the construction of moving image sequences.

In an attempt to apply more precision to the film language comparison, the analogy became a theoretical claim. As a result, film theory became concerned with a knot of issues involving the definition of language and the applicability to film of terms used in this definition. Too close a comparison with verbal language threatens to deny the specificity of cinematic signification and reduce discussion of the articulation of film to a dependency upon linguistic equivalences. These issues have so distracted some theorists that little attention has been given to the consequences of considering film as language. Some of the questions about the basic mechanisms by which viewers comprehend moving images remain largely unanswered as a result.

However, one of the benefits of considering film as language is that the attempted application of a linguistic model at least takes us beyond naïve assumptions of realism. Filmic narration is seen as an articulated system. Ironically, the analogical nature of the image prevents us from finding a true



linguistic doubly articulated system. However, even if the linguistic metaphor cannot be fully applied, the definition of the problem is slightly more clear. Like all analogies, the film language analogy is useful only up to a point.

The search for a film language has perhaps concentrated rather too much on attempting to identify a counterpart to a *langue* or language system. The precision with which it was attempted to analyse motion pictures from linguistic principles suggests that we have a thorough understanding of the structural nature of verbal language itself, which is far from being the case. Linguistics is only capable of dealing with language at the level of the sentence. There is not even any adequate simple definition of what constitutes a sentence. A sentence is simply the largest unit to which we can assign a grammatical structure.

Even if film could be shown to be a language, this would not begin to explain how it is used or understood. As Metz observes, film resembles literature rather than language. The endeavours of a linguistics-based cinesemiotics reached a 'full-stop' at the boundary of the sentence unit. Any cinematic syntax or grammar that is based on linguistics cannot account for higher levels of organisation, such as we find in narrative. There are no syntactic rules about possible combinations of units above the level of sentence. Here we are dealing with a description of paragraph structure, and there is no grammar of the paragraph, the choices available to the writer or speaker are simply stylistic. The repeated conclusion is that film does not have a grammar, but demonstrates a rhetoric or poetics.

Christian Metz's *grande syntagmatique* was in many ways symptomatic of the descriptive goal of structural linguistics. Although Saussure has proved to be immensely influential in the structuralist and semiotic enterprise, some of the more recent developments in critical theory have been sceptical about the undue concentration on *langue* rather than *parole*. To turn to the latter marks a move from the search for an abstract language system to the consideration of the comprehension of actual discourse. Meaning is seen to be not inherent in the text, but constrained by its structure codes and realised in the interaction of reader and text. In going on to consider literacy rather than language, attention is centred on the concept of a competence in comprehending motion pictures and the consideration of actual motion picture texts and real audiences.

## Notes

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## *Chapter 4*

# **Video Literacy**

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The proposition that there is a specific literacy appropriate to film, television and video is an extension of the suggestion that there is a language of motion pictures. However, this is problematic because it is not possible to draw direct equivalences between verbal language and visual perception. Words and images appear to be fundamentally different in kind. A shot demonstrably does not equal a word and a sequence of shots is not equivalent to a sentence. However, the semantically significant arrangement of shots into syntactic sequences allows certain linguistic analogies. The question of literacy is less concerned with finding an equivalent to language as such, than with drawing comparisons between language and the structure of moving picture sequences.

While structuralism brought a valuable objectivity into literary analysis, criticisms have been made that meaning is too complex to be demonstrable by structuralist techniques such as binary analyses. A number of post-structuralist positions have since been adopted which stress the role of mental processes in interpreting linguistic relationships, and point to the possibility of a multiplicity of meanings that effectively deny the prospect of objectivity in textual interpretation.

Reader-orientated approaches to texts consider that meaning is not so much inherent in the text as constructed by the reader in the process of reading the text. From this perspective, the concept of video literacy that is introduced here reflects the ability of viewers to construct a meaning from a visual text.

## **Literacy**

The quality of literacy is associated with proficiency in written language. Literacy is generally something that has to be formally taught. It is a measure of education. Yet the capacity to communicate in a native spoken language is acquired spontaneously as a part of natural development simply on exposure to suitable input. All proficient users of verbal language possess an intuitive knowledge that allows them not only to recognise an indefinite number of novel utterances, but



also to recognise deviant constructions and on occasion to impose an interpretation on them. Knowledge of this language is directly accessible to any native speaker, yet it is sufficiently complex that no available linguistic grammar can completely account for it.

The capacity to understand moving picture sequences is also naturally acquired. As Patricia Greenfield remarks: 'children must be *taught* to read, but they learn TV literacy on their own by simply watching television.'<sup>1</sup> This basic ability can be intuitively achieved at an early age merely through exposure to appropriate material. It then matures in parallel with general cognitive development and the acquisition of world knowledge. In this respect there is a strong similarity to the acquisition of a native spoken language. Both skills quickly become non-conscious to the extent that the individual viewer is unaware of the complex cognitive activity that is involved.

A significant difference is that the visual ability is acquired almost exclusively through reception rather than production. As a result, the ability is apparent only in comprehension and the majority of users remain unaware of the skills that they possess. The user of a written language may have some understanding of its grammar, but it is not necessary to have an explicit knowledge of grammar to communicate in speech. The basis of this ability is an intuitively acquired linguistic competence.

## Competence

The appeal to a concept of competence derives from the highly influential work of the linguist Noam Chomsky. With the publication of *Syntactic Structures* (1957), Chomsky initiated a revolution in modern thinking about language. This was developed in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965) and has subsequently undergone a number of revisions. Although this work is still the subject of considerable debate, the central concepts provide an important background for the consideration of video literacy as being comparable to linguistic competence.

The distinction is made between *competence*, the individual's intuitive internalised knowledge of a language, and *performance*, or an individual's actual use of language. The Chomskyan theory of language proposed to link the system of language with actual language use. This is superficially similar to Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, but rejects the idea of language as an abstract structural system of similarities and differences, which tells us little if anything about *how* an individual is able to understand and produce an indefinite



number of novel utterances, and even less about how this extraordinary ability might be acquired.

Competence is seen by Chomsky as an aspect of our general psychological capacity. Only in ideal circumstances is performance a direct reflection of competence. Therefore it is not possible to study competence directly, it must always remain hypothetical. The long term goal is to provide a grammar capable of going beyond the study of individual languages to the nature of human language as a whole, by discovering linguistic universals, and in so doing contribute to our understanding of the human mind. Such an approach proved to be a radical departure from the prevalent structuralism and behaviourism.

Traditional grammars failed to account satisfactorily for certain types of structural ambiguity. There is a fundamental difference between the following two sentences: 'John is eager to please.' and 'John is easy to please.'. Although superficially similar in their syntax, at a deeper semantic level they are distinctly different. In the first case John is involved in pleasing someone else and in the second case someone else is involved in pleasing John. The similarity of surface structure disguises a fundamental difference at the level of deep structure.

Chomsky developed a theory of transformational generative grammar that included semantics as an integral part of the grammatical analysis of language. This saw the grammar of a language as a system of rules relating the semantic component to the syntactic component of a sentence. It is suggested that the semantic deep structure is related to the syntactic surface structure by an ordered series of formal operations known as transformations, hence the term transformational generative grammar. The suggestion is that language production involves taking a semantic deep structure and deriving an appropriate syntactic surface structure. Conversely, comprehension involves taking a syntactic surface structure and generating an appropriate semantic deep structure. This transformation and derivation could be seen as a process of linguistic coding and decoding. The term 'generate' is used in the technical mathematical sense, referring to rules that will predict the members of a particular set. The transformations relate to structural descriptions, and do not represent the actual process of generating sentences.

Chomsky went on to argue that the general principles that determine the grammatical rules in particular languages are to some degree common to all languages. The theory of universal principles of language is supported by considering the process of native language acquisition. Behaviourist theories,



based on stimulus, response, and reinforcement, are inadequate to describe the phenomenon of creativity, by which children at the age of around five or six are able to produce and understand an indefinitely large number of utterances that they have not previously encountered.

To account for this, it is proposed that certain universal principles about the structure of human language are precoded in the brain. These may consist of certain fundamental principles from which various languages activate certain options or parameters. Therefore the acquisition of a language may depend upon learning the structural peculiarities that differentiate that language from all other languages. The acquisition of language through the exposure to surface structure data is then based upon the intuitive discovery of the principles of deep structure. These principles are now seen as a series of tests that a construction must pass in order to be grammatical. One particular set of principles has been identified as part of a universal core that is potentially common to all languages. These relate to a principle known by linguists as government and binding. Effectively it is suggested that certain abstract properties of language are genetically encoded in the brain as part of an innate human language faculty that determines certain universal linguistic features. To suggest that every human language must conform to the binding principle is to make a strong claim, which amounts to a scientifically testable hypothesis.

In his later work, Chomsky went on to suggest that linguistics had wider application in the study of the human mind. The theory that certain fundamental cognitive principles are 'hard-wired' into the brain has important implications for the study of other areas of communication and comprehension. If there is a core of universal grammar in verbal language, there may be certain universal principles involved in other forms of communication that have been compared to language. These principles may or may not be linguistic.

The concept of competence goes some way towards explaining the way in which a visual literacy may be acquired. The suggestion that certain cognitive functions are effectively predetermined may help to explain how it is that certain visual constructions come to be interpreted. However, a grammatical approach can only go so far towards explaining how complex texts are understood.

If there is a medium-specific 'grammar' of moving pictures it would appear to consist of a small number of general principles of continuity that allow spatio-temporal relationships between shots to be constructed without ambiguity. However, such a 'grammar' only operates at a local level and does not go very far



towards explaining the organisation of complex connected sequences of shots and scenes. At this level, which might be compared to discourse, the construction of verbal texts and visual sequences have much more in common. The ability to comprehend moving picture sequences is here termed literacy in recognition of these similarities.

## Discourse

An adequate grammar of a language would provide a syntactic description that would be able to account for all and only those sentences or utterances that users accept as being correctly constructed. However, this would say very little about how such constructions come to be used. There is a very real difficulty in attempting to relate grammar to pragmatics.

The comprehension of language is not simply a matter of the grammar of individual sentences in isolation. No sentence or utterance stands alone. There is always some element of context. To understand the pragmatics of comprehension, it is necessary to move away from the language system, *langue*, or competence, towards language, *parole*, or performance, that is language as it is used in practice.

Traditionally, the longest structure that can be wholly described in grammatical terms is the sentence. Language organised above the level of the sentence constitutes discourse. The organisation of language above the level of the sentence is not simply syntactic but has to be understood in terms of its use.

## Texts

The word 'text' is derived from the Latin verb 'to weave'. The related word 'texture' originally referred to something woven, that is to say textile. This sense has been transferred to relate to the surface structural characteristics of an object. Texture is also the term given to the property of a particular stretch of discourse by which it exhibits coherence and consistency and so constitutes a text.

Verbal texts may be written and composed of one or more sentences, or spoken and composed of one or more utterances. These sentences or utterances typically exhibit various syntactic and semantic relationships. The study of these relationships has generally been the province of rhetoric and stylistics. More recently there have been attempts to formalise the relations involved in what has been called text grammar or text linguistics.



A text does not consist simply of a string of grammatically well formed sentences or utterances. The sentences or utterances in a text are in some way mutually related. A text is a stretch of language that seems appropriate linguistically, semantically, and pragmatically coherent in its context. The property of textuality which constitutes a text has been termed texture. In one of the standard texts on cohesion in texts, Halliday and Hasan (1976) observe 'The concept of *texture* is entirely appropriate to express the property of "being a text". A text has texture, and this is what distinguishes it from something that is not a text.'<sup>2</sup> This rather loose definition demonstrates the problem that it is not possible to define a text based on its formal structure alone. Unlike structure, texture is provided by semantic ties or relations of meaning that exist within the text.

Formal markers of texture are not in themselves necessary or sufficient characteristics of a text. There is a powerful expectation that a text will make sense in the context in which it appears. There is apparently a natural tendency to try and interpret discourse as a text. As Halliday and Hasan remark, it appears that 'we insist on interpreting any passage as text if there is the remotest possibility of doing so'.<sup>3</sup> Contiguity leads us to co-interpret, filling in any connections as required: 'it is the underlying semantic relation ... that actually has the cohesive power'.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that there is a structure of meaning underlying the formal structure of the text. This may be formally realised in the text or may be partially elided.

A famous example of a simple text is given by Sacks (1972), consisting of two sentences: 'The baby cried.' 'The mommy picked it up.'<sup>5</sup> This demonstrates how sentences in a text do not stand on their own. The interpretation of the second statement appears to be related referentially to that of the first. There is seen to be an underlying semantic connection that relates them, and encourages the two sentences to be interpreted together. As a result, in the reader of this text is inclined to understand 'it' to refer to 'the baby' and infer a narrative producing the interpretation that the mother picked up her baby because it was crying. This form of back reference is called an *anaphoric* relation and is one of a number of cohesive relationships that have been recognised. Although this can partly be explained by the lexical relationship of the words 'mommy' and 'baby' belonging to a semantic category consisting of members of a family, it does not explain the inference that in this case there is a familial and causal relationship between the two statements. The interpretation of the two statements as a text is partly due to



wider world knowledge about the relationship between mothers and babies and their respective behaviour.

A verbal text, being generally composed of a sequence of sentences or utterances, each with a syntactic surface and deep structure, may also be seen as having a textual surface structure and a deep structure. The textual surface structure is the sequential arrangement of the text at the level of presentation as it is perceived. The deep structure of the text may be considered to be the underlying level of the organisation of the meaning of the text.

To constitute a text some form of cohesion must be present. Cohesion is provided by linguistic relationships in the surface structure of the text. However, it is possible to invent a sequence that is highly cohesive but remains incoherent. Coherence concerns conceptual relationships at the underlying level of meaning. These relationships should be relevant to one another, allowing plausible inferences to be made about the underlying meaning. Coherence is not so much a property of the text itself as the outcome of cognitive processes activated by the text. In the two sentences of our example text, there is a relationship between the two at the level of a deep structure of meaning. In this case the causal relationship has been elided but remains implicit.

Concepts of cohesion and coherence are important in the context of the pragmatic concerns of communication. Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) propose five other standards of textuality related to the users of the text: intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality, and intertextuality. Intentionality and acceptability refer respectively to the attitude of the producer and receiver of the text. Informativity and situationality refer to the information presented in the text and its relevance to the situation in which it occurs. Intertextuality concerns the dependence of the text upon previously encountered texts. Together these are measures of relevance that relate to the degree to which a text is coherent.

The concept of relevance is necessarily a loose one, since it is dependent upon semantic context. Brown and Yule (1983) propose that the heuristic principles of analogy and local interpretation constrain the construction of a context.<sup>6</sup> The principle of analogy assumes that everything will tend to remain as before unless otherwise indicated. The principle of local interpretation instructs the interpreter to construct a context no larger than is necessary to arrive at an interpretation. This might suggest that the interpreter processes the possibilities in approximate order of probability until a suitable interpretation is found. Coherence and relevance are expected to constrain the construction and interpretation of



discourse presented as a text. These assumptions about texts are similar to those made in our general experience of life. It is only possible to make sense of experience if certain features can be expected to remain coherent and consistent. The comprehension of a text is a special case of the construction of meaning in the world in general. The conceptual organisation of the text creates a textual world, which may or may not agree with the experienced organisation of the empirical world.

The principle of relevance has been proposed as a fundamental explanatory principle for a theory of human communication.<sup>7</sup> In attempting to understand a text, be it spoken, written or visual, the perceiver is constantly required to attempt to attribute relevance to the material, by asking questions such as 'Who is involved here?', 'What is happening?', 'Why is it happening?', 'Where is it happening?', 'When is it happening?', and 'How does this relate to what has gone before?'. Such questions are central to the comprehension of any text and can only be partly answered by reference to grammar.

### **Schemata**

One approach to the way in which discourse is processed and interpreted comes from the fields of artificial intelligence and the computational modelling of language. Here the problem of context presents a considerable problem. When an attempt is made to model the interpretation of a text in a computer program, it quickly becomes apparent that simply parsing it for grammatical construction is insufficient.

Although the lexical units and syntactic structure of a linguistic message are used to arrive at an interpretation, the meaning of a linguistic message is not understood solely on the basis of the words and the structure of the sentences used to convey the message. The interpretation, not only of discourse, but virtually every aspect of our experience, is underpinned by general knowledge of the world. Although linguistics cannot be expected to specify this world knowledge, it is necessary to understand how this knowledge might be used in the interpretation of a text.

If the interpretation of elements in a text is dependent upon previous elements, clearly some form of memory storage is required. At its simplest this involves making the distinction between 'given' and 'new' information. In reading a text, the reader seeks to find the connections between sentences by dividing information into that which is given, or already referenced, and that which is new,



and attempts to integrate the new information to an existing knowledge base. The reader progressively organises the incoming information to construct an internal representation of the input. The input suggests certain possibilities, and these are then evaluated in terms of the organising processes.

Since interpretation depends on the application of relevant knowledge, this must be stored in an organised way. Theoretical models of how world knowledge is stored and retrieved have been advanced by attempts at the computational modelling of natural language comprehension driven by developments in artificial intelligence and cognitive psychology.

Modern psychology recognises two main processes of perception. One is a form of integral perception as proposed by Gestalt psychology by which forms are perceived in their entirety. The other is a form of scanning perception in which information is apprehended over time. So-called 'bottom-up' processes are directly data-driven. 'Top-down' processes operate on data indirectly and are inference-driven, using the perceiver's goals and expectations as principles of organisation. Both kinds of process are complementary and are generally in simultaneous operation.

Top-down inference driven processes require some form of memory storage. The comprehension of discourse involves retrieving relevant information from memory and relating it to the problem of interpretation. Schematic structures for memory models have been proposed that are quite different to the taxonomic relations of similarity and difference suggested by structural linguistics or to the abstract competence of an idealised language user proposed by transformational generative grammar. What has become known as schema theory deals with schematic forms of organisation of knowledge about objects, events and places, which take into account relations that could be described as spatial and or temporal.<sup>8</sup>

The concept of a schema is fundamental to modern cognitive psychology. A schema is an arrangement of previously acquired knowledge possessed by a perceiver that is used to predict and classify new sensory input. When meaning is attributed through the use of a schema it has a probabilistic quality, which incorporates assumptions and expectations, rather than an absolute quality defined by necessary and sufficient conditions. A schema therefore involves a form of 'fuzzy logic' that operates in a probabilistic fashion, allowing the perceiver to make inferences and fill in missing data that are not presented in the surface structure but can be inferred from its position in the schema.



Various alternative metaphors for schematic organisation have been proposed. In connection with the representation of knowledge involved in visual perception, Marvin Minsky (1975) proposed the concept of frames consisting of slots and fillers. Schank and Abelson (1977) developed the notion of scripts employing procedural knowledge of a standard sequence of events that describes a situation. Such metaphors for the representation of knowledge have been very influential in considerations of the comprehension of discourse. A problem common to every attempt to apply schematic world knowledge to discourse processing lies in restricting that extra-linguistic information only to the relevant details required in a particular context. It is not always clear which is the most appropriate schema to activate in the interpretation of any given input.

A spoken or written text does not in itself carry meaning. It provides cues for listeners or readers as to how the intended meaning should be retrieved or constructed from their own previously acquired knowledge. The interpretation and comprehension of texts requires certain connections and inferences to be made. Information that is not explicitly stated in the text must be supplied by the interpreter. Texts imply certain gaps or discontinuities that must be filled by supplying missing links. This may require additional processing, which can take a certain amount of time. These inferences should not be equated with any form of connection in the text itself. They are connections made in the process of attempting to interpret the text. The process is potentially open-ended, and in a complex text there is no predictable limit to the number of inferences that may be triggered.

In general, naturally occurring texts will show a minimal amount of formal cohesion, assume massive amounts of existing background knowledge, and normally require an indeterminate number of inferences to be made to reach an interpretation.

### **Narration**

A special category of text is that of narrative, which employs a particular form of organisation. Narrative provides a way of assembling and organising information about a textual world that involves relationships of space, time and causality. In narrative, the order of organisation is significant. The text 'The baby cried. The mommy picked it up.' is an example of a narrative, albeit a very simple one. The sequence 'The mommy picked it up. The baby cried.' seems strange. It has lost its



cohesion and coherence because the term 'it' is ambiguous. As a result of the alteration of sequence, the meaning has changed or become lost.

In literary studies, the application of linguistic methods to narrative texts is not new. Structuralist theorists such as Greimas and Todorov have compared the construction of narrative texts to that of sentences.<sup>9</sup> It is argued that the fundamental structures of language also inform the structures of narrative texts.

In *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), Jonathan Culler employs the concept of literary 'competence' to describe the set of conventions employed in reading literary texts: 'To read a text as literature is not to make one's mind a *tabula rasa* and approach it without preconceptions; one must bring to it an implicit understanding of the operations of literary discourse which tells one what to look for.'<sup>10</sup>

Two systems of organisation can be considered. First, there is the organisation of the depicted events, which might be taken to constitute a deep structure. Second, there is the organisation of these events as they are depicted, which might be taken to constitute a surface structure. The distinction between deep and surface structure in narrative texts is similar to the two levels of organisation identified by the Russian formalists as the distinction between the *fabula*, the original story material as pure chronological sequence, and the *syuzhet*, or the plot as arranged and edited by the shaping of the story-teller, that is as experienced in a text. French Structuralism employs a similar distinction, between *histoire* and *discours*, the story matter and its manner of delivery.

The narrative text is represented and perceived at the level of surface structure. This is organised in such a way that the deeper structure of meaning can be retrieved. In this way the text controls the access of the receiver to the deep structural meaning. The surface structure of the text imposes a particular order and coherence upon the presentation of information which implies patterns of activity in the receiver, who derives the deep structure through the controlled release of information.

As in other texts, the interpretation of narrative is dependent upon the expectation of some form of cohesion and coherence. A narrative text creates a textual world. This is what Metz termed the *diegesis*. There is an expectation that this textual world will exhibit certain consistencies. If by its own logic it appears to be internally inconsistent it may seem confusing or even incomprehensible.

A narrative may be either fictional or non-fictional, the distinction being not in the manner in which material is organised but in its relationship to empirical



reality. The ability to comprehend a narrative is distinct from a belief in its truth value. A narrative may be realistic without being real. A reader may understand a narrative without believing in it, just as an argument may be logically valid without the conclusion being true.

At the level of deep structure, the organisation of narrative is related to language in the sense that all abstract thought is mediated through language. It may be that narrative is essentially linguistic in nature because verbal sentences, texts, and narratives are all human constructions based on language. A narrative may be said to be effable, that is it can be at least approximately expressed in words as a sequence of sentences. A narrative that is told in pictures may be paraphrased in words. It is in this sense that a moving picture narrative can be considered in relation to language.

## Reception

Increasingly, interest in narration has shifted away from authors and narrators to the psychology of the reception by the reader or viewer and the pragmatics of comprehension. This cognitive approach attends more to deep structure and how this knowledge may be conceptually organised.

To be understood, a text must be read. This view reflects the critical concerns of contemporary reader-response criticism and reception theory. The traditional view of a literary work that it has a stable self-sufficient objective meaning derived from the intention of the author is rejected by reader-oriented accounts, according to which meaning emerges through the interaction of the reader with the text.

According to reception theory, which draws upon formalism, structuralism and phenomenology, it is suggested that the potentiality of the text is rendered concrete by the consciousness of the reader.<sup>11</sup> Meaning is produced by an evolving temporal process of the flow of the reader's experience of the text. This consists of expectations, anticipations, frustrations, questions, answers, surprise, excitement, disappointment and satisfaction. Reading is seen as an active process of meaning production. The meaning of an individual work is a set of potentialities which are manifested by the cumulative responses of successive readers over time.

The text is potential, rather than fully realised, and always contains a number of 'gaps' which the reader must fill in subjectively, by creative participation with what is given in the text. The process of the reader's consciousness renders the



potential concrete and constitutes the coherence of the work as a whole. The text contains and creates incentives and constraints in the possible interpretations, and so allows certain aberrant readings to be rejected as erroneous misreadings.

As Tony Wilson (1993) observes, there are some similarities between the viewer's understanding of the television text and the comprehension of everyday conversational discourse: 'The discourses of both television text and familiar speech are experienced as "gappy".'<sup>12</sup> The reader of a text and the participant in a conversation are both involved in bridging these gaps through active interpretation. Wilson cites the literary theorist Wolfgang Iser in a passage which might equally be applied to the popular television text: 'what is missing from the apparently trivial scenes, the gaps arising out of the dialogue—this is what stimulates the reader into filling the blanks with projections ... Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins.'<sup>13</sup>

## Visual texts

It may be seen that these more recent approaches to verbal texts may also have application in the consideration of other forms of communication. The concept of video literacy invites the consideration of the role of the viewer as a 'reader' of the visual text.<sup>14</sup> The viewer of the visual text may be seen as an active participant in the extraction of meaning from the structure and content of the moving picture medium. This is cued both by the syntactic construction and the textual organisation of the visual text.

If there is a grammar of motion picture construction, this may be related to principles of continuity which attempt to assist comprehension by minimising spatio-temporal ambiguities. This has been institutionalised in the continuity system, which is in effect a prescriptive grammar of motion picture construction. A competence in this code would involve an intuitive knowledge of the conventional rules which are used to structure motion picture sequences. It is not necessary to demonstrate that this is similar to a linguistic grammar, or that motion picture construction constitutes a language, in order to accept the validity of this system as a conventional code. Since the continuity system, or indeed any system, of structuring motion picture sequences is less than a century old, developed within a generation, and yet is intuitively understood by young children universally, it would appear to be based on general human cognitive capacities as well as cultural factors.



In many respects the system of motion picture construction differs from verbal language, in that it deals with skills of perceiving spatial relationships that simply do not occur in the abstract realm of language. The comprehension of moving images may involve completely separate cognitive activities to those involved in language processing. However, analogies with language can be made when sequences of images are used to tell, or support the telling of, stories. Narrative is a particularly linguistic mode. The way in which stories are told in pictures is related to the way in which stories are conceived in words.

Attempts have been made to apply the principles of transformational generative linguistics to the question of film language.<sup>15</sup> In motion picture sequences, as in sentences, it is possible to conceive of two levels of organisation, analogous to linguistic surface and deep structure. There is a surface structure of sequential images and an underlying deep structure of sequential events involving objects, actors and actions. This deep structure of meaning could be considered to consist of components analogous to those found in linguistic deep structure. Therefore it may be wrong to seek to find superficial similarities between the syntax of words and images, but this need not rule out common elements of deep structure.

This suggests that, just as in understanding a verbal utterance it may be transformed back into its underlying deep structure, something similar may occur with image sequences. In viewing an image sequence, the viewer may detransform the scene as presented back into its underlying event structure. That is to say it is the events, rather than the scene, which is understood. Comparisons might be drawn between deep structure and Eisenstein's original rather vague conception of 'inner speech'.

The comprehension of moving picture sequences seems to entail similar strategies to those involved in interpreting texts, using principles such as relevance to construct a sufficient context to allow co-interpretation of contiguous images. This presents an explanation for the operation of the phenomenon of the so-called 'Kuleshov effect', that fundamental principle of moving picture articulation identified by the Russian formalists, by which the viewer infers certain relationships between shots. In the case of visual sequences, cohesion is partly provided by a representation of spatio-temporal continuity between shots. The principles of continuity editing, namely the eyeline match, the match on action, and the maintenance of screen direction, function to contribute cohesion and consistency.



In moving picture sequences, the cuts between shots provide discontinuities that must be bridged. It is in this sense that a coherent sequence of shots constitutes a text. The bridging of discontinuities between shots requires an inferential process. Within a single scene, there will be an assumption of coherence and consistency that shots belong to the same time and space. This will tend to constrain inferences to the current context. That includes not just the previous shot, but all the preceding shots in that scene. At scene boundaries, however, the viewer is required to establish a new spatio-temporal orientation. This may be triggered by formal cues marking scene boundaries. The provision of a new context may require relatively elaborate high-level inferences to be made, invoking a range of schematic knowledge about people and places, characters and settings, as well as a sense of the narrative organisation.

In most moving picture sequences, the narration is supported by other linguistic elements, such as dialogue. These may carry the bulk of the burden of narration, in which case the pictures simply perform an illustrative function. Indeed this is often the case in television. That is not to say that the medium of moving pictures is incapable of narration in its own right.

Images, like words, derive their meaning from their referential relationship with empirical reality. Just as a knowledge of syntax is necessary but not sufficient for the understanding of a sentence, no grammar of film, television, or video can completely account for how a sequence of images is able to produce meaning.

Once again it is necessary to turn to film theory for an adequate account of the comprehension of moving picture narration in terms of cognition. Accounts of moving picture viewing as an essentially active process has been most thoroughly developed with respect to film by David Bordwell (1985; 1989)<sup>16</sup> and Edward Branigan (1984; 1992),<sup>17</sup> both of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This work is draws upon formalism, structuralism, modern linguistics, narrative theory, and contemporary cognitive psychology. The act of viewing is seen as an algorithmic search for meaning and the viewer is seen as possessing a package of cognitive processes. Although applied to film, this approach is equally applicable to television and video narration, and marks a decisive shift away from the established orthodoxies of screen theory, offering a way out of the impasse presented by the consideration of moving pictures as language.

David Bordwell, although preferring not to refer to the process as reading, suggests that the viewer of a narrative is interacting with the text, making



continuous assumptions, and constructing hypotheses using frames of reference derived from our knowledge of the real world and from previous viewing experience.

Cognitive processes help frame and fix perceptual hypotheses by reckoning in probabilities weighted to the situation and to prior knowledge. In both cognitive and perceptual processes, schematic mental codifications of prior experience guide the formation of hypotheses. This is an active anticipatory process. In forming a hypothesis, the viewer is effectively placing a bet that the assumptions made are correct. If they subsequently prove to be false, the viewer simply revises the situation and bets again. Through repeated practice, the probability of successful interpretation rises. Such a model is heavily informed by modern approaches to artificial intelligence and knowledge framing schemes. It suggests that the viewing of moving pictures is very much a learned, active practice.

The spectator's comprehension of the story is seen as the principal aim of narration. The hypothetical viewer acts according to the protocols of story comprehension. Insofar as empirical viewers make sense of the story, their activities coincide with this idealised process.

Viewing is considered to be an active, dynamic process of perception and cognition. The foundation of this approach is constructivist psychology, according to which perception is seen as an active, goal-oriented process. The bases of this are non-conscious inferences and hypothesis formation.

The structure of the moving picture narrative itself offers structures of information. The narrative is so constructed to encourage the spectator to execute story-constructing activities. 'In opposition to all passive notions of spectatorship, then, we should consider film viewing as a complicated, even skilled, activity. Watching a movie may seem as effortless as riding a bicycle, but both draw on a range of practised acts.'<sup>18</sup> Like riding a bicycle, the process of reading, once learned, becomes virtually automatic, but it nevertheless requires mastery of an enormous number of non-conscious skills.

The comparison between viewing and reading relies not so much on the activity of decoding a language as to the textual processes of attending to a narrative. It seems likely that the successful comprehension of a story is an acquired skill, however much it may operate with innate mental capacities. Comprehension of narrative requires assigning to it some coherence. At a local level, the viewer must grasp character relations, lines of dialogue, relations between shots and so on. More broadly, the viewer must test the narrative



information for consistency and coherence. The viewer finds unity by looking for relevance.

In comprehending a narrative, the spectator seeks to grasp the continuum as a set of events, occurring in defined settings and unified by principles of temporality and causality. To understand a film's story is to grasp what happens, and where, when and why it happens.

The viewer of a moving picture narrative takes as a central goal the comprehension of an intelligible story. To do this, the perceiver applies narrative schemata that define narrative events and unify them by principles of causality, time and space.

The most common template structure in narrative can be articulated as a 'canonical' story format, with a number of phases such as an introduction, explanation, complication, outcome and ending. Guided by something like the canonical story, the perceiver chunks the film into more or less structurally significant episodes.

Narratives are composed to reward, modify, frustrate, or defeat the perceiver's search for coherence. By progressing at a fixed rate, the viewer is put under pressure of time, in such a way that the narrative exploits the tentative, probabilistic nature of mental activity. When the viewer bets on a hypothesis, especially against the clock, confirmation can carry an emotional reward.

Formal systems both cue and constrain the viewer's construction of a story. In narrative theory, a fundamental distinction can be drawn between the story that is represented and the actual representation of it. This distinction may go back to Aristotle, but it was most fully theorised by the Russian formalists who made the distinction between the *syuzhet* and the *fabula*. These could be thought of as the surface structure and deep structure of narration.

The *syuzhet* is the actual arrangement of narrative events as they are represented. The *syuzhet* is a textual system. The architectonics of the *syuzhet* patterning is independent of the medium. The same patterns could be employed in a novel, a play or a film. Unlike enunciative theories, which force an analogy between linguistic categories and non-verbal phenomena, the concept of *syuzhet* avoids surface-phenomena distinctions, such as person or tense, and relies upon more subtle principles basic to all narrative representation.

The *fabula* is defined as the imaginary construct the viewer intuitively infers when presented with a series of narrative events through a process picking up narrative cues, applying schemata and framing and testing hypotheses. In



constructing the fabula, the perceiver defines some phenomena as events while progressively and retrospectively constructing causal or spatial or temporal relations among them.

The fabula is a construct of the spectator. It is not the pro-filmic event before the camera and is never materially present on the screen or soundtrack. In principle, viewers will agree about either what the story is or what factors obscure or render ambiguous adequate construction of the story.

There are three principles that relate the syuzhet to the fabula: narrative logic, time, and space. Schematising and hypothesising activities are guided by the syuzhet's cues about causality, time and space which cue and channel the spectator's construction of the fabula.

Rarely does the viewer receive ideal maximum access to the fabula. Knowledge of the fabula is gained through the syuzhet, which presents information selectively. Selection creates gaps. Combination creates composition. Gaps are among the clearest cues for the viewer to act upon, since they evoke the entire process of schemata formation and hypothesis testing. Gaps can be temporary or permanent, plugged sooner or later, or not at all. The syuzhet can also flaunt or suppress the gaps in the fabula. By delaying the revelation of some information, the syuzhet arouses anticipation, curiosity, suspense and surprise.

The narration can be more or less knowledgeable about the fabula it represents. It can vary in the range and depth of the fabula information it presents and the self-consciousness with which it narrates.

The process of gap-filling creates an impression of coherence and continuity. Classical narration offers a particular coherence as the text rarely leaves permanent gaps. Generally, everything presented either creates, develops, confirms or disconfirms a hypothesis. The narration is fundamentally reliable.

Narration is irreversible, in that if an assumption breaks down, it is not possible to go back and undo a step. Instead, an alternative revised hypothesis must be produced. This is all the more significant in a temporal medium such as moving pictures. In watching a film, the spectator submits to a programmed temporal form of specific order and duration. The time needed to comprehend a new shot is dependent upon context and expectation. By forcing the spectator to follow the text at a certain rate, the narration governs what inferences are made. Cognitive psychologists have suggested that the mind's induction operations can be limited by the speed at which the environment demands decisions. The viewer's anticipatory schemata are ready to pick up certain kinds of data, and the



rate at which the information is presented can affect how hypotheses are developed.

Spatial relationships are constructed dynamically, based substantially on the visual information that is presented. Temporal relations are derived by inference, since there is nothing intrinsic to the image which signifies its temporal context. There is apparently no visual equivalent of tense. Within the scene, the viewer assumes temporal continuity unless otherwise signalled. The procedures of continuity cutting, such as the eyeline match and the match on action, together with soundtrack continuity, operate to signal temporal continuity.

The constructivist approach treats the perceiver as constantly active, constantly applying schemata to test for relevance, consistency, and coherence. New perceptual data are slotted into place, revising earlier inferences as required in order to make sense of the material. Perception is seen as a dynamic, temporal, probabilistic process. Armed with hypotheses about how to make sense of what is presented, the spectator tests them over time, betting on the most probable interpretation of sensory data, in terms of the world of objects.

In a sequence of shots, the viewer approaches each shot already tuned or prepared to test logical, spatial or temporal schemata against what the shot represents. Any shot leads the viewer to infer a limited set of more or less probable outcomes. The viewer is primed to expect a very narrow range of alternatives. The viewer can therefore confirm or refute an immediate hypothesis comparatively quickly.

A change of shot will show another view either of the same space, or a view of a different space. Generally there is also a high probability that an establishing shot will be followed by a cut-in to a close shot of the same scene. There is a high probability that certain shots will be followed by reverse angle shots. There is a lower probability of a point of view shot following. Cutting within a scene will generally be based around eyeline matches. The motivation of the cut will generate anticipations about what will follow. In classic continuity cutting, the possibilities are comparatively restricted. By using conventional schemata to produce and test hypotheses about a string of shots, the viewer often knows each shot's salient spatial information even before it appears. The viewer checks the shot against expectations and adjusts hypotheses accordingly. Alternative hypotheses are formulated hierarchically according to probability, from the most to the least likely. The viewer participates in a process of hypothesis formation, posing and answering questions about space. Each shot can be fitted into a



cognitive map of the locale which represents a selective codification of narratively and spatially salient elements. The classical continuity system ensures the presentation of coherent spatial information, which allows the viewer to build a schematic cognitive map of the fictional space. The system has become codified to a degree that makes its operation appear transparent. The screen may appear to be a window on the world of the narration, but the spectator meets the moving image half-way to complete the illusion.

When presented with a change of shot, the viewer must form a hypothesis about the relationship of this new shot to other shots that have gone before. A number of questions present themselves, which may be summarised as 'Who, what, where, when and why and how?'. The reader must interrogate the text on the basis of already given information in an attempt to attribute relevance to new information and anticipate the presentation of further information.

If figures are present in the shot an attempt is made to identify them and associate them with previously encountered characters. The same may be said for objects and places. In the first instance, it may be assumed that the same general space is presented from another viewpoint. If the viewpoint cannot be ascribed to the same space as the previous shot, another space may be assumed. An attempt can then be made to associate this space with previously encountered spaces.

Inferences about spatial relationships can also lead to the formation of hypotheses about temporal relationships. If characters are seen in separate spaces in consecutive shots, a temporal elision may be assumed, since a person cannot be in two places at once. Otherwise a change of space may indicate a concurrent or consecutive time or a degree of temporal progression. If the characters or the space in the new shot are familiar from a previous occasion, a hypothesis about the temporal relationship may be made from the context of the action depicted and the degree of temporal elision may be estimated. Such a hypothesis may also suggest the time-frame in which previous events have taken place. For instance, an alternation between spaces with little apparent temporal elision may suggest simultaneous action.

Conceived in this way, video literacy effectively involves a set of operations the viewer is expected to perform. The narration continually cues the viewer to form conjectures. The spectator is continually attempting to attribute relevance to material as it is presented. This implies that the viewer is constantly seeking to establish relationships between each shot and its predecessor. This is a provisional process of forming hypotheses that are subject to revision and may be continually



refined 'on-the-fly' as the viewer progresses through the text. Such an account acknowledges the activity of the viewer in making a meaning out of the text.

In *Making Meaning: Inference and rhetoric in the interpretation of cinema* (1989)<sup>19</sup> David Bordwell concentrates on interpretation rather than comprehension. Bordwell still reserves the term 'reading' for literary texts, but he continues to use the term 'text' for the object of interpretation. He observes: 'Comprehending and interpreting a literary text, a painting, a play, or a film constitutes an activity in which the perceiver plays a central role. The text is inert until a reader or listener or spectator does something to and with it.'<sup>20</sup> Comprehension and interpretation involve the construction of meaning out of textual cues: 'The perceiver is not a passive receiver of data but an active mobilizer of structures and processes'.<sup>21</sup> These processes range from the mandatory and very fast activity of perceiving apparent motion, through to the construction of links between shots and scenes and the still more open process of ascribing meanings to these sequences. Meaning exists at different levels. At its most basic it requires constructing the diegetic spatio-temporal world of the narrative and constructing an ongoing story or fabula within it. Further it involves assigning a purpose or explicit meaning to the narrative. More abstractly it deals with implicit meanings such as themes, problems, issues or questions. Finally there are those meanings which are repressed by the text.

The processes of perception are not rule-based in the strict sense, but probabilistic, arranged in default hierarchies in which expectations hold good only if not disconfirmed by data. As with any inductive system, the perceiver is predisposed towards data that confirm rather than disconfirm the initial hypotheses.<sup>22</sup> The problem-solver is attuned to information that confirms the hypothesis rather than challenges it.

Bordwell employs a cognitive approach according to which human induction is seen as achieving its goals by using organised, selective and simplified bodies of knowledge, that is schematic constructs such as frames, scripts or models. These schemata are retrieved, applied, adjusted and rejected in the course of all perception and cognition.

What is often overlooked in concentrating on the making of meaning, is the production of pleasure by this inductive process:

In watching an image, we pay attention, make inferences, and perform both voluntary and involuntary perceptual activities that need analyzing and explaining. In following a narrative, we make assumptions and draw on schemata and routines in order to



arrive at conclusions about the world of the story. Somehow all this may come out as pleasure, but we scarcely know how.

(Bordwell 1989: 269-270)

In his *Point of View in the Cinema* (1984), Edward Branigan sees point of view as the key to comprehension. He argues that the intelligibility of the text depends upon the capacity of the spectator to form spatial hypotheses about the point from which a scene is viewed. This may be indeterminate with respect to time, but may be determined with reasonable accuracy with respect to space. The temporal cues are constructed through reference to the narrative text. The spatial cues are contained within the image, since a picture must always be taken from somewhere.

Branigan defines the camera as a model employed by the reader of the visual text, from which to construct hypotheses about spatial relationships. The camera is a label applied to the origin of an image to account for the projection of space. This viewpoint provides the intelligibility of the image. The camera is defined not as a real photographic instrument, but as a mental construct of the viewer as a reading hypothesis which seeks to make the spaces of the film intelligible and coherent. Images can cue such hypotheses without a photographic camera ever having occupied such a position. Animators can create the effect of camera effects by manipulating these spatial cues. In computer animation, the camera is simply an algorithmic construction. All that is needed for a viewer to construct a camera schema are some basic assumptions about how photographic images are produced. One requirement of visual literacy therefore involves the ability to abstract from a pictorial display a single property of camera viewpoint.

It is suggested that there is a hierarchy of levels of narration and that the narration can fluctuate between different levels of subjectivity. Branigan concentrates on a particular cinematic construction, the point of view structure. This marks a temporary move to a more subjective level of narration. The logic of the point of view structure is a matter of convention. The point of view shot cannot be recognised until its elements are learned. Like other aspects of the continuity system, the point of view structure pretends to the invisibility of the camera. In reality, the camera and the character cannot occupy the same space at the same time.

Competence implies the ability to generate new spatial configurations from new angles. That is, a viewer, given a sequence of spatial fragments, is able to image a complete coherent space. This hypothetical space is analogous to the deep structure of transformational generative grammar. It is a record of the inferences



made by a viewer about the underlying connections and structure of the shots within a scene. In the classical text, these connections can be arrived at systematically and predictably.<sup>23</sup>

In *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (1992) Branigan develops a model of narrative perception based on principles of cognitive psychology. Narrative is seen as one of the fundamental ways in which understanding of the world may be organised. Narrative is a perceptual activity that organises our spatial, temporal and causal perception in way that represents and explains experience.

Unlike analyses that attempt a purely formal approach to narrative, Branigan presents a model that examines the interaction of the perceiver with the text. Narrative is seen as a cognitive activity.

I believe that by studying comprehension as a constructive activity (encompassing much more than the mere retrieval of images or words stored in the order received), one bypasses the now vexed film-theoretical question of whether film is like a 'language'. Indeed, one almost bypasses the question of whether film is like a 'communication'. There is, in fact, good reason to believe that both film and natural language are special subsets of more general cognitive enterprises. One of these general enterprises is our ability to construct a narrative out of experience; that is to say, our ability to use a narrative schema to model a version of the world. In this view, both film narrative and written narrative express temporal relationships because both are mental constructions, not because film reduces to language.

(Branigan 1992: 17)

Viewing involves attempting to match information to various schemata in order to create connections and fill in data that is not explicitly presented in the text. Thus the viewer works backward and forward through the text in constructing large-scale hierarchical patterns that represent a particular narrative as an abstract knowledge structure based on an underlying general schema.

The frequently invoked metaphor of narration as a chain of causal connections is perhaps inappropriate. Causal connections are rarely made at such a local level. A schema driven model of narrative perception allows for connections to be made at a more general level, grouping elements according to principles and criteria that are not determined solely by local conditions but in response to wider contexts.

Through the application of top-down processes, the cognitive activity of the viewer is not restricted to the particular moment being viewed. The act of viewing involves searching back through the acquired knowledge structure to experiment with a variety of syntactical, semantic and referential hypotheses. Through this process the viewer creates spatial, temporal and causal connections that do not derive directly from screen data.



Spatial and temporal hypotheses are used to support conjectures about causation while hypotheses about causality can be used to establish spatial and temporal relationships. Causes and effects can be seen as explanatory labels for certain sequences of actions according to a particular schematic interpretation.

Four important principles of causal reasoning are identified: a cause must precede an effect, an effect cannot work backward in time to create a cause, certain patterns of repetition among events make a causal connection more likely, and a prior event that is temporally or spatially more proximate to the outcome than others is more likely to be the cause of the outcome.

Branigan argues that in seeking equivalences in surface structure by looking for a film language, there is the danger of ignoring cognitive operations that take place at the level of deep structure.

Distinctions based on grammatical surface features like pronouns neglect top-down processing, and at best furnish only rough approximations for the spatial, temporal, and causal networks that define our procedural knowledge of an event. How pictures acquire a narrative significance cannot be reduced to how surface features and techniques are delineated, or marked by bottom-up perceptual processing, but instead must be analysed in terms of the top-down cognitive processes which drive us to offer descriptions and apply (macro) propositions to what is seen and heard and read. One need not worry about whether a shot, or something else in a film, can be equated with a 'word', for this equation and similar ones are never reached: neither a shot nor a word is determinate in an analysis of either a film or a sentence.

(Branigan 1992: 169)

Although narrative can be conveyed by many media, the particular materials and techniques of a given medium partly determine how to apply the skills of spatial, temporal and causal construction. A text can be seen as a set of cues or instructions relating to procedures to be employed by the viewer in constructing a set of interrelationships. In a moving picture sequence, the discontinuities between shots form strong cues for the viewer to proceed to generate hypotheses about spatial, temporal and causal relationships. Spatial and narrative schemata are therefore employed to fill-in deep structural relationships that are missing from the surface structure.

Moving picture media employ a collection of techniques for representing time, space and causality. These are used as 'instructions' relating to procedures and rules used by the spectator to generate hypotheses. Video literacy can be seen as a viewing competence in the application of procedures of comprehension in response to these particular cues.



## Summary

Although the metaphor of literacy has proved to be a powerful one, the real limitation of analogies with language is that they do not appear to elucidate how comprehension is achieved. While there may be a grammar of constructing visual sequences in such a way that they can be clearly understood, no grammar can completely account for the processes of comprehension.

There may be a grammar of construction, the objective of which is to render spatio-temporal relationships in an unambiguous manner. This may be independent of the procedures of comprehension that are employed in the course of viewing by which spatio-temporal relationships are reconstructed.

Grammar can only account for the organisation of features on a very local level. The comprehension of a text is a more diffuse process, which is related to the organisation of discourse. One particularly pertinent model for the organisation of discourse is that of narrative. Narrative construction is concerned with the organisation of spatial, temporal, and causal connections. Modern cognitive psychology has provided useful models that can be applied to a description of the mental operations that may be involved in comprehending a text. Comprehension is seen as a dynamic, schema-driven process of hypothesis formation and testing. Although our understanding of how this may take place is currently extremely limited, the importance of this approach is in its emphasis of viewing as an active process.

The information, structural, semiotic theories of codes are compatible with cognitive theories of schematic knowledge structures. In terms of the communication model the video text is a coded message, employing many different codes functioning at different levels.

The application of reception theory looks at the viewer's interaction with the television text as a process of reading through which meaning emerges. The act of viewing, seen as a process of reading, is dependent upon an understanding of the codes and conventions previously assimilated by the competent viewer or reader that make possible and at the same time constrain the creative activity of interpreting the text.

In order to interpret the message the receiver of the text is constantly proposing hypotheses by which it can be decoded. The intuitive acquired knowledge base of codes employed in this process constitutes the receiver's competence in comprehension.



Both bottom-up data-driven processes and top-down inferential processes of perception are involved. Spatial relationships may be constructed using similar perceptual processes to those employed subconsciously in negotiating the everyday environment. Temporal relationships may require higher-order processes of inference.

At the level of narrative organisation the comprehension of a visual text shares certain similarities with the comprehension of a verbal text. It is this similarity of narrative organisation that allows the analogy with verbal literacy.

The video text is thus seen as a set of cues for procedures the viewer is intended to perform. Therefore, in studying texts it is not enough simply to describe their content, one must also be attentive to the formal processes by which they produce meaning.

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## *Chapter 5*

# **Television Texture**

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From the perspective of video literacy, the output of television can be seen as a text. To treat television as a text is not to look for a specific language of television, but to observe how it functions as coherent discourse. The television text is unlike other texts. It has its own aesthetic. While the classic feature film can be considered as being comparable to a literary text, the television text resists such comparisons. There is a tendency in television towards serial forms which are characterised by segmentation and fragmentation. This is particularly evident in one of the most characteristic of television genres, the continuing drama serial or soap opera. The textual strategies of the continuing story are very different to those of the classical closed narrative. The construction is highly conventional, and yet creates a fictional representation that can appear to be convincingly realistic.

### **Television as text**

Although texts are usually considered to be written or spoken verbal structures, the discourse of television can be approached as a text. Rather than looking for a linguistic language of moving pictures, treating television as a text involves examining the codes and conventions which structure its linear organisation as a flow of communication. The television text should be understood to refer not just to the verbal language component, such as dialogue, but to the structural organisation of the total discourse. This discourse is exceedingly complex, organised according to an indefinite number of codes and conventions operating at many different levels. Although the text includes non-visual elements, the specificity of moving picture media lies in the visual domain. The structural organisation of images constitutes a particular level of articulation. A television drama differs from a radio drama in many ways, the most obvious of which is that it is accompanied by pictures, and to a greater or lesser extent it is told through a sequence of images.



The primary discrete unit of construction is that of the shot. The organisation of shots bears certain similarities with the organisation of language in a verbal text. The linear, sequential structure controls the interaction of the perceiver with the text. The visual text demonstrates cohesion and coherence insofar as shots appear to fit together in a visual text in the way that sentences or utterances fit together in a verbal text.

To compare the visual text to a verbal text is not to return to the simple suggestion that shots are equivalent to words or scenes to sentences. Rather it is to make the claim that these units may function in a similar manner at their respective levels of discourse, according to the relevant codes and conventions of that domain. Ultimately this similarity derives from the use of images to communicate messages that might otherwise be described in verbal language. Images may serve many functions, but to communicate a meaning in pictures is to communicate a meaning that can be at least approximately expressed in words.

Images can function as illustrations to linguistic discourse, but they can also function structurally to support narration. Sequences of shots allow the compression and manipulation of the representation of spatial and temporal relationships. This provides the basis for the articulation of narrative.

The techniques for using moving pictures to support narration were first developed for the cinema. A number of conventions emerged to ensure the consistent and coherent representation of space and time which are the woof and the warp from which the narrative text is woven. The conventions of classic cinematic construction function to ensure that the stitching should not show. As a result, the process of narration appears to be relatively transparent.

Television has adopted, adapted and assimilated many cinematic techniques, but it has gone on to develop many other methods of organising visual sequences. Much of our awareness about the organisation of moving pictures is based on the conventions of classic cinema, but for a number of reasons this is not directly applicable to television.

## Cinema and television texts

Film theory has provided much of our understanding about the nature of the moving image. With its longer history and higher cultural status, film is much better theorised than television, which is still seen as a poor relation. Although superficially similar as a screen medium employing moving pictures, television has many important differences to the cinema.

The study of television has suffered considerably from the ready assumption that the small screen is but a pale imitation of the cinematic experience. Theorists have tended to seize on the most obvious differences in the relative size and quality of the image. The perceived inadequacy of the television picture has been incorporated into the critical heritage of television theory. It is suggested that the small dimensions of the television image compared to that of the cinema imply a low attention span, and that as a result television has developed formal compensation strategies by which to maximise its impact.

As has been argued, it is a fallacy to found a theory of television upon the quality of the image alone. The relationship of the viewer to the image is not simply one that is specified by screen size. It is important to recognise not only the technical features of the medium, but also its predominant use as a system of domestic distribution. The particular features of television are as much imposed by that economic ecology as by any technical constraints of television as a system of representation.

Cinema and television can be compared respectively to the novel and the newspaper. Both employ narrative and are generally published commercially, but structurally they function differently. A newspaper is not generally judged by the narrative norms of a novel, but this has little to do with their relative qualities of reproduction or the paper upon which they are printed. There are differences in their nature as texts, their communicative function, their system of distribution, and their mode of consumption.

The cinematic text is comparable to the novel. The underlying normative assumptions of film theory are based not upon the quality of the image but on the dominant fictional form the institution of cinema has produced. The feature film is a discrete creative work, generally of fiction, and as such may be safely subjected to strategies drawn from traditional literary criticism, with their emphasis upon coherence and closure. It is thus amenable to a concept of high culture that attempts to establish critical appreciation on canonical principles. The Hollywood



movie, and a limited canon of classics at that, is the critical yardstick by which cinema, and hence motion pictures, have come to be judged. Film theory has even attempted to accommodate the intentionality of a single author through the notion of the director as 'auteur', and tends to consider not the theatrical audience but the single spectator, an isolated idealised individual, comparable to the solitary silent reader of the written text.

The cinema is a mass medium, but it is generally critically considered as an art. The deficiency of the bulk of film theory, as it attempts to elevate cinema into an art form and apply principles of traditional literary criticism, is the frequent failure to accept that the pre-eminently successful cinema form, the Hollywood movie, has always been based upon the commercial entertainment industry. There is little emphasis in film theory on popular films that actually appeal to the public.

The television text is more like that of the newspaper, delivered daily to the home. It is a mongrel medium of uncertain pedigree, accommodating a mixture of genres. The forms of television are resistant to conventional critical practice. In television, the status of the individual work, let alone the existence of an author is highly ambiguous. The study of television has been characterised by an endeavour to establish the identity and cultural legitimacy of the medium, echoing the struggle for academic credibility previously undergone by film theory.

Suddenly faced with the enormous social impact of television, the urgent concerted effort was to research the influences and effects of the medium, rather than its forms and aesthetics. The television viewer is invariably thought of as the lowest common denominator member of a monolithic mass audience, a vulnerable individual who requires protection from the medium.

The crux of the aesthetic difference between the cinema and television as mass media lies neither in the relationship of the spectator to the image, nor the comparative resolution or dimensions of the respective screens, but in the mode of distribution that establishes the relationship between the audience and the text.

The fundamental differences between film and television as media are rooted in their respective technologies and systems of distribution. Film is a record and replay medium. A film can be shown many times. Television is a transmission medium. It is essentially ephemeral. Video combines these qualities and blurs the boundaries. The introduction of new delivery technologies will also result in further changes in moving image media. However, the historical differences between film and television have had a profound effect on the formal development of programming.



The film text is a printed artefact and like a book is necessarily complete when it is exhibited. The images and sounds of cinema present themselves as recorded phenomena. The feature film narrates events that are already completed before the film begins. Although the viewer may be eager to know how the narration will develop and conclude, there is no question that the conclusion is not predetermined. The mode of narration is historic. For all they may appear to be in the present, the events presented must have taken place in the past. This is taken for granted, because of our cultural familiarity with printed literary narration.

The television text is by contrast not necessarily complete when it is exhibited. The images and sounds of television, even if pre-recorded, are often presented as a live transmission. Broadcasting has the unique advantage that it can narrate events as they are actually happening, the outcome of which is indeterminate.

This indeterminacy can have a profound psychological effect on the sense of viewer involvement. For instance, in the case of the live presentation of a football match, the final result is indeterminate. If the presentation is pre-recorded, the outcome is determined. If the viewer knows the final score before watching, the viewing experience can be very different. If the recording of the football match is edited to include only the highlights, it becomes a narrative record.

A broadcast quality video recording may be technically indistinguishable from the original signal. There is nothing intrinsic in the nature of video recording that reveals it to be a recording. The status of the narration is potentially ambiguous. However, the structure of the text may provide indications. The elision of time is evidence that the material is recorded. Such indications may be either foregrounded or suppressed, but nevertheless they provide clues to the status of the text.

Broadcasting has adopted particular forms of narration that exploit the possibilities of indeterminacy. One principle is the resistance to narrative closure. While a text remains unfinished, it remains suspended in the present. Once it is completed, it is consigned to the past. One way of ensuring that a text is incomplete is to subject it to continual revision, replicating the same basic structure with innumerable variations.

An example of such a text is the news. There can be no definitive text of the news because it is always provisional, liable to subsequent revision. The text of old news may be available, but its interest is then only historic. The status of the news text is relative to the speed at which it can be updated. The cinema first developed the newsreel as a form of presentation, but this was eventually made



redundant by television. News is now available with increasing frequency. Constantly updated videotext services are available. In the future, the video text itself may be available in a constantly updated form.

The weekly film serial was developed by the cinema, but was rendered obsolete as regular audience attendances dropped away. The function was assumed by television, which relied on reaching a regular audience. The television serial is simply a natural development of the nature of broadcast distribution. A daily or twice-weekly serial simply could not be economically sustained by the pattern of cinema attendance.

The cinema viewer is a customer paying for a theatrical social occasion. In the past, to recover the cost of production, a film had to be shown many times to reach a theatrical audience. The economics of this process produced certain patterns of release and distribution to maximise the return on investment. The ultimate justification was the box office return.

Television established a different system of distribution. Originally the technology of television required that the audience was reached in a single transmission. This produced a different mode of distribution and consumption. In commercial broadcasting supported by advertising, the ultimate justification is in the audience ratings a programme returns. In a mixed market, where public service broadcasting is in direct competition for audience share, there is also an incentive to maximise the audience. Television programming must be paid for, either indirectly through the consumption of goods and services which are advertised, directly through a licence fee tax, or through premium rate subscription services. Pay per view systems have not yet been widely adopted, although this may change with the introduction of new technologies. For the moment, there is generally no price penalty in consuming any amount of television. The television viewer can watch for nothing as a domestic diversion. This significantly affects attitudes towards television programming.

Broadcast television therefore has an inherent insecurity about its audience. Since they have not paid to see a particular performance, no assumption can be made that they are watching or will continue to watch. Generally, a programme is either watched, on transmission or repeat, or missed for ever. It is not simply that television executives have a low impression of the intellectual capacities of viewers, although this may be the case, and in some cases it may be valid, it is rather that television cannot assume that the audience will always be watching.



The simple division between cinema and television forms is becoming increasingly indistinct in an evolving moving picture environment. The domestic video recorder, with its ability to time-shift transmission or later viewing, has fundamentally changed the potential status of the television text. Remarkably, this has as yet had little effect on the forms and formats of broadcast television. The predominant assumption remains that the audience is watching a live transmission.

Video cassette distribution and subscription television are changing the financial structures of the industry. The television audience will inevitably fragment as more channels become available through new forms of distribution, particularly as digital compression technologies greatly increase the number of channels that can be delivered. Nevertheless, the system of distribution determines the mode of consumption of the television text, and the system of scheduling in part determines the dominance of certain genres of programming.

The television programme is part of a complex intertextual web that is inseparable from the television schedule. The television text is the schedule, the pattern of distribution, rather than the individual programme, a feature addressed in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974) by Raymond Williams, who is credited with coining one of the few terms indigenous to television theory, in the notion of flow: 'In all developed broadcasting systems the characteristic organisation, and therefore the characteristic experience, is one of sequence or flow. This phenomenon, or planned flow, is then perhaps the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form.'<sup>1</sup>

The concept of flow is expanded upon by John Ellis in *Visible Fictions: Cinema, television, video* (1982)<sup>2</sup> which represents a notable attempt to challenge the frequent assumption that cinema and television can be considered as interchangeable media. The cinema and broadcast television are discussed in the context of their consumption as commodities. Apart from questions of technology, Ellis recognises their difference as distinct aesthetic and commodity forms, as exemplified in the single feature film in cinema and the series and serial in television. As a result, the model of classic cinema narration is considered to be inapplicable to television where it is suggested that both fictional and non-fictional narrative modes tend toward similar sequential serial forms. Ellis argues that the complexity of broadcast television as a particular commodity form bears very little relation to the single text.



The argument is founded on broad generalisations that are reductive but nonetheless instructive. Four main areas in which the cinema and broadcast television differ are highlighted.<sup>3</sup>

First, the two media are consumed under different conditions. Cinema is experienced as public event and the mode is that of the individual text, the single film performance. Television is experienced in domestic conditions on a casual basis and the text is characteristically offered in series or serial form.

Second, the viewing conditions produce different levels of attention. Cinema offers a large high definition image and the spectator is engaged in an activity of intense and relatively sustained attention. Television offers a small low definition image and sound is crucial in holding the spectator's attention, which is characterised by the glance rather than the gaze.

Third, as a consequence of these different forms of attention, different narrative forms have developed. Cinema characteristically adopts an enclosed narrative with events and characters integrated in the logical progression of narration organised around a particular problem or disruption that is resolved by the conclusion. Television is more concerned with the open-ended forms of the series and the serial, composed of episodes that are variations of the same narrative problem, divided into a series of relatively self-contained segments.

Finally, each medium proposes a different attitude to its spectators. Cinema proposes an expectant spectator whose expectations become the point of intelligibility of the film. Television is seen more as a domestic diversion for the casual viewer.

Ellis argues that broadcast television has developed distinctive aesthetic forms in response to the circumstances of its consumption. This has less to do with the technology of television than with scheduled broadcast distribution. He argues that instead of the single coherent text that is characteristic of classic cinema, television typically offers a series of relatively discrete segments which are organised into sequences. Ellis adds that this model of the television text appears to apply to fiction and non-fiction alike and concludes: 'There is no real difference in narrational form between news and soap opera. The distinction is at another level: that of source material.'<sup>4</sup>

The organisation of material as a series of segments, coherent in themselves, but with no necessary connection between them, differs markedly from the narrative patterns of classic cinema. The quintessence of televisual textual structure as a segmental commodity is the commercial, a discrete unit with no



particular connection to other commercials except that they belong to a similar class of segments. This principle of segmentation appears to extend across virtually all television output, including channels that do not carry commercials. This segmentation reflects the structure of the television schedule itself, characterised as a succession of segments.

Segmentation is a principle of both factual and fictional television narration. In news bulletins the viewer is presented with a succession of stories, each of which is coherent in itself, but relying partly for its meaning on its position relative to other similar elements. In fictional narratives, there is a similar pattern, with relatively discrete scenes, each coherent in itself, although its characteristic effect depends upon its placing in relation to other discrete segments. This principle of juxtaposition can create an impression of objectivity. Neither the news text nor the typical television drama tend to foreground the act of their creation. The lack of integration disguises the degree of construction. Meaning is produced through the integration of elements in the mind of the viewer.

Many fictional segments are relatively self-contained, often consisting of conversations between two or three characters, featuring an incident or encounter that produces a particular mood or meaning. There is a marked break between segments and the discontinuity tends to outweigh the sense of continuity and consequence. Each segment is complete, self-contained and internally coherent and as a result the movement from segment to segment is more a matter of succession rather than consequence. The temporal unity of the segment is emphasised by the lack of cinematic elision of unimportant time, partly a result of multi-camera recording techniques.

Television places less emphasis on the causal narrative chain of events than cinema. A more extensive mode operates which is resistant to narrative closure. The drama series and serial are a form of continuity-with-difference that television has perfected, providing a means of generating many segments from the same basic thematic material. While repeat transmissions are often resented by the audience, the opportunity to see similar situations repeatedly performed is apparently appreciated. The series format provides the form upon which an indefinite number of variations can be played. The cinema film text typically moves from a stable state, through some form of disruption, with the eventual restoration of order and a return to a stable state. By contrast, the television text continually frustrates the possibility of closure. The basic problematic of the



television series is itself a stable state. As a result the television series tends to present itself as a form of continuous update.

The coherence of the cinema text is emphasised by the conventions of camerawork. For the cinema, one explanation for the impression of internal coherence presented by the feature film has been advanced through an appeal to psychoanalytic theories of voyeurism. One of the attractions of this model has been the comparison of the circumstances of the cinema audience, seated in the dark, to a dreamlike state in which the spectator in some way 'hallucinates' the meaning of the film through a process of identification with the camera viewpoint. Clearly this requires substantial modification if it is to be applied to television, owing to differences in the relationship of the spectator to the screen, and rooted in the technology and production practice of the medium itself.

If the attention of the audience is indeed characterised by glance rather than gaze and the flow of the text is fragmented and interrupted, the sense of identification is likely to be weaker.<sup>5</sup> The practical procedures of multi-camera production produce an entirely different screen space, through the different handling of the point-of-view and reverse-shot structures.

Differences in single and multi-camera shooting practice construct an entirely different screen space. In the cinema, the camera and lighting are typically re-positioned for each set-up to provide the optimum viewpoint and the procedures of continuity cutting operate a principle of 'suture' by which the spectator is stitched into the scene and positioned as an ideal voyeur. In the case of multi-camera shooting as applied in television production, lighting and camera placement are more restricted and as a result the viewer cannot always be placed in an ideal position. Point of view and reverse shot structures therefore function differently and do not produce the same subjective identification with a character's perceptual viewpoint.

However, multi-camera production compensates by representing a sense of real-time. Coherence is preserved within scenes by a stronger continuity of time and space. The two styles produce a different aesthetic, neither of which is inherently more proper. The dissection of an event made possible by single camera production may produce a more cinematic effect, while multi-camera production may suggest a stronger sense of actuality.

It should not be assumed that all television, or even all television fiction, relies exclusively on multi-camera production. Increasingly, new technology means that



single camera production is being employed. Single and multi-camera techniques are often combined within a programme.

A further difficulty for the application of a psychoanalytic account is the use by television non-fiction forms of the rhetorical mode of direct address. This distinct mode of viewer engagement, inherited largely from radio, is somewhat incompatible with theories of voyeuristic spectatorial identification with the image on the screen.

While direct address is generally taboo in television fictional narrative that follows the principles of continuity cutting, it is frequently found in non-fiction narrative, particularly news and current affairs. Where it employs direct address, television performers directly acknowledge the camera, and hence the viewer. At this point any conception of the television viewer as a voyeur appears to break down. The pattern of eye contact is similar to one of direct face to face dialogue, although television employs a persistent stare. This is compensated for by the viewer, whose attention is apparently characterised by glance, rather than gaze. Television is capable of imitating the voyeurism of the cinema, but it is not dependent upon it. A film shown on television may present a very different experience to the same film seen in the cinema, but it is unlikely that it produces meaning in an entirely different way. If the impression of voyeurism is so much weaker for a television presentation, and yet it is still understood, it must be questionable how far theories related to this are generally valid.

Television theory has tended to concentrate on features such as flow and fragmentation. However, it has notably ignored the phenomenon that programmes nevertheless cohere and remain comprehensible, in short that television texts make sense. The questions about the production of meaning that seemed so central to an understanding of the operation of film have all too frequently been forgotten in the case of television.

While the television text may possess a segmental structure, this is integrated in some way by the viewer to create some sense of a text. If there were no cohesion at all, it is unlikely that viewers would perceive particular programmes as satisfactorily coherent texts. The notion of a programme as it is listed in the schedule is something that is intuitively recognised. Although viewers may just choose to watch television, simply selecting the least personally objectionable offering from the available channels, often not watching complete programmes, possibly even zapping between channels, or even grazing across several channels, there is still a strong sense that the television text consists of a programmed



schedule. Viewers are able to apply the conception of a coherent text, despite the segmentation and interruption, and recognise that a text may be serialised, often for weeks on end, perhaps indefinitely. The lack of consequentiality between segments should not be mistaken for the view that television itself is inconsequential.

Rather than attempting to hide the units of its construction, the episodic medium of television continually draws attention to its fundamental principle of segmentation. The fragmentary text is not unique to television. It is a pattern that was adopted by newspapers and magazines. Yet readers still have a sense of a newspaper or a magazine as a particular commodity despite the fragmentary nature of its contents.

The fragmented nature of television appears to offer considerable scope for structural analysis. However, the analysis and assessment of television through the application of traditional cultural structures, such as that of the self-sufficient narrative, would appear to be destined to failure.

Film provided a means of recording and reproducing moving pictures. In this sense it was comparable to writing, the privileged mode of language in our culture. The cinema film is a stable, completed creative artefact, like a bound book, and can be compared to writing and literature. Television is essentially a technology of transmission. The television text is transient and ephemeral, more like spoken discourse and conversation. Although its programmes are largely scripted, and often pre-recorded, it attempts to give the impression of being spontaneous and contemporaneous. The chattering box in the corner produces an endless stream of ephemeral, open-ended discourse.

The discourse of a continuing drama serial is comparable to the conversations one has in life. No-one can possibly remember every conversation they have ever had, even with their most intimate acquaintances, but there is a sense that everything that has been previously said is available for reference. The television text can be much the same, dependent upon an indeterminate intertextuality for its meanings. As part of a widely shared folk memory, television's discourse resembles an oral literature.

Until comparatively recently, the transience of the television text rendered it resistant to study. Only in the last two decades has inexpensive video recording equipment made it possible to analyse television material in much the same way as has long been made possible with film, if necessary frame by frame, just as one would on a film editing table.



Whereas the object of study can be conveniently constrained with cinema material, there is a very real difficulty in isolating the television text. The television text is inseparable from the schedule. In studying spoken discourse there is a similar problem of representing relevant context in conversation analysis. Spoken discourse does not exist in isolation. Meaning is dependent upon pragmatic context.

Television displays a tendency towards open-ended, serial forms. In order to study television, it must be recorded, but to freeze a fragment from the fluid flow may introduce a distortion, especially if we approach this isolated text with traditional literary expectations. To select a segment out of context is to attempt to apply the aesthetics of the canonical text.

A further difficulty for research is the practical absence of a publicly available recorded text. With no common body of reference, normal scholarly activity is almost impossible. It is difficult to conveniently quote, cite, or otherwise reference the television text. While more recently there has been some recognition of the need to maintain accessible archives of material, it cannot be assumed that the reader has seen, or is able to view, any particular programme under discussion. Although television may be considered as a text, it is not possible to study it in the library alone.

## Serial narration

As previously suggested, broadcasting has an affinity with serial forms. This is inherent in the economic system of production and distribution. Series and serials clearly offer economies of scale, but other factors also contribute to their prevalence. Serial forms produce predictable audiences, which is an important factor for commercial television supported by spot advertising. While the economics of cinema depend upon high audience turnover, the economics of commercial television depend upon building large and loyal audiences, the composition of which can be predicted with some statistical confidence. It is upon such principles that the television schedule is constructed and the programming within it determined.

An extreme example of the tendency of television towards open narrative forms is the continuing drama serial, commonly known as the soap opera. Although there is a danger in centralising the seriality of television narration, the soap opera, by definition a serial form, is a pre-eminent exemplar of those aspects already identified as being typical of the television text. The narrative resists



closure. There is no point of resolution from which to narrate. It is presented as being contemporary and the mode is primarily present tense, with a foregrounding of the narrative segmentation. In short, the soap opera is everything that the classic cinema film is not. For these very reasons, the soap opera apparently defies conventional critical exegesis. The soap opera text, extended by hundreds of hours a year, is the antithesis of the classic literary work, but is a commodity peculiarly suited to broadcasting. Unique to the broadcast media, the open-ended serial drama offers important insights into the operation of television representation. In his book *TV: The most popular art* (1974), Horace Newcomb argues that the extent of the soap opera form brings it closer to experiential reality than any other form of television: 'The result is that we get more indication of what television art can be through an analysis of soap opera than through examination of any other program type'.<sup>6</sup>

The recognition of the importance of the form requires a willingness to relinquish certain aesthetic assumptions. The most striking feature of the continuing serial is the 'sense of unending', a rejection of the sense of closure and coherence typical of classical literary forms. The resistance to resolution denies one of the conventional expectations of narrative. The refusal to end a story is in itself a subversive narrative strategy. The never-ending story is almost a contradiction in terms. There is a customary expectation that stories have a beginning, a middle and an end, although this convention may be challenged by more avant-garde texts. Generally, however, a story will at least have an end, even if this is left relatively open. The soap opera, on the other hand, 'belongs to a separate genus that is entirely composed of an indefinitely expandable middle'.<sup>7</sup>

One of the literary functions of narrative is to provide a system by which extended texts can be sustained. So long as a narrative can be kept open, it can potentially go on forever. It is a basic convention of recorded fiction that while a narrative may pretend to be taking place in the present, logically it must have taken place in the past, prior to its completion. The knowledge that a story is complete implies that everything that is to be related by the narrative has been said. This makes it possible to make some attempt to assign an interpretation to the story. The unfinished form of the open-ended continuing story is much more like an oral narrative that is extemporised day by day. Its meaning is always provisional. Many of the formal features which are characteristic of the continuing narrative stem from the requirements of regular live broadcasting. Resistance to closure provides an opportunity to sustain a text indefinitely.



The open-ended extensiveness of the narrative is an aid to realism. Characters are seen to develop and grow old. The very form of the narration lends authenticity, suggesting that the events portrayed are taking place in real time in a real world, running in parallel to our own. Unlike other forms of formulaic fiction, such as the television sitcom, where the characters rarely remember the dilemma of the previous episode, the soap opera has a memory, and the characters must live with the multiplying implications of their actions.

In the continuing serial, the narration is always in the present. There is no position at 'The End' from which to narrate. As a result, the future is always unwritten. The sophisticated viewer may understand that major storylines may be plotted out up to a year in advance, but these are not inscribed in the narrative as it is encountered. Potentially, anything is possible. This leads to a sense of audience involvement, since the viewer has the impression of witnessing events as they unfold. The status of this apparent reality is highly complex. For instance, fans frequently write to producers in an attempt to change future story lines.

It is an important feature of viewer involvement that there is no sense that the narrative is predetermined. The plot of the continuing narrative is therefore buried. There is no single recognisable goal of the narration. The ending is always deferred. Whereas the classical narrative is characteristically driven by the progression of a single main plot, or a combination of plot and sub-plot, this would soon be exhausted in the case of a continuing narrative. Instead, serial narration relies upon the creation of a credible textual world, in which a variety of narrative action can take place, allowing a multiplicity of plots. The serial narrative may be either episodic, organised around a sequence of coherent narratives, or it may be woven from a number of storyline strands. Typically these will be interrelated in a complex manner. This provides a mechanism by which the narration can be indefinitely extended since new narrative threads can be spun in at any time.

The proliferation of storylines precludes the conventional chain of narrative progression that is typically found in classical cinema. A conventional technique for the management of multiple storyline strands is to foreground the process of episodic segmentation and suppresses the impression of narrative construction. The usual strategy is to cut between different storylines. This technique is an extension of the convention of classic cinema of what is termed parallel montage, by which the impression of simultaneous action is constructed. In the early days of television, this episodic segmentation may have been imposed by the patterns



of live broadcasting, since the only form of scene change available was a cut to another space. Certain forms of cinematic temporal elision are therefore denied.

The use of multiple concurrent plot-lines acts as a retardation device to frustrate the progression of the narrative. There is a difficulty in sustaining a single storyline without running the risk of exhausting it. The switching of narrative threads also disguises the impression that the narration is contrived. Cutting between storylines gives an impression of omniscient objective distance that disguises the organisation of the narration. The narrational point of view is that of an ideally situated observer of the textual universe. Cutting between different storylines disguises the process of temporal elision and helps to support the impression that the events are taking place in a parallel world.

The narrative strategies of the continuing serial have evolved in support of a particular transparency of realistic narration. In contrast to the tight coherence of the causal chain of narration that is typical of classical narration, the continuing serial superficially appears to be a rambling shambles. However, closer inspection reveals a complex, highly organised interwoven texture, with each strand carefully threaded through the fictional fabric.

A particular feature of serial narration is a high level of redundancy, repetition and recapitulation. This stems from the fact that the audience cannot be assumed to have seen or heard the previous episode or any or all of the preceding episodes. In American and Australian serials there is often a formal reprise at the beginning of each episode. British serials have tended to avoid this device as it draws attention to the construction of the narrative. All serial narration makes constant use of what is known as the 'backstory mechanism' as a way of recapitulating and reintegrating previously encountered narrative information. Very often, the same information will be given several times in different ways, even in the course of a single episode. Often, this information will have different implications for different individuals. Such apparently redundant repetition is perceived by conventional criticism as a weakness, because artistic aesthetics are opposed to redundancy. However, for many viewers it allows the possibility of many levels of dramatic irony which may be lost on the casual critic.

The importance of any particular plot development is not so much its effect upon a particular protagonist as its consequences upon a network of interpersonal and familial relationships. Irony is often an important part of serial drama. This is related to levels of knowledge about the narrative. The knowledge of the listener or viewer of any particular situation typically exceeds that of any one individual



character. Much of the pleasure of the audience lies in this disparity. Part of the appeal of serial drama lies in the interplay between different levels of knowledge available to the viewer. The more an individual invests in viewing a particular serial, the greater the potential appeal. The narrative effect of soap opera is cumulative.

The coherence of the soap opera lies in the creation of a credible textual world. The narrative is provided in pre-constructed kit form, and some assembly is required on the part of the viewer. The text is cohesive in that it contains latent relationships and gaps that the viewer is invited to close. Coherence is produced as a result of the process of viewing which is an active interpretative process. The interpretation is constrained within limits. The viewer is invited to adopt certain interpretations and moral readings, but these are not explicitly specified.

Soap operas are 'open' texts, open to multiple levels of interpretation. In more than one sense they are unfinished. Their status is somewhat provisional and indeterminate. Viewers are actively engaged in negotiating meaning. The reader is thus an active participant in making sense of the text. The demands placed on the viewer are in fact very great. The text leaves the viewer to organise the action into meaningful patterns. Simply to comprehend the text, the viewer must assemble the narrative fragments to create a coherence. The experience of viewing depends partly upon the experience of the viewer. A knowledge of the narrative conventions of the genre informs the process of comprehension and interpretation. Much of the pleasure of watching lies in the expertise that experienced viewers are able to bring to the programme.

This freedom allows the soap opera to appeal to a variety of audiences, working on different levels. The text does not impose a single monolithic meaning. Meaning is a construction of the viewer. A programme may be seen by millions of viewers, but that need not imply that it has millions of meanings. The meaning is constrained by the text, but it is open to individual interpretation. It is therefore impossible to extract a single meaning. The meaning is not contained in the text. It is constructed and constrained by the text, through the active interpretation of the viewer. As a result it is difficult to say what the soap opera text 'means', but it may be possible to suggest how it works and the various ways in which it may be read.

The form of the continuing narrative makes it resistant to paraphrase in terms of a plot. A soap opera is not simply a story. The inability to extract a story denies one of the most basic expectations of the interpretation of a narrative, since a plot



is one of the tools by which the meaning of narrative is conventionally understood.

The soap opera text is comparable to a literary text in the sense that its meaning is ultimately expressed in its form. Its content is inseparable from form. In a very real sense, the medium is the message. The meaning of the text lies in the way in which it is structured. A text does not simply contain a narrative representation, it constructs it.

## Textual realism

Seeing the soap opera text in terms of its form or its structure enables such narratives to be recognised as stories, the meaning of which is constructed and constrained by their structure. The meaning of television is not something that can be strained through the fabric of the text. The television text is ultimately about its own texture and cannot be reduced to an independent content. The principal strategy of the soap opera narrative is to sustain and prolong the text. The sense of realism is seen to be something that is constructed out of the text, rather than showing through it.

So powerful are the illusions of coherence and continuity that moving picture texts can produce, that it is often difficult to focus on the surface texture of the presentation without looking through the narrative window into the world beyond. Soap operas in particular attempt to produce realistic representations, although this realism may range from a documentary to an escapist mode. For some viewers, the fictional textual world is held to be real. Many others like to believe in the fiction that it is real. This is no different to the involvement that may be created in the theatre or the cinema, but this is generally dispersed when the lights go up. The difference is that for the continuing television serials, disbelief may be permanently suspended. The critic may deride such a reaction, but it is important to understand how such a realistic impression is created. Attention to the formal structure of the construction of texts moves beyond the simplistic view that a text can represent a reality or contain a content that can be simply extracted. It is important to realise that the moving picture text is no more realistic than a written text is realistic. In the case of the written text, it is clear that the text is articulated by language. In the case of the visual text, it is partly articulated by the images themselves. That a written text can produce a particularly realistic effect is typically held to be an artistic achievement. That a visual text can produce a similar impression is held to be indicative of the credulity of the viewer.



In appealing to a notion of realism, it is important to define precisely what is meant. Realism is not the same as reality. The realistic is not necessarily real. Realism is a vague and elastic critical term. In essence, realism suggests a fidelity of representation in such a way as to confer authenticity or verisimilitude. Imitation has been a critical concept since Aristotle, but realism, as opposed to idealism, has only been valued relatively recently in art and literature. The literary tradition of realism goes back to a recognisable and conscious movement that began in Europe and came to be applied to literature in the mid-nineteenth century. Literary realism was strongly influenced by art and science, and also one may presume by the invention of photography. Although the term realism was reluctantly applied with some suspicion, one of the assumptions of realism was the representation of everyday contemporary life and manners by observing meticulously, dispassionately, impersonally and objectively.

The realism of the nineteenth century novel is itself a literary convention, by which the narration is rendered in such a way as to give the reader the illusion of actual experience. This is related to the way in which the story is told. In the so-called classic realist text, the illusion of realism is achieved and sustained by suppressing the structure of the text and the presence of the storyteller. However, no narrative can simply be presented without the intervention of a narrator. There is always a teller in the tale, even when cunningly disguised. The narrative is presented through the structure of the text that contains traces of authorial intervention. The intrusiveness of the narration can be conventionally suppressed, but it cannot be eliminated.

Moving pictures confer a particular type of realism. The capacity to record and reproduce a visual likeness of the physical world and move a viewpoint through space and time can produce a particularly powerful illusion of realism. It is possible to raise this illusion of reality to the point at which it might be genuinely believed that the narrative is representing an independent reality. This can only be achieved and sustained by disguising the means by which it is produced. This is apparently more possible in a photorealistic visual medium than in a written form. The codes and conventions of the dominant realistic form of cinematic narration were developed and refined by Hollywood, to the extent that they now appear to be transparent.

Realism is not something that is simply dependent upon the quality or fidelity of the representation. Contrary to the prevalent assumption, it is not necessary for an image to fill the visual field for the viewer to believe in its reality. The cinema



image in no way equates to normal perception, but it is sufficiently similar that the spectator is able to suspend disbelief. The television image is even further from our normal visual experience, but paradoxically its image appears realistic. The viewer must accept the convention of the mode of television presentation, just as the cinema viewer must buy a ticket and assume a seat in the stalls. Thereafter, television can produce a representation that is realistic, arguably even more so than the cinema.

Television is capable of producing a particular mode of realism. This stems from a number of factors. There is a significant difference between the aesthetic effect of electronic as opposed to film reproduction. The film image connotes a record of the past, whereas the electronic image implies a transmission of the present. Broadcasting carries with it the potential for what might be termed 'real-time realism'.

Soap operas are seen on the same apparatus as the news and sport and may gain credibility as a result. It is important to realise however, that all forms of realistic representation are constructed. The question of whether a representation is factual or fictional is quite different from the question of whether it is realistic. To determine the fictional status of a realistic representation is not a trivial task. It depends upon extensive contextual knowledge and an understanding of the convention that a narration can be fictional. The ability to distinguish between fact and fiction is not properly learnt until comparatively late in a child's development.

A factual presentation, such as the news, may actually be rooted in an empirical reality, but that does not mean that the news is reality. It is a structural organisation imposed upon a representation of reality, and as such it is capable of reflecting certain biases or emphases.

Soap operas are realistic in that they purport to represent contemporary social reality. This level of realism is independent of the degree of similarity to empirical reality. It is possible to distinguish the realism of verisimilitude, of being like the real, from the realism of reference, of being about the real. Continuing serials are realistic insofar as they provide a plausible and credible account of contemporary social reality. That reality is not an external fact. It is felt through the experience of the individual. One particular form of realism is that of psychological realism, a fidelity that exists in the representation of character and feeling, independently of the perceived realism of the representation itself. Melodrama in particular appeals at a level of what has been termed emotional realism.<sup>8</sup> Although the events portrayed may be implausible on one level, for instance in terms of coincidence,



they may be realistic at an emotional level because they contain a realism of experience with which members of the audience can relate. Stereotypical characterisation can in fact reflect realistic experience in the same way that a cartoon or a caricature captures certain essential characteristics. Soap opera realism is therefore stylised in terms of recognisable norms and stereotypes rather than actual realities.

There is always a tension between realism and convention. Realism is a mode that seeks to disguise or deny its own conventions, but all forms of representation are dependent upon conventions. The identification of a convention is an indication of the presence of a cultural code. The structure of any text is not entirely idiosyncratic or uniquely organised in that text. If the originality is too great it becomes obscure and ultimately impossible to read. All texts are therefore to a degree coded and conventional. A text is dependent upon shared conventions and previous texts so that there is always a degree of intertextuality. There is a range of freedom between convention and innovation. If a text is too innovative in its presentation, it runs the danger of being misunderstood. If a text is too conventional it has nothing new to say and risks being boring. A work of art probably exists at the very limit of the intelligible. Mass culture, by definition of being aimed at a mass audience, cannot exist at this level. Instead it must aim at optimum intelligibility. Serial dramas, in their strategic role to produce large audiences, are often highly conventional, but this does not imply that they are simple or simplistic.

Realism is itself a set of conventions for the representation of experience. A work in a realistic mode should not be judged by the ultimate criterion of reality. Realism is not just about the close rendering of experience. It is about the creation of a belief in a fiction that is known to be fiction. The very real emotional belief in a fictional world need not imply the total loss of all critical faculties. All forms of representation require a certain receptivity, which Coleridge called the 'willing suspension of disbelief'.<sup>9</sup>

The soap opera creates and sustains a particular illusion of realism. This is partly a result of the textual strategies of the narration, which deploy conventions in such a way as to disguise the teller of the tale. As will be seen, this was not always so. The first soap opera serials on radio employed an explicit narrator figure, a function that was dropped in the transition to television.

Soap opera represents a genuine genre, with its own history and tradition. It borrows from other forms of continuing fiction, but is unique in its broadcast



mode. Serial dramas are, consciously or subconsciously, written and produced within a certain tradition. They draw on an inheritance of codes and conventions. This sets up genre expectations. An appreciation and acceptance of these conventions are part of the pleasure of responding to a genre.

The confusion that appears to surround the nature of soap opera is typical of the confusion related to issues of genre. The recognition of a genre involves expectations about both form and content, structure and subject matter. Soap opera is generally a generically leaky classification. There is a certain slipperiness about soap. The average viewer often has an intuitive feel for what a soap opera is, but often the genre eludes precision of definition. If a definition is too tight, it can be too exclusive. If it is too loose, it can be so inclusive as to become meaningless.

Genres operate by adopting and adapting certain conventions. All drama is dependent upon dramatic conventions. Soap opera is built around dramatic conventions that are every bit as strong as conventions of the stage. The recognition and appreciation of these conventions forms part of the appeal of a particular genre. Conventions are a form of code, and are essential as well as convenient ways of working within the limitations of a medium. Ignorance of a convention may lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

Stock characters, improbable coincidence and schematic plotting are generic conventions of the melodramatic form. They are as much a part of soap opera as they are of grand opera. Although the conventions of the continuing serial are deeply rooted, they are not immutable. Genres work by addressing conventions, which may be established, broken, abandoned, revived, or replaced. In the case of popular fiction, genres set up a system of expectations by which a text may be marketed. They provide an element of predictability.

The television soap opera embodies many of the tendencies of the television text, and is therefore an ideal subject for further study. Given the difficulty of establishing the extent of a soap opera text, it may be more profitable to attempt to analyse the aspects of a genre rather than a particular text.

## Summary

The notion of television texture introduces the idea that television output constitutes a text and that it displays particular formal features. As yet there is an inadequate understanding of television as a text. The specificity of moving picture media lies in the organisation of images. A study of the texture of the television text would therefore involve close attention to surface structure features. A proper study of the television text should therefore be directed not only at the messages it attempts to communicate, but also specifically to the structural strategies by which these are mediated.

Television output is generally different in form from the classic closed text of the cinema. Television differs from cinema in a number of important ways. Although screen size is the obvious difference, it is not the only factor in determining the nature of the television text. The relationship of the viewer to the text is imposed by the entire institution of television as a broadcast domestic medium. The television text is a different commodity and constructs a different type of audience. While film has been theorised in terms of the individual spectator, analogous the reader of a book, there has been a tendency to continue to think of the television audience as a monolithic mass. As a result, there has been an inadequate appreciation of the role of the viewer in reaching an interpretation.

The nature of television output has been characterised as one of flow. The tendency of television towards serial forms has been noted, as has the lower level of attention anticipated of the audience, characterised by the glance rather than the gaze of the viewer. Voyeuristic theories begin to break down when applied to television, bringing them into question.

The open-ended nature of the text makes it resistant to critical analysis. Television can be defined as a text, but it is difficult to know where this text begins and ends. General observations can be about fragmentation and flow, but this does not go very far towards explaining what it means or how it is understood.

Assumptions about the nature of texts are generally drawn from the written text, the privileged model for which is literature. The television text is in many ways different in form. It does not have the same permanence, it is open ended and it resists closure. The mode of the television text is seen to be more like that of a conversation.



The continuing drama serial or soap opera is seen as embodying some of the key characteristics of television as a text. The open-ended form is functionally related to the structure of broadcast distribution. It results in a particular mode of narration. One of the features of this mode is the potential for creating a particular illusion of realism. The credibility of the representation is in part a product of the way in which it is constructed. Therefore any examination of the alleged realism of certain television texts must attend to the formal mechanisms by which this is achieved.

While one can argue the aesthetic merits or demerits of popular forms, there is no denying their importance. Soap opera is often critically disdained. Familiarity breeds contempt. The soap opera is often seen as kitchen sink drama at its most kitsch, that is literally 'thrown together', a pot-boiler produced for profit to gratify popular taste. Soap opera must be taken on its own terms. It is a mistake to attempt to apply standards of literature to popular drama. The continuing drama serial has its own aesthetic and a unique form of structural organisation. Nevertheless, it can be useful to apply certain literary critical strategies if we are to make distinctions and arrive at a critical appreciation.

**Notes**

- 1 Williams, Raymond (1974) *Television: Technology and cultural form*, reprinted edition 1990, London: Routledge, p. 89.
- 2 Ellis, John (1982) *Visible Fictions: Cinema, television, video*, revised edition 1992, London: Routledge.
- 3 Ellis (1982) pp. 24-25.
- 4 Ellis (1982) p. 158.
- 5 Flitterman-Lewis, Sandy (1987) 'Psychoanalysis, Film, and Television' in Robert Clyde Allen (ed.) (1987) *Channels of Discourse: Television and Contemporary Criticism*, London: Methuen, pp. 172-210.
- 6 Newcomb, Horace (1974) 'Soap Opera: Approaching the real world', in Horace Newcomb (1974) *TV: The Most Popular Art*, Garden City, New York: Anchor, pp. 161-182, p. 163.
- 7 Porter, Dennis (1977) 'Soap Time: Thoughts on a commodity art form', *College English* 1, 38: 782-788, p. 783.
- 8 Ang, Ien (1985) *Watching Dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination*, trans. Della Couling, London: Methuen.
- 9 Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1817) *Biographia Literaria*, Chap. XIV.



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*Part Two*

**Practice**

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## Chapter 6

# Soap Opera

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With its origins in the serial narratives of the domestic novel, weekly story papers, the comic strip and the silent cinema serial, the development of serial drama on radio in the 1930s, and subsequently on television in the 1950s, was driven and sustained by the economic imperatives of commercial broadcasting. The emergence of sponsor-supported network radio in America led to the requirement to generate and maintain stable and predictable audiences at the lowest cost per thousand. During the daytime there was a large potential audience of housewives to whom consumer products could be promoted cost-effectively through the vehicle of the continuing drama serial.

When such programmes first emerged on radio they were simply known as serials. Sponsored by the manufacturers of household essentials such as flour, they might equally have been called *cereal* drama. One of the most enthusiastic supporters of the serial medium was the detergent company Procter and Gamble which began sponsorship of daytime drama in 1932, extending to over twenty serials at the end of the decade, beginning an association that continues to this day. Through their association with such sponsors, the serials became denigrated as 'dishpan drama' or 'washboard weepies'. To the radio industry they were known as 'strip shows', possibly a derivation from the comic strip or from the practice of strip scheduling at the same time five days a week. However, this unfortunate phrase did not survive. The term that stuck was 'soap opera', a particularly apt epithet, suiting the whiter-than-white image of many of these moralistic narratives. The reference to opera alludes to their melodramatic nature, the melodrama originally being characterised by a musical accompaniment, and coming to denote a genre identified by extravagant emotional appeal, complicated incident, and a high moral tone. The second edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines soap opera as 'A radio or television serial dealing especially with domestic situations and frequently characterised by melodrama and



sentimentality'. The precise origin of the 'soap opera' sobriquet is probably unknown.

Although precedents for serial fiction can be found, the continuing broadcast drama serial is *sui generis*. As with all genre classifications, there is a difficulty of definition. A highly conventional form, the soap *oeuvre* depends upon the recognition of certain dramatic conventions of form, style and content. Occasionally these can be subverted to create new hybrid genres. The continuing serial has been developed and adapted into a diversity of dramatic forms. Nevertheless these share certain common characteristics. In the generic genealogy of this typology of types there are certain strong family resemblances.

The modern soap opera form is deeply indebted to its historical origins and can be best understood by looking at the tradition from which it derives. The history of soap opera is only partly written. It receives scant attention in the authoritative histories of broadcasting and much of the original transmitted material has been lost to the ether. While soap opera is increasingly the subject of serious academic study, with a few honourable exceptions, much of the remaining literature on the subject is confined to popular accounts aimed at a wider audience. In America, there is a growing market for supermarket magazines devoted to daytime drama, and there have been a number of comprehensive publications, often including complex synopses of the complete stories to date. The following survey is based on a large number of published sources, all of which are given in the bibliography, together with countless contemporary cuttings. It does not attempt a scholarly history, but presents the main periods and themes in the development of the soap opera genre.

## US soap opera

### Radio

The origins of soap opera go back to the beginning of America's 'radio days'. Commercial radio began in 1922, with the AT&T station WEAJ. Four years later, the National Broadcasting Company was formed, with two networks, 'Red' and 'Blue', in operation by 1 January 1927. These were joined by the Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting System, later CBS. The development of network radio as a commercial medium created the context from which serial programming evolved.

*Amos 'n' Andy*, a highly successful nightly comedy show, with its roots in vaudeville, has been widely identified as a forerunner of the radio drama serial. It was first heard as *Sam 'n' Henry* on WGN in Chicago from 12 January 1926. Two minstrel artists, Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden, playing two Alabama Negroes who had come to the city to find their fortune. The show moved to the rival *Chicago Daily News* station WMAQ to become *Amos 'n' Andy* from 19 March 1928. *Amos 'n' Andy* was first networked by NBC on 19 August 1929 and was broadcast for fifteen minutes six days a week, sponsored by Pepsodent toothpaste who apparently saw no irony in selling the virtues of a whitening toothpaste through a minstrel show. It was pioneering at the time for audiences to be presented with respectable black role models, albeit imaginary ones. *Amos 'n' Andy* was the birth of a notion that was to introduce the continuing narrative to national radio. It became a phenomenal success and within two years was regularly heard in half of all radio homes in America. The programme demonstrated the potential for radio as a national advertising medium and inspired several similar shows. The success of a serial, which was contingent upon characterisation and narrative rather than expensive star names from vaudeville variety or popular performers on New York's Broadway, helped to establish Chicago as a centre for radio serial production.

The emergence and evolution of new radio programming coincided with the start of the Great Depression. As the boom decade of the twenties drew to a close, in October 1929 the American stock market crashed and share values plunged. During a time of severe economic recession, radio became an important mass medium of free entertainment, supported through the sponsorship of advertisers of staple household commodities. Despite the economic decline, companies that had



built their business on high volume sales at low margins continued to employ advertising to maintain and increase their market share. At the time, daytime radio was a wasteland. Advertisers were initially sceptical about the extent of daytime listening, but airtime was cheaper during the day than in the evening. The emerging techniques of mass marketing and audience ratings research soon confirmed the availability of an enormous housewife audience during the day. The emergence of the daytime serial came about as a result of a number of independent endeavours, most of which came out of Chicago. Aimed at housebound housewives, they tended to be domestic in nature and escapist in outlook.

*Clara, Lu 'n' Em*, the first daytime network serial, began in June 1930 on WGN in Chicago as a gentle comedy about small town daily domestic life improvised by three young women. It went on to become an evening feature on the NBC network, subsequently moving back to the daytime, establishing the fifteen minute, weekday pattern later adopted by succeeding radio soaps. The serial left the air in 1936, returning briefly in 1942.

*Painted Dreams*, celebrated as the first true daytime serial, premiered on WGN Chicago on 20 October 1930. It ran six days a week and featured a multi-plotted storyline about the intertwined lives in a small town, a structure that was to become an important element in later serials. Its prime importance was unquestionably that it launched the career of its creator, Irna Phillips who went on to become a prolific producer with a profound impact on the development of the soap opera over the next forty years. The origin of *Painted Dreams* is particularly well documented because it was the subject of a legal dispute over the rights to the format. As a result of this, Irna Phillips followed *Amos 'n' Andy* in taking her format to WMAQ to create a similar programme, *Today's Children*, first transmitted on 16 June 1932, and subsequently broadcast nationally from Chicago across the NBC network from 1933 until 1938.

As more and more serials emerged, Chicago became the major centre for the production of daytime drama serials. The Chicago advertising agency of Blackett-Sample-Hummert, recognising that the key to profitability was in handling a large number of accounts, took the serial format and turned it into a profitable industry. Frank Hummert, working together with his assistant Anne Ashenhurst, produced an enormous number of successful serials that vied for an audience much the same as competing brands in the marketplace, offering an impression of choice and



creating internal corporate competition and efficiency. Such serials were to help define the soap opera genre for decades to come.

*Just Plain Bill* began on night-time radio on 19 September 1932 as *Bill the Barber*, before moving to the daytime on CBS from 16 October 1933. Exploiting the small town myth that was to become a favourite theme, the serial was set in the fictional mid-West community of Hartville and was promoted in its epigraph as 'the story of a man who might be living right next door to you; the story of people just like people we all know'. It proved to be the first successful network soap, moving to NBC in 1936 where it continued until October 1955.

*Ma Perkins* started in Cincinnati on 14 August 1933, moving to NBC Red later that year, sponsored by the Procter and Gamble soap brand Oxydol. The programme was promoted as 'The true-life story of a woman whose life is the same, whose surroundings are the same, whose problems are the same as thousands of other women in the world today.' Ma Perkins provided homespun philosophy and the conscience of the community until the end on 25 November 1960.

*The Romance of Helen Trent* began regionally on 24 July 1933 before moving into the CBS schedule. It was described daily as the real-life drama of Helen Trent who strives to prove that because a woman is thirty-five, romance in life need not be over. In fact the impossibly principled heroine hardly aged a day over thirty-five, facing a succession of suitors over twenty-seven years on air until 24 June 1960.

By the mid-thirties, production shifted away from Chicago to New York, the centre of network radio, although the stories generally remained in the mid-west. Frank Hummert married his assistant Anne and they formed their own New York production company, Air Features. To produce their deluge of dialogue, they created a fiction factory applying assembly-line methods of mass production to the manufacture of soap, based on advertising agency practice. The Hummerts dreamt up the storylines for each serial, with suggested dialogue and characterisation, while a team of about a dozen anonymous writers produced the final scripts. The main problems were said to be finding names for the people to populate the ever-ever land, keeping the story fresh, and maintaining the perpetual emotion necessary to keep the endless stories from ending. The prolific production of soap opera was likened by more than one contemporary commentator to the literary mill of Alexandre Dumas.



The factory system was justified by its success. In all the Hummerts were responsible for launching over thirty serials. The formula of their stories about the everyday doings of plain, everyday people was to mix the ordinary and routine of the familiar environment with romantic escapism, on the premise that happiness might only be found through love and marriage. This promise was frequently contained in the epigraph which preceded each daily broadcast. *Backstage Wife*, on NBC from 30 March 1936 until 1959 was 'The story of Mary Noble, a little Iowa girl, who married Larry Noble, handsome matinee idol, dream sweetheart of a million other women, and her struggle to keep his love in the complicated atmosphere of backstage life.' *Our Gal Sunday*, which ran on CBS from 29 March 1937 repeatedly posed the question 'Can this girl from a mining town in the West find happiness as the wife of wealthy and titled Englishman?' The question was not answered until she finally found happiness when the serial ended in 1959. *Stella Dallas*, which ran on NBC from 6 June 1938 to 1955, based on the film of that name, was described as 'The true to life sequel—as written by us—to the world famous drama of mother love and sacrifice'.

Uncertainty and anguish were built into the structure of such soaps. Frank Hummert described the requirements for serial scripts: 'The characters must be human and loveable, their actions must be logical, consistent and believable and painted against the canvas of simple everyday American life.'<sup>1</sup> Their fundamental formulae, based on irresolvable doubt, dilemma or indecision, provided escapist fantasy for housewives struggling through the Depression. These homely homilies provided moral, as well as advertising, messages. The strong and stable central characters were the flawless projections of the housewife audience's ideal woman. The young widow or divorcee became a recurrent soap opera type, being both experienced in married life, yet free to indulge in romantic escapism and follow a career as a single woman. Men were typically seen as the weaker sex. The presentation was deliberately unsubtle, intensely moral, and the characterisation was sketchy and two-dimensional. The clean-living communities typically depicted in the soap opera world reaffirmed the deep-rooted American myth of the small town as a symbol of honest old-fashioned values, attitudes and lifestyles, offering an idealised sense of community in contrast to the city, an immoral source of disturbing outside influences. This was exaggerated and oversimplified as a basic opposition of good and evil. There was little attempt at atmospheric realism. While they may have begun as authentic stories of small town life, audience expectations and the sheer demands of regular production had soon fixed



the formula. Such conventionalised communities offered comfortably familiar surroundings for the majority of the listening audience.

The scale of the interest in the serials was evidenced by the response to premium offers inviting listeners to send in a proof of purchase, often a box top, generally accompanied by a coin, for which they received a small gift. An attractive offer could draw anything up to half a million responses. This provided sponsors with concrete evidence of the scale of their audience and was confirmed by audience research such as the Crossley ratings report which provided a measure of the relative audience sizes for particular programmes. Equally revealing was the fan mail that arrived, generally addressed to individual characters. In response to the various ailments that befell them, recipes for remedies poured in. A small minority of letters came from cranks, but the great majority came from listeners apparently revealing a naïve belief in the realism of the serials.

In contrast to the streamlined assembly line of the Hummerts, Inna Phillips was more interested in realism rather than escapism. She claimed to dictate every word of her scripts herself by acting out the roles of her characters to her two secretaries. It was in this manner that she began to tell what can probably lay claim to being the longest story ever told, continuing on radio until 1956 and on television to this day.

*The Guiding Light* was first heard on NBC Red from 25 January 1937, sponsored by Procter and Gamble. This sermonising soap originally focused on the life of a pastor and his parish in the fictional Midwest town of Five Points, Anywhere, USA. Often evangelical in tone, employing organ music for effect, the programme frequently devoted whole episodes to a single sermon. Inna wrote from life, creating characters based on professionals known to her, mainly ministers, doctors and nurses. *The Road of Life* (1937-1959) and *Woman in White* (1938-1948) were both medical soaps, a genre that lives on in various hospital series. *The Guiding Light* produced a spin-off called *The Right to Happiness* (1939-1960) and *The Brighter Day* (1948-1956) also concerned the lives of a preacher and his family. In contrast to the escapist action melodrama of the Hummerts' serials, slow-moving discussion was a typical trademark of Inna Phillips. With their concentration on characterisation and their recognition of the rising role of the career woman, it is unlikely that such programmes could have achieved similar success before the end of the Depression.



After the first decade of daytime dramas, the term 'soap opera' had yet to appear. In 1938 a preacher writing in *The Christian Century*, published in Chicago, described how he sought solace from his sick bed in the daily radio serials, but found only endless pain and suffering: 'I call them the "soap tragedies"—though a few of them are lard, bean and flour tragedies—because it is by the grace of soap I am allowed to shed tears for those characters who suffer so much from life'.<sup>2</sup> In November 1939 *Newsweek's* radio column referred in passing to 'the "soap operas"—daytime serial dramas bringing the hard-working housewife the Real Life adventures of Real People'.<sup>3</sup> This was an allusion to the appeal of the epigraphs that introduced such serials as being true to life.

At the height of their popularity in 1940 there were in all sixty-four radio serials, among them the top ten rating daytime programmes, constituting a third of all network airtime income. An extensive article entitled 'Soap Opera' in *Harpers* magazine described the phenomenon: 'From nine every morning until six every evening, Monday through Friday, unrelieved tragedy nearly blankets the radio networks.'<sup>4</sup> In view of the enormous popularity of soap operas, the writer was inclined to conclude that 'the daytime radio serial is the most popular form of entertainment ever devised.' The basic principle of soap opera was common: 'while the shows have different characters, different situations, different backgrounds, all are essentially alike. Each offers an escape from reality into vicarious reality, from one's own worries into the far more enjoyable worries of others.'

This form of etherealised escapism was already beginning to cause critics some concern. It was not until 1942 that the first celebrated attack on soaps was published by Dr Louis Berg, a New York psychiatrist. His evidence largely derived from his own pulse and blood pressure readings before and after listening, and he probably succeeded only in measuring his own indignation, but he attributed all manner of ailments in his women patients to such serials. The radio industry responded by inviting independent professional researchers to investigate the influence of such programmes. The NBC and CBS networks established research committees that reported that the effects of such soaps were more likely to be benign than malignant.

Early audience research was particularly concerned with establishing the effectiveness of programmes in penetrating a particular target audience. Soap opera listening was the subject of academic study as early as 1944, in a volume of audience research edited by Paul Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton.<sup>5</sup> They



conservatively estimated that 40 per cent of American women were regular listeners to daytime serials, 30 per cent did not listen, and the remaining 30 per cent were not available during the day. Thus of an American population which then included forty-nine million women over fifteen years of age, twenty million were regular listeners to daytime serials.<sup>6</sup>

In an introductory article, Herta Herzog asked 'What do we really know about daytime serial listeners?'.<sup>7</sup> The suggestion, based on surveys, was that the 'listening gratifications' provided by daytime serials offered emotional release, wish-fulfilment fantasies, and explanation and education for the inarticulate listeners. This was an early statement of the so-called 'uses and gratifications' model that was to become highly influential in mass media research. Ignoring many socio-economic factors which might govern availability to listen, the author concluded that women with little formal education were more disposed to listen to the daytime serials because they provided experiences which the more sophisticated listener might encounter at first hand, while the stereotypical characters and situations were less likely to satisfy those with a more discriminating perspective.<sup>8</sup>

Rudolf Arnheim contributed a content analysis of more than forty radio serials transmitted in Spring 1941.<sup>9</sup> He found that the serials were generally set in small or middle town America, with less than a tenth set in rural communities. The central characters were predominantly professionals and housewives. Working class characters were noticeably absent, with no instance of a skilled or unskilled worker playing a central role. The narratives were centred on problems created and solved, an uninterrupted chain of more or less serious nuisances, largely of a personal nature, rather than obstacles to the accomplishment of goals. The resolution of problems was profoundly moral, with reward and punishment directly attributable to the ethical evaluation of character which might be expected from the average listener. The central character was typically presented as an idealised woman, with whom it was suggested the listener might identify. The woman listener was therefore presented with a portrait of her own shortcomings, together with the image of an ideal woman to whom she is encouraged to aspire.

A 1948 study conducted for the Office for the Study of Social Communication in Chicago<sup>10</sup> concluded that the serials might serve to strengthen and stabilise the contemporary social structure. It was suggested that they might function as folk tales or secular morality plays, employing symbols of good and evil to express the feelings and beliefs, hopes and fears of their largely female audience. The authors



found almost nothing to confirm any harmful effects. If anything, the radio serials were a conservative influence that provided a sense of community through a time of economic crisis. Highly traditional in their social outlook, soap operas provided conventional models for behaviour. As the rest of the world faced enormous uncertainty, the American housewife was fed constantly reassuring moral messages.

The soap opera phenomenon was sympathetically investigated by the American humorist James Thurber, perhaps best known for his creation of the character Walter Mitty. In his five-part series on 'Soapland', published in the *New Yorker* in the Spring and Summer of 1948, he presented a record of a year's sojourn in the strange and fascinating country of daytime serials. He reflected: 'A soap opera is a kind of sandwich, whose recipe is simple enough, although it took years to compound. Between thick slices of advertising, spread twelve minutes of dialogue, add predicament, villainy, and female suffering in equal measure, throw in a dash of nobility, sprinkle with tears, season with organ music, cover with a rich announcer sauce, and serve five times a week.'<sup>11</sup> He was reluctant to predict the future for soap opera, but he concluded: 'Your guess is as good as mine about the effect that television will have on the day-time serial. The creeping apparition called video has already made several experiments with continuous narratives... Just how television could manage to put on a fifteen-minute programme five times a week, I have no idea, but from what I know of American technological skill, I wouldn't bet that it can't be done.'<sup>12</sup>

As it happened, in the fifties, television flourished, audiences for network radio floundered, and advertising revenue fell. Local radio network affiliates found that they could earn more revenue from local spot advertising. As a result, commercial radio changed. NBC radio made an unsuccessful experiment in sequence programming, while ABC went on to adopt a music and news format. When Raymond Stedman was completing his doctoral dissertation on the history of daytime serials in 1959, marking the first of a number of scholarly considerations of the subject, the radio soap opera was already in decline.<sup>13</sup> On Friday 25 November 1960, CBS dropped the last four remaining daytime radio serials. *Ma Perkins*, *The Right to Happiness*, *Young Dr Malone*, and *The Second Mrs Burton*, aired for the final time, so ending the first thirty years of the soap opera era. Fittingly, for such an open form, the storylines were not entirely tied together. Traditional old time daytime network radio had died. The first soap opera bubble had finally burst.



## Television

Following the Second World War, television had begun to compete with radio as a commercial mass medium and to test the soapy waters of the continuing serial. The popularity of radio serials was such that there was initially some doubt whether this daily dramatic formula could be adapted to the visual medium.

In May 1944, Lever Brothers sponsored a daily version of the radio soap opera *Big Sister*. It ran on the DuMont WABD television station in New York for three weeks. In 1946, *Faraway Hill* was transmitted by the DuMont network simultaneously in New York and Washington. In October 1949, the network began *A Woman to Remember*, a television serial about a radio soap opera.

Meanwhile, three weeks previously, NBC had launched the Ina Phillips serial *These Are My Children*, loosely based on her first radio serials. It was broadcast for fifteen minutes daily live from Chicago, but lasted just four weeks. In December 1950, CBS began broadcasting *The First Hundred Years*, sponsored by Procter and Gamble. It featured two newly-weds embarking on their 'first hundred years' of married life. Ironically it was cancelled after its first anniversary. Although short-lived, these early attempts demonstrated the commercial potential of the television soap opera.

The following year CBS launched three soaps, including two durable successes. *Search for Tomorrow* first aired in September 1951, sponsored by Procter and Gamble. The first thirteen weeks were written by Agnes Nixon, who was to become a major influence on the development of the television soap opera. The search for tomorrow continued on CBS for thirty-one years until 1982, when the programme was picked up by NBC, running until 1986. *Love of Life* also began in September 1951, produced by American Home Products, and continued on CBS for nearly three decades until 1980. Both programmes were created by Roy Winsor, who had previously worked on radio serials in Chicago. Seen as the father of the continuing television serial, he contended that while the radio soaps had relied mostly on plot, television serials should concentrate on character.

The early television serials drew on their radio roots. In many cases they were produced by writers who had learnt their craft in radio and they were transmitted by television networks that grew out of radio. As a result of this inevitable institutionalisation of the form, the television versions carried with them characteristics from their radio days. Like their radio counterparts, the first television soap operas ran in fifteen-minute episodes, broadcast daily and



transmitted live. Like their predecessors, they were targeted at a largely female audience as an accompaniment to housework and in this respect could not expect constant visual attention. The early television serial dramas employed a theatrical mode of presentation, with scenes centred on kitchens and living rooms with windows and doors hung in front of drapes to suggest the sets. Television production was expensive and labour intensive, in contrast to its cost effective radio equivalent, requiring sets and props to create images that could be conjured up out of thin air by the radio writer and the listener's imagination. While the radio serials had been told in words rather than images. The male voice-over narrator had intoned the opening epigraph, recapitulating the story so far, and fulfilled the role of story-teller, interpreter and salesman. In the visual medium, such a device was awkward and unnecessary. In the transition to television a less rhetorical mode was adopted. The tone of explicit narration almost disappeared, and the sales message was separated from the story. There was no longer a narrational voice to provide a perspective from which the conduct of the characters could be reviewed. Without the mode of direct address, the presence of the audience was no longer directly acknowledged. Visually, the 'invisible' mode of classic Hollywood continuity cinema narration was adopted. However, the emphasis remained on dialogue, to the extent that the story could normally be followed from the audio element alone.

*The Guiding Light*, which was first introduced to radio by Irna Phillips in 1937, moving to CBS radio ten years later, could also be seen on CBS television five days a week from 1952, sponsored by Procter and Gamble. By the end of the following year it had attracted considerably more television viewers than it had radio listeners. The programme continued to run on radio for a further four years as *Guiding Light*, using substantially the same scripts for both radio and television, illustrating the degree to which television was seen as radio with pictures. With adaptable resilience *The Guiding Light* still remains apparently indestructible on American daytime television as the World's longest running daytime television serial.

At the time, soaps were almost by definition aired for fifteen minutes a day. Irna Phillips suggested to the show's owner and sponsor, Procter and Gamble, that *The Guiding Light* be extended to half an hour. She believed that people watched serials not just to see what happens next but because of their identification with the characters. There were also clearly economies of scale in stretching a single episode. The sponsors were initially reluctant to change the format, but agreed to



allow her to create a new programme. The result, *As the World Turns*, premiered on CBS in April 1956. The world it portrayed turned slowly indeed. The pace of the programme was totally different to anything that had gone before and the approach was more visual. The result was a more closely observed drama that achieved new levels of realism and characterisation. Although the audience was slow to build, by the end of its second year it had grown phenomenally successful. It has the distinction of being the only daytime drama to produce a primetime spin-off serial, which ran briefly in 1965.

In an attempt to break the CBS grip on daytime drama, the other networks capitalised on the popularity of the evening hospital dramas *Dr Kildare* and *Ben Casey* by introducing two medical soaps on 1 April 1963. *The Doctors*, produced by Colgate Palmolive for NBC, began as an episodic series but within a year became a continuing serial, running until 1982. *General Hospital* was produced by Procter and Gamble for ABC and became a fixture in their daytime schedule surviving the axe in the late seventies to become a top-rated daytime drama.

Ima Phillips went on to create *Another World* for NBC, a more psychological melodrama which premiered in 1964, sponsored by Procter and Gamble, and can still be seen in America. *Love is a Many Splendored Thing* was another Phillips creation, loosely based on a novel and 1955 film of that title. It began on CBS in 1967 as a serial about young interracial love, but after the first year CBS decided to drop this theme and as a result Ima Phillips left the programme which continued to run until 1973.

In the late sixties, partly in response to movements in prime time programming and partly as a result of social and demographic change, as the traditional audience aged and more women went to work, there was an effort to expand the daytime audience. *Days of Our Lives* was introduced by NBC in 1965, produced in Hollywood rather than New York, beginning a run that still continues. There was a process of modernisation, aimed at attracting a new generation of viewers by injecting younger, more career-oriented female characters and more controversial plotlines, increasingly centred on socially relevant issues and the theme of young love.

*One Life to Live*, which began on ABC in 1968, began by presenting interracial relationships, although again this theme became diluted. The main innovation was that it ran for an hour a day, a 'television hour' being around forty-five minutes plus commercials. It was written by Agnes Nixon, a protégé of



Irna Phillips. She went on to create *All My Children* for ABC in 1970, a serial much lauded for its attention to social issues.

Once the one hour format had been tested, *Another World*, *Days of Our Lives* and *As the World Turns* were all extended to an hour a day in 1975. *All My Children* and *The Guiding Light* followed suit from 1977, pursued by *One Life to Live* and *General Hospital* in 1978. In 1979 *Another World* was even expanded to ninety minutes, although it was cut back to an hour the following season.

As established serials expanded and attracted a younger audience, glossy new soaps began, featuring photogenic young people and a faster pace. *The Young and the Restless* was launched by CBS in 1973, created by William J. Bell, another protégé of Irna Phillips. Produced in California, its production values set the stylistic pace for other daytime soaps. Dealing with young people and their relationships, it started a trend in portraying beautiful blonde bimbos and handsome heros. With its sexier storylines featuring taboo topics, it began to draw a large following among younger urban viewers, and other serials soon followed suit. In 1980 it was expanded to an hour and in 1982 it was joined by *Capitol*, from the same producer, set in Washington DC but taped in Hollywood. This ran until 1987, to be replaced by *The Bold and the Beautiful*, set in Los Angeles, from the same team. Meanwhile, ABC introduced another Agnes Nixon creation called *Loving* in 1983. The following year NBC countered with *Santa Barbara*, set on the Californian coast, running until January 1993. In March 1990, NBC launched *Generations*, promoted as the first fully racially integrated daytime soap. It lasted only until early 1991.

The modern daytime soap is far removed from its rural origins and is generally populated by improbably glamorous individuals who inhabit a world that seems far removed from reality. To the uninitiated, the programmes can seem virtually indistinguishable. With around a dozen daytime serials on air, soap operas continue to dominate weekday network television programming in America. With audiences of up to ten million, viewing figures are low in absolute terms, compared to prime time audiences and the ratings for prime time soaps in Britain, but they remain nonetheless highly profitable for the American networks. For as long as soaps continue to be popular, and so long as the networks continue to hold sway, no single network can risk losing audience share by re-programming the afternoon. *Table 6.1* shows a typical afternoon line-up.

**Table 6.1**  
**US television daytime soap operas**  
 (1992-93 season)

Time (EST)	NBC	CBS	ABC
12:00			
12:30		<i>The Young and the Restless</i>	<i>Loving</i>
13:00	<i>Days of Our Lives</i>		<i>All My Children</i>
13:30		<i>The Bold and the Beautiful</i>	
14:00	<i>Another World</i>	<i>As the World Turns</i>	<i>One Life to Live</i>
14:30			
15:00		<i>Guiding Light</i>	<i>General Hospital</i>
15:30			

The development of the daytime serial had an influence on, and was influenced by, parallel developments in prime time programming. The so-called 'golden age' of American television had been characterised by prestigious prime time drama in the form of anthologies of single plays in regular sponsored presentations. These were gradually supplanted by more economic episodic serials, featuring regular characters and self-contained stories. One successful example of the form, derived from its predecessors in radio and cinema, was the western serial or 'horse opera', a term that gained currency around the same time as 'soap opera'.<sup>14</sup> *Gunsmoke* filled the air for twenty years, originating on CBS radio in 1952 and moving to television in 1955, closely followed by *Bonanza* on NBC from 1959 to 1973. The evening audience became accustomed to action and adventure serials, generally shot on film, which were quite different from the slow-moving continuing stories of daytime television. The first prime-time soap-style serial was therefore something of a hybrid.

*Peyton Place*, produced by Twentieth Century Fox and screened on ABC from September 1964 as a twice-weekly open-ended film drama, was the first successful prime time drama serial to include soap opera elements. Having noted the success of the British bi-weekly evening serial *Coronation Street*, executives had considered buying the rights, but instead adapted and bowdlerised a best-selling novel by Grace Metalious, which had been the subject of a 1957 feature film. The serial emerged out of the creative differences of Paul Monash and story consultant Irna Phillips. It was set in small New England town, with a skeleton in every cupboard. Although tame by today's standards, it was tagged television's first 'sex-opera' or 'sex saga', and the term 'sexial' was coined. In all, 514 episodes were produced up to June 1969. The first 104 parts were bought by Britain's regional independent television companies as their first major American



package. It was shown twice a week in the provinces from January 1965 and ran with partial networking until 1970. A spin-off serial *Return to Peyton Place* that ran for fifty episodes from April 1972 failed to recapture the audience. There were also two television movies, *Murder in Peyton Place* (1977) and *Peyton Place, The Next Generation* (1985).

In the late 1970s there were two significant satirizations of the soap opera genre. *Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman* has been described as part legitimate soap opera and part spoof. Produced independently by Norman Lear, it was rejected by the networks but successfully ran five days a week as a syndicated series from 1976 to 1978. *Soap* was an ABC prime-time series that ran from 1977 until 1981. A soap opera satire, it interpreted the conventions of the form in terms of situation comedy, combining continuing plot strands and self-sufficient episodes. In so doing, it tackled almost every conceivable television taboo.

As the seventies drew to a close, a form of prime time soap opera emerged out of the development of the television mini-series. The first of these, a luxury soap shot on 35mm film, was immensely influential in redefining the form that had previously been the province of daytime television. It came from the stable of Lorimar Television, once best known for *The Waltons*, a sentimental series featuring a family-run sawmill, which lumbered along for over 220 episodes from 1972 to 1981. Set during the Depression, it offered a point of reference back to the early days of soap opera.

*Dallas* could not have been more different. It was the creation of David Jacobs, then a story editor on the dramatic series *Family*, who had ambitions to write something of his own. The first proposal Lorimar took to CBS was considered to be too tame, too middle class to break into prime time, although the format was to subsequently surface as *Knot's Landing* and prove them wrong. The result was a contemporary cowboy serial, a modern melodrama of oil-rich Texan tycoons, set in Dallas, where the wild west met big business. Jacobs drafted the first and last of the five pilot episodes based on this stereotype, without visiting the city. Elements of the western were grafted onto the family saga of the traditional soap opera. *Dallas* was fundamentally about the Ewing family, whose success embodied the American dream.<sup>15</sup>

The programme began as a series of self-contained stories screened on five consecutive Sunday nights in April 1978, first seen in Britain in September. Encouraging ratings were returned, and a further thirteen fifty-minute episodes were ordered. During its first season, *Dallas* developed serial continuity.



Extended serialisation had not been attempted previously in prime time because it limited the potential for secondary syndication sales to stations that did not wish to be committed to screening episodes in a particular order. In acquiring a serial element, *Dallas* became a blend of the mini-series and soap opera. While the traditional American practice involves repeating a series in the same time slot during the summer season, the network decided to save all re-runs for the syndication market, with the condition that episodes be aired in story order.

At the end of each season, there was a cliff-hanger climax. The turning point came at the end of the second season, when the American network asked for an additional two episodes. The result was perhaps the most notorious cliff-hanger of all time in the shooting by an unknown assailant of the lead character the audience loved to hate, J. R. Ewing. The incident attracted an American audience of 80 million, making it the most popular series on American network television. This episode was seen in Britain on 26 May 1980 by 16.4 million viewers. America discovered the culprit on 22 November 1980, an episode that attracted 85 million viewers in America, and no less than 21.6 million in Britain.

Such was the success of *Dallas* that in Britain, Thames Television attempted to outbid the BBC for the serial, prompting a furore that resulted in the intervention of the Independent Broadcasting Authority. However, by that time, the programme's phenomenal popularity was already waning. As characters came and went, the action of one entire season was written off as a dream sequence. The original interest became increasingly difficult to sustain and in the latter half of the decade, ratings declined.

In its heyday, *Dallas* was a spectacular success, a highly influential export that was seen as the epitome of American cultural imperialism. It inspired a number of spin-offs, including a daytime drama *Texas* that ran for just over a year NBC from 4 August 1980, unfortunately scheduled against *General Hospital*.

*Knot's Landing* was revived by Lorimar from the previously rejected David Jacobs treatment and shown on CBS from the end of 1979. One of the four families in a wealthy Californian cul-de-sac was made a member of the Ewing clan and there was a certain interplay with *Dallas*, with characters occasionally visiting each others' serials. For a long time the serial was in the shadow of *Dallas*, but it went on to outlast all the supersoaps, until the final episode came on 13 May 1993, marking the end of the 1980s prime time soap operas.

*Falcon Crest*, first screened in December 1981, was a second attempt by Lorimar to repeat the formula for CBS, this time featuring the Channing family,



owners of a North Californian vineyard. *Knot's Landing* and *Falcon Crest* arrived in Britain in 1980 and 1982 respectively, but they were only modest successes, eventually consigned to daytime as fillers.

*Dynasty* was a successful attempt by ABC, not to be outdone, to exceed the excess of *Dallas* with a very similar serial set in Denver. The original title was to have been simply *Oil*, but the allusion to *Dallas* was thought to be too close. It began in America with a three-hour television movie screened in January 1981 and was first seen in Britain from May 1982. It faltered for fourteen episodes, lacking a basic conflict. In the second season, new writers were brought in. Joan Collins joined the cast and turned the serial around. *Dynasty* went on to outstrip *Dallas* and become the World's most popular soap, ending in America in mid-1988.

*The Colby's*, a *Dynasty* spin-off originally titled *Dynasty II: The Colby's*, aired on ABC on Thursday nights from November 1985, and was seen in Britain from the following January, until it was cancelled after two seasons. With excess breeding excess, the producer and writers of *Dynasty* attempted to extend the formula with a farcical follow-up about a branch of the Carrington family. It concluded one season with a character apparently disappearing in a UFO, only to return in *Dynasty* the following year.

*Dallas*, *Dynasty*, and their derivatives established a prime time success formula that suited the mood of the decade. They became associated with the label soap opera because of their melodramatic plotting, but structurally they owed little to the genre, being shot on film and screened in self-contained fifty-minute episodes that ran in seasons. However, they shared with stereotypical soap opera the same lack of narrative closure. As a sub-genre, they exaggerated the domesticity that was central to the original serials to the level of the mini-series, where the one big unhappy family feud became a supreme power struggle, elevating the domestic to the dynastic. The taste for Hollywood glitz fed back into the daytime dramas, which became increasingly glamorous as a result.

By the end of the eighties, the phenomenon of the supersoap was somewhat played out. The 356th and final episode of *Dallas* was shown in 1991. Of the primetime serials it had spawned, ironically the one that survived longest was *Knot's Landing*. The new decade saw the brief emergence of a serial that completely subverted the genre.

*Twin Peaks*, first screened on ABC in a two-hour pilot in April 1990, followed by an initial season on seven one-hour episodes, was a highly surreal serial that



consistently denied and defeated audience expectations. While previous prime-time soaps had been shot with the high production values of film, they did little to exploit the cinematic idiom. Created by *Blue Velvet* director David Lynch and former *Hill Street Blues* script editor Mark Frost, *Twin Peaks* was an aberration in American network television, demonstrating prime time television could still be dangerously different. ABC bought it on the assumption that it would be a *Peyton Place* for the nineties, but although it was about a small town and its secret, it had nothing else in common. Although lauded by the critics, the audience shrank considerably after the success of the pilot, a pattern that was repeated when *Twin Peaks* was first shown in Britain on BBC2 from 23 October 1990, gaining an initial audience of 8.15 million. The second season of twenty-two episodes was watched by an audience that grew in allegiance but steadily shrank in numbers.

Unlike previous attempts at parody and pastiche, *Twin Peaks* did not operate by sending up the genre, but by undermining its myth. It took the myth of the small town and the family values so dear to the American dream and proceeded to peel away the layers to dissect its darker corners to find something very nasty in the woodshed. It was dubbed a 'dirty soap' and termed 'soap noir' by some critics. An explicit point of reference with the classic daytime serial was occasionally made as we saw various inhabitants of *Twin Peaks* watching episodes of a serial called *Invitation to Love*. The serial's supposed central question, a murder mystery predicated on the question 'who killed Laura Palmer?', was secondary to the slow exploration of the bizarre world the serial had created. Essentially, *Twin Peaks* attempted to combine a murder mystery with the inconclusiveness of soap opera. Ultimately, without a narrative motor, the serial failed as a prime time drama. *Twin Peaks* tested the limits of the soap opera form, and in so doing demonstrated some of its limitations. It will probably be remembered as a minor curiosity in the history of serial drama.

In the course of nearly fifty years, a large number of soap opera style television serials have been launched, but only a relatively small number achieved lasting fame or success. *Table 6.2*, compiled from a variety of references, gives a reasonably comprehensive chronology of American daytime and prime time television soap operas.



**Table 6.2**  
**US network television soap operas**  
 (Excluding syndicated and cable programmes)

Programme	Channel	Start Date	End Date
<i>Faraway Hill</i>	DuMont	2 October 1946	18 December 1946
<i>These Are My Children</i>	NBC (Chicago)	31 January 1949	25 February 1949
<i>A Woman to Remember</i>	DuMont	21 February 1949	15 July 1949
<i>The O'Neills</i>	DuMont	6 September 1949	20 January 1950
<i>One Man's Family</i>	NBC (prime time)	4 November 1949	21 June 1952
	NBC (daytime)	1 March 1954	1 April 1955
<i>Hawkins Falls</i>	NBC (prime time)	17 June 1950	19 August 1950
	NBC (daytime)	2 April 1951	1 July 1955
<i>The First Hundred Years</i>	CBS	4 December 1950	27 June 1952
<i>Miss Susan</i>	NBC	12 March 1951	28 December 1951
<i>Search for Tomorrow</i>	CBS	3 September 1951	26 March 1982
	NBC	29 March 1982	26 December 1986
<i>The Egg and I</i>	CBS	3 September 1951	1 August 1952
<i>Love of Life</i>	CBS	24 September 1951	1 February 1980
<i>Fairmeadows, U.S.A.</i>	NBC	4 November 1951	27 April 1952
<i>The Guiding Light</i>	CBS	30 June 1952	Continuing
<i>One Man's (Woman's) Experience</i>	DuMont	6 October 1952	10 April 1953
<i>The Bennetts</i>	NBC	6 July 1953	8 January 1954
<i>Three Steps to Heaven</i>	NBC	3 August 1953	31 December 1954
<i>Follow Your Heart</i>	NBC	3 August 1953	8 January 1954
<i>Valiant Lady</i>	CBS	12 October 1953	16 August 1957
<i>The Brighter Day</i>	CBS	4 January 1954	25 September 1962
<i>The Secret Storm</i>	CBS	1 February 1954	8 February 1974
<i>Woman with a Past</i>	CBS	1 February 1954	2 July 1954
<i>Portia Faces Life</i>	CBS	5 April 1954	1 July 1955
<i>The World of Mr Sweeney</i>	NBC	30 June 1954	31 December 1955
<i>Concerning Miss Marlowe</i>	NBC	5 July 1954	1 July 1955
<i>First Love</i>	NBC	5 July 1954	30 December 1955
<i>Golden Windows</i>	NBC	5 July 1954	8 April 1955
<i>The Seeking Heart</i>	CBS	5 July 1954	10 December 1954
<i>A Time to Live</i>	NBC	5 July 1954	31 December 1954
<i>The Greatest Gift</i>	NBC	30 August 1954	1 July 1955
<i>Modern Romances</i>	NBC	4 October 1954	19 September 1958
<i>Road of Life</i>	CBS	13 December 1954	1 July 1955
<i>Way of the World</i>	NBC	3 January 1955	7 October 1955
<i>A Date With Life</i>	NBC	10 October 1955	29 June 1956
<i>As the World Turns</i>	CBS	2 April 1956	Continuing
<i>The Edge of Night</i>	CBS	2 April 1956	28 November 1975
	ABC	1 December 1975	28 December 1984
<i>Hotel Cosmopolitan</i>	CBS	19 August 1957	11 April 1958
<i>The Verdict is Yours</i>	CBS	2 September 1957	28 September 1962
<i>Kitty Foyle</i>	NBC	13 January 1958	27 June 1958
<i>From These Roots</i>	NBC	30 June 1958	29 December 1961
<i>Today is Ours</i>	NBC	30 June 1958	26 December 1958
<i>Young Doctor Malone</i>	NBC	29 December 1958	29 March 1963
<i>For Better or Worse</i>	CBS	29 June 1959	24 June 1960
<i>The House on High Street</i>	NBC	28 September 1959	5 February 1960
<i>Full Circle</i>	CBS	27 June 1960	10 March 1961

**Table 6.2 (Continued)**  
**US Network Television Soap Operas**  
 (Excluding syndicated and cable programmes)

Programme	Channel	Start Date	End Date
<i>The Clear Horizon</i>	CBS	11 July 1960	11 March 1961
	CBS	26 February 1962	11 June 1962
<i>Road to Reality</i>	ABC	17 October 1960	31 March 1961
<i>Dr Kildare</i>	NBC (prime time)	28 September 1961	30 August 1966
<i>Our Five Daughters</i>	ABC	2 January 1962	28 September 1962
<i>Ben Jerrod, Attorney at Law</i>	ABC	1 April 1963	28 June 1963
<i>The Doctors</i>	NBC (anthology)	1 April 1963	28 February 1964
	NBC	2 March 1964	31 December 1982
<i>General Hospital</i>	ABC	1 April 1963	Continuing
<i>Another World</i>	NBC	4 May 1964	Continuing
<i>Peyton Place</i>	ABC (prime time)	15 September 1964	2 June 1969
<i>The Young Marrieds</i>	ABC	5 October 1964	25 March 1966
<i>A Time for Us</i>	ABC	28 December 1964	16 December 1966
<i>The Long, Hot Summer</i>	ABC (prime time)	16 September 1965	13 July 1966
<i>Moment of Truth</i>	NBC	4 January 1965	5 November 1965
<i>Our Private World</i>	CBS (prime time)	5 May 1965	10 September 1965
<i>Morning Star</i>	NBC	27 September 1965	1 July 1966
<i>Paradise Bay</i>	NBC	27 September 1965	1 July 1966
<i>Never Too Young</i>	ABC	27 September 1965	24 June 1966
<i>The Nurses</i>	ABC	27 September 1965	31 March 1967
<i>Days of Our Lives</i>	NBC	8 November 1965	Continuing
<i>Confidential for Women</i>	ABC (anthology)	28 March 1966	8 July 1966
<i>Dark Shadows</i>	ABC	27 June 1966	2 April 1971
<i>Love Is a Many Splendored Thing</i>	CBS	18 September 1967	23 March 1973
<i>One Life to Live</i>	ABC	15 July 1968	Continuing
<i>Hidden Faces</i>	NBC	30 December 1968	27 June 1969
<i>Where the Heart Is</i>	CBS	8 September 1969	23 March 1973
<i>The Survivors</i>	ABC	9 September 1969	17 September 1970
<i>Bright Promise</i>	NBC	29 September 1969	31 March 1972
<i>The Survivors</i>	ABC	29 September 1969	17 September 1970
<i>All My Children</i>	ABC	5 January 1970	Continuing
<i>Another World—Somerset / Somerset</i>	NBC	30 March 1970	31 December 1976
<i>A World Apart</i>	ABC	30 March 1970	25 June 1971
<i>The Best of Everything</i>	ABC	30 March 1970	25 September 1970
<i>Return to Peyton Place</i>	NBC	3 April 1972	4 January 1974
<i>The Young and the Restless</i>	CBS	26 March 1973	Continuing
<i>How to Survive a Marriage</i>	NBC	7 January 1974	18 April 1975
<i>Ryan's Hope</i>	ABC	7 July 1975	13 January 1989
<i>Beacon Hill</i>	CBS (prime time)	25 August 1975	4 November 1975
<i>Executive Suite</i>	CBS (prime time)	20 September 1976	11 February 1977
<i>Lovers and Friends</i>	NBC	3 January 1977	6 May 1977
<i>Soap</i>	ABC (prime time)	13 September 1977	20 April 1981
<i>For Richer, For Poorer</i>	NBC	6 December 1977	29 September 1978
<i>Dallas</i>	CBS (prime time)	2 April 1978	3 May 1991
<i>Knots landing</i>	CBS (prime time)	27 December 1979	13 May 1993
<i>Texas</i>	NBC	4 August 1980	31 December 1982
<i>Secrets of Midland Heights</i>	CBS (prime time)	2 December 1980	24 January 1981
<i>Number 96</i>	NBC	10 December 1980	2 January 1981



**Table 6.2 (Continued)**  
**US Network Television Soap Operas**  
 (Excluding syndicated and cable programmes)

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Channel</b>	<b>Start Date</b>	<b>End Date</b>
<i>Flamingo Road</i>	NBC (prime time)	6 January 1981	13 July 1982
<i>Dynasty</i>	ABC (prime time)	12 January 1981	4 May 1989
<i>Behind The Screen</i>	CBS (prime time)	9 October 1981	8 January 1982
<i>Falcon Crest</i>	CBS (prime time)	4 December 1981	17 May 1990
<i>King's Crossing</i>	ABC (prime time)	16 January 1982	27 February 1982
<i>Capitol</i>	CBS	26 March 1982	20 March 1987
<i>Bare Essence</i>	NBC (prime time)	15 February 1983	29 April 1983
<i>The Hamptons</i>	ABC (prime time)	27 July 1983	24 August 1983
<i>The Yellow Rose</i>	NBC (prime time)	2 October 1983	12 May 1984
<i>Loving</i>	ABC	26 June 1983	Continuing
<i>Emerald Point, N.A.S</i>	CBS (prime time)	26 September 1983	12 March 1984
<i>Santa Barbara</i>	NBC	30 July 1984	15 January 1993
<i>Paper Dolls</i>	ABC (prime time)	23 September 1984	25 December 1984
<i>Berenger's</i>	NBC (prime time)	5 January 1985	9 March 1985
<i>The Colby's</i>	ABC (prime time)	20 November 1985	26 March 1987
<i>The Bold and the Beautiful</i>	CBS	23 March 1987	Continuing
<i>Generations</i>	NBC	27 March 1990	25 January 1991
<i>Twin Peaks</i>	ABC (prime time)	8 April 1990	10 June 1991

## UK soap opera

### Radio

British radio developed very differently to the American commercial model. The BBC began broadcasting in November 1922 as a private company, becoming a public corporation acting as a trustee for the national interest from the beginning of 1927. The British Broadcasting Corporation was established to inform, educate and entertain as a public service funded by the licence fee. The first director general, John Reith, later Lord Reith, provided the high-minded guiding-spirit that partly shaped public service broadcasting in Britain. The BBC was imbued with a cultural and moral mission and the belief that it was the duty of the educated elite to use broadcasting for the enlightenment of the general public. The Reithian ethos eschewed the soap opera as such. The continuous serial, born in the climate of competitive commercial broadcasting, initially had no place in a monopoly public service system. However, the genre did cross the Atlantic and exert an influence on the emergence of the continuing radio serial in Britain.

By the late thirties, popular serial dramas could be heard, not on the BBC, but on the very different continental commercial station Radio Luxembourg, perhaps best known for introducing *The Ovaltineys*. These were generally transcriptions of American soaps of the escapist variety. A daily soap, *Plain Jane*, introduced as 'The story of Plane Jane Wilson and her struggle for those things that every woman longs for—love and happiness', was sponsored by Rinso from September 1938. From October she was joined by *Young Widow Jones*, 'the moving story of a woman's heart and a woman's love' sponsored by Milk of Magnesia, together with the American serial *Backstage Wife*, presented by Lyons Tooth Powder. From the following October, *Stella Dallas* could be heard on Radio Luxembourg, sponsored by California Syrup of Figs. Such delights were suspended when Radio Luxembourg closed during the Second World War.

Meanwhile, a number of serials set around families were to be heard on the BBC. The first British radio family to appear in a regular series were *The Plums*, making their début on 4 October 1937. The first attempt to establish a family serial was made with *The English Family Robinson*. The first episode of these 'Everyday happenings in an everyday household' was heard on 7 October 1938. In July 1939 *The Home Front* introduced the first wartime radio family, in a drama entitled 'The Air Raid'. A series followed, beginning on 10 October 1939



with 'The Leversuch Family at War'. *The Armstrongs*, a radio family written by playwrights Ronald Gow and Walter Greenwood was devised as an educational experiment for schools programmes. First broadcast on 6 August 1940, it later developed into a weekly wartime series for adults. Although such series were based around a family, they did not employ a continuous narrative. Nevertheless they provided the background for the first continuous daily serial produced by the BBC.

*Front Line Family*, the first attempt at what was essentially a soap opera, was a propaganda piece not originally broadcast to Britain. Once again it was the story of a family named Robinson, intended to reflect how an average British household was bearing up in wartime London. *Front Line Family* was first transmitted on the Overseas Service from 28 April 1941, with Alan Melville writing and producing the fifteen-minute weekday programme for the first two-hundred episodes. The serial was heard around the world and the audience response was generally found to be favourable among regular listeners, although there was also evidence of vigorous vocal hostility.

The war had obliged the BBC to provide more popular programming to sustain morale. After the war, radio was reorganised into three streamed services, the Light, Home, Third Programmes, conceived as cultural pyramid aimed toward raising public taste, with the popular at the base. The head of the new Light Programme decided that *Front Line Family* would fit the bill. Val Gielgud, the long-serving head of radio drama, was openly hostile to the suggestion. He regarded it as unfit for domestic consumption and was concerned that creative talent would be condemned to a treadmill, writing in a memo: 'In short, my view is that if the suggestion is implemented we shall be creating a Frankenstein monster whose influence upon programmes will be bad, though its popularity may be immediately good.'<sup>16</sup>

*The Robinson Family* as it was retitled, was nevertheless scheduled in the Light Programme from 30 July 1945, to be renamed *The Robinsons* on 31 March 1947 and running until 24 December 1947. This serial paved the way for two of the classic continuing radio serials, *Mrs Dale's Diary* and *The Archers*.

*Mrs Dale's Diary*, which directly succeeded *The Robinsons*, was first introduced on the Light Programme at 4pm on 5 January 1948 with a repeat the following morning. Among the original writers were Ted Willis, who was to become one of the most prolific scriptwriters, and Jonquil Antony who had previously worked on *The Robinsons*. In many ways this was a similar



programme. The fifteen-minute episodes reflected comfortable middle class family values in the home of a doctor in a leafy London suburb. An innovation was the use of the device of a diary to avoid using an explicit narrator. Mrs Dale's diary provided the narrative thread, with her voice-over introducing the dramatised action. The focus was always domestic. Mrs Dale was the woman who coped, with her famous catchline 'I'm worried about Jim'.

The programme was produced under the reluctant aegis of Val Gielgud, who remained positively hostile to the programme, expressing an antipathy to the form as such. In June 1948 he wrote that he found *Mrs Dale's Diary* to be 'socially corrupting by its monstrous flattery of the ego of the "common man" and "soul destroying" to the actors, authors and producers concerned.'<sup>17</sup> He felt that the production of such a serial would become a chore to producers and scriptwriters alike, scarcely preferable to working on a factory conveyor belt. He repeatedly asked for it to be replaced by something superior.

Lacking a *raison d'être* in sponsorship or advertising, the public service serial was avowedly serious in its tone of social realism and responsibility, as stated in a BBC policy document that stressed the realistic ambitions of the proposed programme and explicitly rejected that it was a soap opera: 'This serial has a simple object: to hold a mirror to the everyday life of a normal, middle class family. It is not a soap-opera of the kind which abounds in American daytime radio and is therefore not subject to the restrictive rules and practices of sponsors and their agents.' It went on: 'In other words, *Mrs Dale's Diary* should strive to achieve a realism which is specifically withheld from its American counterparts.'<sup>18</sup>

After a couple of years, there was some concern that the Dales were becoming too comfortably well off. A report was commissioned to investigate their apparent social standing to arrest any tendency for the Dales to climb too high in the middle classes. Audience research suggested that the Dales were perceived by listeners to be an idealised family circle, having faults but not vices and suffering tribulations while untouched by tragedy. It was originally felt that if the serial was to run indefinitely, the characters should never age, marry, divorce, have children, or otherwise change their status. However, under pressure from the writers, after three years it was considered that there would be no harm in allowing the characters to have birthdays, weddings or deaths, even if it was envisaged continuing the programme for a further ten years. On 27 February 1962 the programme became *The Dales* and the practice moved to the fictional new town



of Exton. After twenty-one years, doctor Dale retired and the final episode, number 5431, was broadcast on 25 April 1969.

*Waggoners Walk* replaced *The Dales* from 28 April 1969. Set in a Hampstead flat, it set out to avoid a middle class bias and depicted social problems. It adopted a straight dramatic presentation. After eleven years, the run ended on 30 May 1980 with episode 2,824.

*The Archers*, which began shortly after *Mrs Dale's Dairy*, continues as the longest-running radio serial ever produced. The story goes that the seeds were sown at a meeting in Birmingham between farming representatives and the BBC when one farmer suggested a presentation in the manner of *Dick Barton*, the immensely successful nightly radio serial conceived as an escapist strip cartoon of the air that began on 7 October 1946. Godfrey Baseley, a producer of farming programmes for the BBC in the Midlands, took up the idea, and the team behind *Dick Barton* were employed as the original writers.<sup>19</sup> A product of a period of austerity, the initial intent was to disseminate Ministry of Agriculture farming information and offer a metaphorical breath of fresh air to alleviate the gloom of food-rationed post-war Britain. *The Archers* began as a one-week trial in the Midlands on Whit Monday 1950, moving to the Light Programme on 1 January 1951, originally in the late mornings, but after three months it replaced *Dick Barton* in the early evening.

The début of independent television in Britain on 22 September 1955 was deliberately overshadowed by a cliff-hanger episode in which the much loved character of Grace Archer died in a stable fire. As television began to erode radio audiences, the serial slumped in the late sixties and early seventies and was considered for the axe. Audience research suggested that listeners were beginning to doubt the credibility of the serial, finding the storylines to be increasingly unreal.

The programme survived the slump and through the eighties audience figures improved. The ten thousandth episode was celebrated on 26 May 1989, followed by the 40th anniversary in January 1991. Under a succession of women editors there was a noticeable tendency towards a more feminist perspective. Farming matters remain on the agenda, reflecting contemporary controversies in agricultural issues. A consistent complaint from many of the serial's regular listenership of 7.5 million is that their serial has sunk to the level of a television soap opera. A favourite charge is that the programme has also become increasingly concerned with plot development and is populated by stereotypical



characters. Two of the original cast, June Spender and Norman Painting, playing the parts of Peggy and Phil Archer, have been with the serial since the first episode.

Described as 'the everyday story of country folk', it continues as Britain's longest-running radio serial and the cosy rural community of Ambridge has become a national institution. *The Archers* continues to create a fictional world of its own for millions of radio listeners. It remains an extraordinary combination of middle class middle England and rustic rural romanticism, providing a surrogate family for the nation and a folk memory of stability and order. Such is the affection with which *The Archers* is held by its loyal listeners among the chattering classes, its discontinuation is almost unthinkable. The Radio Four audience is formidable when roused. Whatever its secret, its escapist success has proved impossible to emulate.

*Citizens*, a twice-weekly serial introduced by Radio Four on 27 October 1987, attempted to apply the more modern elements of the television soap to the continuing radio drama. It centred on the permanently bickering occupants of shared house in London. With an urban setting and a strident tone, it was consciously compared to and encouraged by BBC television's *EastEnders*, but it did not share a similar success. After failing to capture a substantial audience, it was finally dropped on 25 July 1991.

As if to prove that the radio soap opera is still alive, from October 1992 Radio 5 briefly carried an American serial set in a small Californian coastal town, *Milford Haven*. From January 1993 the BBC Russian Service broadcast a soap opera depicting the lives of ordinary Muscovites living in a communal apartment block, entitled *House Seven, Entrance Four*, intended to explain the workings of a market economy in a democratic society.

## Television

British television adopted much the same public service remit as radio. Under the influence of the Reithian paternalistic tradition, BBC television drama had adopted the predominant patterns of radio and repertory theatre. The single play was the privileged form of television drama. The emergence of a family serial followed a similar pattern to that on radio, with an early experiment aimed at children.

*The Appleyards*, the first British television family, ran as part of children's television from October 1952, broadcast irregularly in series of six twenty-minute



instalments at fortnightly intervals until April 1957. It was conceived as dealing with a family confronting everyday domestic problems, not least making both ends meet. The story and dialogue were to be ordinary, with the comedy and drama arising from ordinary everyday occurrences.

In 1953, the BBC's controller of television programmes advocated the possibility of a family serial for a family audience. Writer Michael Pertwee suggested the possibility of creating a television serial akin to *The Archers* or *The Dales* that would run throughout the year. The original suggestion was that it might run, if not daily, perhaps twice or three times a week. In the event, it was felt that resources would not possibly permit such an exercise, but a weekly serial seemed attractive. The format would be based on self-contained stories, each with a beginning, middle and an end, with only loose continuity between episodes so the viewers could come to each programme and pick up the threads.

*The Grove Family*, named after the BBC's Lime Grove studios in west London, began in April 1954, perhaps not co-incidentally, the year before the corporation was to face competition from commercial television. The programme was produced not by the drama department but by light entertainment, a term that revealed the corporation's attitude to that area of programming. It was broadcast live in black and white, for twenty minutes every Friday at 7.50pm. By the end of the year, the family saga had established a following of nearly 9 million viewers, beaten only by the panel show *What's My Line?* and *Ask Pickles*. The programme portrayed a suburban middle class family that was just beginning to feel comfortable in the wake of post-war privation. There was a close identity with the presumed audience of those that were sufficiently well off to be able to afford a television set. The message reassured the audience about the social status quo, underwriting traditional family values. With a strong informational content, the serial was somewhat moral in tone. The family was seen as the key and the centre of all social life and the virtues of tolerance and understanding were central. Viewers generally expressed great affection for the television family. In a visit to the studios, the Queen Mother congratulated the Groves on being 'so English, so real'.

In 1955, there were high-level discussions about the possibility of extending *The Grove Family* into a live programme running for ten minutes every weekday, with a Sunday omnibus edition. However, it was calculated the financial implications would prove insuperable and the plan was abandoned. Instead the episodes were extended to a weekly half hour as part of an increase in programme



hours in preparation for commercial competition. Ironically, on the opening night of independent television, one of the first advertisements shown on British television featured Ruth Denning, the actress who played Mrs Grove, advertising Persil soap for Lever Brothers.

After three years, the writers left the programme which then moved to six o'clock on Wednesday evenings, where it did not perform so well. The BBC failed to persist with the serial, and it was scrapped shortly afterwards. This final episode, number 146, 'Under Way', in which the Groves left home for a permanent holiday, is one of only two recorded on film for posterity. The Groves also appeared in the first feature film to be based on a television serial, *It's A Great Day*, released in 1956, written by Roland and Michael Pertwee. Although as a family serial *The Grove Family* was related in kind to the soap opera, this form of inherently commercial, popular programming was alien to the BBC's conception of public service broadcasting.

The arrival of independent television presented the corporation with a formidable challenge. The term 'independent' rather than 'commercial' was a significant euphemism. Sponsorship of programming was specifically outlawed on the new commercial channel, but the first morning of independent television saw the start of British television's first daily serial, which was identifiably a soap opera.

*Sixpenny Corner*, an Associated-Rediffusion production, began on 23 September 1955, and was promoted on the cover of the first *TV Times*. The first week's episodes were shot on film, after which the programme was screened live. It ran in fifteen-minute episodes mid-morning every weekday, moving the following year to the early evening after the 'toddlers truce' close-down. Billed as 'a daily serial telling of the life, love and tribulations of young Bill and Sally Norton and their garage at Sixpenny Corner in rural Springwood', it was written by Jonquil Antony formerly of *Mrs Dale's Diary* and Hazel Adair who later went on to create *Crossroads*.

*One Family* production, began when ATV made its début in the Midlands and was broadcast every weekday at teatime from February 1956. A direct answer to the success of the Grove family, it was written by R. F. Delderfield and described as day-to-day serial of the lives of the Armstrongs: 'The story of a typical British family with strong Empire connections set mainly in their big rambling house at The Old Vicarage at Mossbank, a fictional suburb of London.'



*Emergency-Ward Ten*, the first major ITV soap began in February 1957. Associated Television's medical drama concerning the lives and loves of doctors and nurses was the first British bi-weekly continuing serial. In October 1966 it switched to hour-long, self-contained episodes shown at the weekend. Ratings eventually slumped and ATV scrapped the show after nearly a thousand episodes the following year. The company chief, Lew Grade, later diagnosed the decision to drop it as one of his greatest professional mistakes.

### *Coronation Street*

The longest-running drama serial on British television sprang from humble origins in the North West of England. In many ways it typified the values of Granada Television, confirming the company's aspirations to break away from the dominance of the capital and establish the unique identity of 'Granadaland'. One of the most important characteristics of independent television had been the creation of regional franchises, intended to stimulate competition. The federal structure of the independent television system fostered the regional focus that was to become a part of the unique British tradition in serial drama.

Independent television had been least successful when it attempted to compete in traditional BBC strongholds such as classic drama. In the arena of the single play, a form born of the theatre and thus considered culturally respectable, independent television gradually introduced a new emphasis on working class concerns with the emergence of what was to be termed somewhat derogatorily 'kitchen sink drama'. The trend towards contemporary social realism that found expression in literature, theatre and film was also adopted in television drama. One of the first plays produced by Granada Television was John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, shown on 28 November 1956, based on the London stage production. Richard Hoggart's autobiographical description of working class culture, *The Uses of Literacy*, published in 1957, has also been seen as a key component of the cultural context which created a uniquely British continuous serial.

An important transatlantic influence was the arrival at ABC Television in 1958 of a Canadian, Sidney Newman. He recognised the importance of television as a mass medium and saw an untapped audience in the growing numbers of ordinary working class families who now had television. He went on to implement a policy of presenting original populist plays by contemporary dramatists, written for the medium and concerned with topical issues. Helped by



protective scheduling, these single plays proved to be immensely popular and were an important element in establishing a realist mode of contemporary television drama which created the climate in which the single most significant British drama serial evolved.

At Granada television, another Canadian, Harry Elton, then executive producer of drama, spotted the potential of a script given to him by a twenty-three year-old writer, Tony Warren. Somewhat unfulfilled by adapting the *Biggles* books for television, and wishing to write about his own experience, he had already submitted a proposal called *Our Street* to the BBC. Noting the new trend in theatre and film towards the presentation of working class northerners, he attempted to create something similar for television, set in the Manchester district of Salford, under the working title *Florizel Street*. In a memo to the management he described the proposed programme's subject as: 'A fascinating freemasonry, a volume of unwritten rules. These are the driving forces behind life in a working-class street in the north of England. The purpose of *Florizel Street* is to examine a community of this nature, and to entertain.'<sup>20</sup> The title was eventually changed when a tea-lady said that Florizel sounded like a disinfectant. There was a suggestion that the programme should be softened and made more middle class, but a pilot of the first episode dispelled such doubts. The dialogue was closely observed, featuring some of the gentle verbal comedy of manners that has since become characteristic of the programme. Some snatches of conversation, such as when Mrs Lappin describes a sign she used to have in the shop 'Please do not ask for credit as a refusal often offends', had close parallels with passages in Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*. Warren himself wrote the first five parts and another writer, H. V. Kershaw, was brought in for an additional seven episodes to complete a trial run of thirteen, including a conclusion in which the street was to be demolished.

*Coronation Street* was first seen at 7pm on Friday 9 December 1960. The first episode was transmitted live, with the second tele-recorded immediately afterwards. The programme went out regionally on Wednesdays and Fridays until 3 May 1961, when it switched to Mondays and Wednesdays in a network slot. In the first year, more than thirty writers contributed, all of them from the North, many working for the first time in television. The success of the series was in sharp contrast to that of its creator, Tony Warren who left the *Street* after three years. Having disavowed the series for decades, he now continues as a consultant to Granada.



Only the character of Ken Barlow, played by William Roach, still survives from the opening episode, in which he appeared as scholarship boy acutely aware of his working class origins. Over the subsequent decades, much has changed, but in many respects much remains the same. In the first thirty years of the programme there were as many weddings, ten births and forty-nine deaths, nine of which were seen on screen, and the street saw a total of over 180 residents.

The highest recorded UK audience for a single screening of a soap opera was for an episode of *Coronation Street* transmitted on 14 November 1984, watched by 20.4 million viewers. *Coronation Street* has been shown in America, first syndicated in 1972 and later shown on the USA Cable Network in 1982, but it never found a following.

In its long history, *Coronation Street* has adapted and expanded to cope with competition. An omnibus repeat edition was first introduced on Sunday 22 January 1989 in direct response to the ratings success of the BBC's *EastEnders*, although the repeat was later dropped by most regions. More significant was the introduction of a third weekly episode on 20 October 1989, with which the programme moved to Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights. With this significant expansion in production, Granada was careful not to kill their golden goose by sacrificing production values.

In the early days, the street itself was built in the studio, although this was later replaced by an exterior set. As the programme moved into the nineties, a full-size exterior set was expanded to include a new development, reflecting patterns of infill redevelopment amid the traditional terraces of Salford. Modern cameras, that were more portable and requiring less lighting, enabled an increase in the amount of location shooting and injected a brisker pace into the programme's production.

*Coronation Street* perhaps owes its longevity to a capacity to accommodate evolutionary change. The programme has also consciously addressed its appeal to younger viewers, while taking care not to alienate old members of the audience who grew up on the *Street*. Inevitably, such change has been resented by some in the audience and has been seen as a betrayal of the working class culture from which it sprang. The serial has been criticised by some as living in a nostalgic world of its own, trapped in a time warp around the period of its inception. Whatever criticisms may be made, its roots remain resolutely in the representation of working class life and it helped to establish a tradition of social realism that has since been adopted by successive successful soaps. The undeniable importance of



the serial has attracted a level of critical attention not normally given to popular television programmes.<sup>21</sup>

Granada Television emphatically rejects the 'soap opera' label, preferring to refer to it as a 'folk opera'. To most of its audience, such a distinction would appear spurious. It continues to consistently perform as the most popular programme on ITV and has become something of a national institution. In the 1991 ITV franchise round, it seemed almost inconceivable that the network could lose the provider of perhaps its single most important programme in terms of popular appeal. With its franchise and financial viability assured, Granada seemed set to continue providing the leading brand of British soap for the foreseeable future.

In response to competition that came with the end of its monopoly, the BBC was obliged to broaden its notion of public service broadcasting. In reply to programmes such as *Emergency-Ward Ten*, the corporation produced *Starr and Company*, about a family buoy making firm of that name, set in the town of Sullbridge on the south coast. It was shown on Mondays and Thursdays from March 1958 but was only modestly successful and it sank without trace after seventy-seven episodes. This was the first of a series of twice-weekly workplace serials that represented the BBC's main reply to the success of the continuing drama serial, but it was four years before their next attempt.

*Compact* was a clean, slightly scented soap set in the world of a women's magazine, shown on Tuesdays and Thursdays for 373 episodes from 1962 to 1965. A collaboration between the drama and light entertainment departments, it was conceived by Hazel Adair, who had co-written independent television's first daily serial, and written by Peter Ling. Although there was an attempt at authenticity, it did not ring true. Despite being a modest success with the audience, it began at the same time as the highly acclaimed and highly rated police series *Z-Cars* and perhaps suffered from comparison. The serial was seen inside the corporation as being 'not very BBC', and few were proud of its achievement. To some it was a positive embarrassment. Among its defenders was Donald Baverstock, the assistant controller of programmes who was later to go to Yorkshire Television where he launched *Emmerdale Farm*.

Another brief attempt to create a twice weekly serial was made with *Swizzlewick*, set around a town hall. It ran for just thirteen weeks in 1964, briefly giving the BBC a continuing serial on four out of five weekday evenings. *Compact* was briefly replaced by *199 Park Lane*, followed by two new continuing



serials. *United* followed the faltering fortunes of Brentwich United, a fictional football team in the Midlands, kicking off for 147 episodes on Mondays and Wednesdays from 1965 until 1967. It was complemented in the schedule by *The Newcomers*, featuring a London family settling into the fictional East Anglian overspill town of Angleton, which ran for 430 episodes until 1969. This was replaced by *The Doctors*, set in a north London National Health Service group general practice. The emphasis on authenticity was a far cry from the world of *Emergency–Ward Ten*. The first BBC bi-weekly serial to be made in colour, it ran until 1971.

Meanwhile, in independent television there was a commercial incentive, even an imperative, to persist with continuous serials. For many years, the main commercial competitor to *Coronation Street* came from a serial that for many manifested the worst aspects of soap opera and was probably single-handedly responsible for the critical contempt with which the genre was held for many years in Britain.

*Crossroads* was written by Hazel Adair and Peter Ling, the team behind *Compact*, and was produced for Associated Television by Reg Watson. *Crossroads* was first seen regionally on 2 November 1964 at 6.30pm. It was set in a Midlands motel, and was originally to have been called *Midland Road*. At a time when motorways seemed new and glamorous, a motel offered a model setting for a mobile society, with a high turnover of guests from different places and different classes. Often denigrated as drama and the butt of much stand-up comedy, it was popularly said that the walls gave the most moving performance in the programme. *Crossroads* was partially networked every weekday evening from January 1965 but was not nationally networked until 1972. Under pressure from the television authority to improve the programme, production was cut to four episodes a week in 1967 and down to three episodes in 1980. Although an audience success, *Crossroads* was the subject of unparalleled criticism within the industry for its poor production values. Lord Lew Grade defended the programme with the declaration 'I don't make programmes for critics—I make programmes for viewers'.<sup>22</sup> As late as 1982, when Central Television took over the Midlands franchise, the programme was deprived of post-production editing facilities, largely on grounds of economic and production constraints.<sup>23</sup> Laudably, despite its teatime transmission, the serial did attempt to tackle difficult social issues. In September 1987 the programme was relaunched, although the decision to end the



series had already been taken in principle and the show reached the end of the road after twenty-three years and 4,510 episodes in April 1988.

As the commercial companies continued to try and find a winning formula, the independent television authority was eager to see more programmes with a regional flavour that would also appeal to a national audience. In many cases attempts were frustrated by the federal structure of the network and a system that was dominated by a small group of companies.

*Weavers Green* was an attempt by the small independent contractor Anglia Television to break into the big time. This drama about an East Anglian country vet resembled a cross between *The Archers* and *The Dales*, and it was the first predominantly 'outdoor' serial, shot mainly on location. It began in April 1966 but was hampered from the start by the pattern of scheduling, being shown Thursday evenings and Saturday or Sunday afternoons. This was more of a convenience to networking system that split the weekday and weekend franchises for London and the Midlands between different companies. The serial proved to be a ratings success and Anglia attempted to get a second weekday network screening but they were squeezed out by the bigger companies who wanted the slot for *Emergency-Ward Ten*. This provoked much bitterness and cynicism. Anglia went on to screen it on Mondays and Thursdays in their own region from July, but the serial was scrapped after fifty-two episodes having balanced its books.

The search for the perfect soap setting persisted. *Driveway* was an unlikely choice. The story of the drama of a driving school, it went out twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays for just sixteen weeks in 1968. *Honey Lane* was a twice weekly revival of ATV's earlier episodic series success *Market in Honey Pot Lane*, set in a cockney street market built at ATV's Elstree studios, the site later to be used by the BBC for *EastEnders*. After several changes in transmission time, running in the afternoons and late at night in different ITV areas, the market finally closed after six months in March 1969.

In January 1972 it was announced that restrictions on broadcasting hours would be ended, following pressure from broadcasters on successive governments. As a result, a new pattern of daytime programmes was created on independent television, with nineteen new programmes launched in one week. The gap was to be filled partly by new drama, although none of the continuing series introduced would have been described as soaps.



*Emmerdale Farm*, originally screened on Mondays and Thursdays, was produced by Yorkshire Television. A rural serial about life in the Yorkshire dales, it was in the tradition of *The Archers* and the earliest radio soaps, but it was presented as a drama serial rather than a soap opera. *Harriet's Back in Town* was a twice-weekly domestic drama serial produced by Thames Television. It concerned the problems of a divorced woman having to cope with finding a job and bringing up a daughter on her own. *General Hospital*, which ran on Thursdays and Fridays revived the earlier Associated Television prescription of *Emergency-Ward Ten*, with a medical drama series on similar lines to the successful American ABC serial of the same title. In 1975 production switched to Elstree, with a larger set, and from March it was screened in late evening weekly hour-long episodes until it ended in 1979. Of the new daytime serials, *General Hospital* demonstrated popular appeal, but *Emmerdale Farm* proved to be a long-lasting success. Over the course of more than twenty years, it has evolved into the second longest-running soap opera on British television.

### *Emmerdale Farm*

First seen from 1.30pm on Monday 16 October 1972, *Emmerdale Farm* was Britain's first lunchtime television drama series by a small margin. The Yorkshire Television production was created by Kevin Laffan as a rural drama about life in the Yorkshire dales. It was originally written as a play in parts, initially commissioned for only thirteen episodes, and intended to run no more than two years at most. It once had a reputation for being slow-moving, but gradually, the continuing storyline element was increased and the seasonal serial became a fully-fledged soap.<sup>24</sup>

During its history, it moved through the schedules, from lunchtime, to teatime, to early prime time, although for the first fifteen years it was without a full network slot and did not run continuously throughout the year. Eventually it managed to take the place of *Crossroads*, without inheriting its poor reputation. The word 'farm' was finally dropped from the title to broaden its appeal and subsequently the eponymous Emmerdale farm featured less frequently, until it was eventually abandoned altogether.

*Emmerdale* has never achieved the same ratings as the highest profile soaps, but it has always performed consistently. However, it has always drawn an elderly, downmarket audience that can be easily reached by advertisers elsewhere and therefore is not as commercially attractive as it might be. To this end the



producers have attempted to attract younger, more affluent viewers, without driving away the faithful.

Confident investment in resources at the end of the eighties helped to secure the position of the programme. The pace was gradually stepped up, and new younger characters and stronger storylines were introduced. The serial became increasingly glossy, with storylines featuring the *nouveau riche*, although the focus remained on the Sugden family. The appeal of the open air and attractive exteriors remained the serial's unique selling proposition.

The main significance of *Emmerdale* is the way in which it has adapted to the changing broadcasting environment in order to survive. In some ways, *Emmerdale* has assimilated aspects of other serials, to become slicker, glossier, and pacier. From the American supersoaps it has taken a little glamour, from the Australian models it has introduced strong teenage characters. As a result it has perhaps lost some of its distinctiveness in pursuit of popular appeal. As an interesting example of the genre, *Emmerdale* will be considered separately as a case study in soap opera.

British serials have often reflected a regional outlook. The federal structure of the independent television network, with the active encouragement of the regulatory authority, has favoured and fostered a regional flavour for drama productions. For its part, the BBC has always had a commitment to broadcasting on a national basis, with some programmes separately produced in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

*Take the High Road*, a twice-weekly rural serial produced by Scottish Television, started on 19 February 1980 at 7.00pm in Scotland and at 1.30pm elsewhere on the network. One of the smaller independent television companies, STV had gained previous experience in local soap opera production with *High Living*, *A Place of Her Own* and *Garnock Way*. Initially *Take the High Road* competed against two other regional contenders for the network slot, *Taff Acre* from HTV, and *Together* from Southern Television, a studio-based drama set in a block of high-rise flats.<sup>25</sup>

*Take the High Road* had the undoubted benefit of its splendid setting, being set in the small fictional Highland community of Glendarroch, the title being an allusion to a popular Scottish folk song, 'The Bonnie Banks of Loch Lomond' where location scenes are shot. For the first seven years the rest of the serial was shot in an Edinburgh studio without benefit of post-production facilities. When it was decided to run the serial throughout the year production was switched to



STV's Glasgow headquarters. Marking one thousand episodes on 12 October 1992, the serial became something of an institution north of the border, but lacking a network slot was seen as an afternoon filler elsewhere. In June 1993 it was announced that *Take the High Road* would no longer receive a network slot, although in response to pressure from viewers, Scottish Television pledged to continue weekly transmissions in its home country.

*Pobol y Cwm* or 'The People of the Valley', the Welsh national soap opera, was first seen on BBC Wales on 16 October 1974 and was originally shown for half an hour once a week for about thirty episodes a year. Produced by the BBC for the Welsh fourth channel S4C, it became the corporation's longest running soap, celebrating its thousandth episode on 10 January 1992. Uniquely, the programme is taped on the day of transmission, allowing the inclusion of topical references, with a third of every programme pre-recorded on location. It is screened in twenty-minute episodes five nights a week, with a ninety minute omnibus on Sunday afternoons with English subtitles. The serial highlights the daily life of Cwmderi, a fictitious Carmarthanshire community in South West Wales, where the declining industrial past meets contemporary rural life.

*Pobol y Cwm*, *Take the High Road* and indeed *Emmerdale* deal with small rural communities coping with social change, where the last remnants of the essentially agrarian structure are giving way to a more modern way of life. The regional rural serial is something of a sub-genre in itself, gaining a great deal from its scenic setting, which is a strong contrast to the other main tradition in British serials, featuring contemporary urban existence.

### ***Brookside***

The launch of Channel Four Television in 1982, with a remit to provide innovative and distinctive programming, offered new opportunities for independent production. *Brookside*, the most significant commission from this sector, introduced a new brand of soap that was to achieve new realms of realism. Its creator, Phil Redmond, was born and brought up on a council estate just outside Liverpool and educated at the local comprehensive school. He gave up a career as a quantity surveyor to take up writing, receiving his first commission from London Weekend Television in 1973, to write situation comedy. Meanwhile, an outline he produced for a drama serial illustrating the lives of residents on a housing estate was rejected in turn by each of the five major ITV companies and



by the BBC. However, he went on to create the popular long-running children's series *Grange Hill* for the BBC in 1976.

In 1981 Phil Redmond persuaded chief executive Jeremy Isaacs that the new channel needed a regular drama serial, shot on videotape in genuine houses, using real kitchen sinks. The working title of 'Meadowcroft' was changed to *Brookside* following the purchase of a group of houses on Brookside Close in the West Derby area of Liverpool. Six of these were to be used as settings, cabled up to an on-site control gallery. This was itself a radical departure in television drama production. The intention was to provide the look and feel of a real location, while still offering a controlled production environment. In order to work within confined spaces, film-style single camera production techniques were adopted.<sup>26</sup>

*Brookside* was launched on Channel Four's opening night on 2 November 1982, the eighteenth anniversary of *Crossroads*. The programme occupied a prime time 8.00pm slot more usually associated with situation comedy, light entertainment or imported prime-time serials. A weekend omnibus repeat edition was also scheduled. Despite the comfortable homes depicted, which resembled an estate builder's showpiece, the social background reflected the local problems of high unemployment. Initial press and public reaction to *Brookside* concentrated on the serial's uncompromising vernacular. The first episode drew 4.1 million viewers. Within a month the audience had halved. By the following summer, the audience had dropped to half a million. *Brookside* responded by cleaning up its act, softening its approach and introducing more comedy, while retaining its social focus. Viewing figures rose, and by 1984 it had achieved something of cult status. *Brookside* succeeded in providing the channel with an important audience building block, sustaining the evening schedules.

One significant contribution of the serial was the introduction of masculine storylines and a male point of view. This was largely achieved through the incorporation of crime themes, so expanding the traditional boundaries of the soap opera genre. The programme was also the first British serial to offer a significant youth perspective, through the inclusion of school age characters, no doubt reflecting the influence of *Grange Hill*. *Brookside* has dealt with most of television's traditional taboos: rape, suicide and homosexuality.

In the late eighties, *Brookside* became less overtly political, less radical and appeared to be going off the boil. Increasingly middle of the road, the programme itself seemed to have reached a *cul-de-sac*. The fourth channel was also changing, becoming more mainstream in preparation for selling its own airtime from 1993.



In the face of falling audiences, Channel Four considered scrapping their soap. However, Michael Grade, the new chief executive, decided to revamp the serial, which was arguably the channel's greatest audience asset.

In the summer of 1990, most of the directors, half the writing team, and half the cast were changed and a third weekly episode was introduced. The decision had been taken to increase the number of regular characters to accommodate the extra episode, and scarcely any of the original residents remained. Effectively, the serial was quietly relaunched. As a direct result, ratings reached their lowest ebb in April 1991, at 2 million. To accommodate the additional transmission, the world of *Brookside* was extended beyond the confines of the Close. The solution was the creation of a shopping parade, to provide the characters with somewhere to work and meet. The opening of the parade was timed for the thousandth episode on 9 October 1991. To coincide, the murder of a central character was arranged, with a 'whodunit' denouement, with ratings peaking at 7.4 million, a considerable success for the minority channel. In its first ten years, *Brookside* witnessed sixteen deaths, four births, nine marriages, seventeen affairs, and two rapes. Only the character of Barry Grant, played by Paul Usher, remained from the original cast.

The enduring contribution that *Brookside* made to the British soap opera scene was in the development of a new style of production, using single camera techniques in a real environment and so demonstrating a new naturalism and doing something to shake off the association of soap opera with cardboard characters acting in cardboard sets. But for *Brookside*, British soap opera might have remained time-locked in the nostalgia of *Coronation Street*. *Brookside* took the genre and using new production methods revived it and introduced an element of documentary realism.

### *EastEnders*

Throughout the seventies, the BBC had apparently abandoned the idea of the continuing serial, but produced popular episodic workplace drama series that owed much to the genre. *The Brothers*, the saga of the family feuds of a widow, her three sons and a road haulage firm, successfully ran in one-hour episodes for seven series from 1972 to 1976. It was succeeded by *Angels*, which began as an episodic series, adopting a hard-hitting documentary-style approach to hospital drama, exploiting a well-established soap opera setting in an entirely different idiom to the romantic ideal of previous hospital soaps. From the fifth season in



1979 until the end of 1983 it was scheduled as a continuing biweekly serial in twenty-five minute episodes on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Less of a success was *Triangle*, set on a North Sea ferry running between Gothenburg, Felixstowe and Amsterdam and shot entirely on location on portable video. A technical triumph over adversity and an unmitigated critical failure, it ran in twenty-six parts series from 1981 to 1983. The failure of such serials to find a permanent fixture in the schedule perhaps reflected a certain uneasiness about such programming that was undoubtedly felt in certain circles. The culture within the public service corporation remained generally hostile and there was a lack of commitment to the genre.

Interest in the serial form was no doubt renewed by the example of *Brookside*, which demonstrated that continuous drama could be produced to high standards and retain dramatic integrity and social relevance. Given the will and the impetus from above, the BBC undoubtedly had the experience and the resources to mount such a production. The result was a watershed in the corporation's commitment to the continuing serial.

In late 1983 the BBC bought the former ATV studios at Elstree with a view to producing a major new twice-weekly continuous drama serial. A prime mover was the new head of drama series and serials, Jonathan Powell. An approach was made to producer Julia Smith, who had previously worked as a director on *The Newcomers*, the BBC's last continuing weekly serial. She teamed up with her long time collaborator, Tony Holland, with whom she had first worked on the police series *Z-Cars* and latterly the hospital drama series *Angels*, which became a bi-weekly serial, and the more sedate drama *District Nurse*. They prepared a proposal that was commissioned in January 1984.<sup>27</sup> Although it was apparently conceived through a process of creative inspiration, rather than any attempt to find a formula, the corporation was careful to underwrite its investment with market research which suggested a fairly favourable audience attitude to the proposed programme and also revealed the extent to which viewer predispositions were influenced by *Coronation Street*.<sup>28</sup>

Work began on the construction of the outdoor set at Elstree. The design for the fictional setting for Albert Square in Walford was based upon a Victorian square in East London. The production resources offered to the new serial reflected the rehabilitation of the 'soap opera' in certain BBC circles. Fittingly, one of the social spaces adopted as a meeting place in the BBC's first unabashed soap opera was a launderette.



Set in a predominantly working class community in the East End of London, the characters featured a collection of cheerful cockneys, minor villains, and a representative selection of immigrants. The extended family, so often at the centre of the soap opera structure was represented by the Beales. The original matriarch, Lou, bore a certain family resemblance to the cantankerous Ma Grove.

The BBC launched *EastEnders* amid considerable media attention, with the first transmission on 19 February 1985. The scheduling and the high publicity profile of the programme can be largely attributed to Michael Grade, the newly appointed controller of BBC1. Together with the chat show *Wogan*, *EastEnders* was intended to provide fixed points to introduce much needed stability in the early evening schedule. *EastEnders* was originally scheduled at 7.00pm. The first episode was watched by 17.35 million, dropping to 14.45 million for the next episode and falling to around 12 million by the end of the first month. However, audience data demonstrated the serial's broad appeal and appreciation research proved to be increasingly favourable.

In response to *EastEnders*, ITV had networked *Emmerdale Farm* which provided unexpectedly strong opposition, at least until it took its customary summer break. In September 1985, under the spurious pretext of protecting family viewing time, *EastEnders* was moved to 7.30pm where it faced softer opposition. Following the example of *Brookside*, an omnibus repeat was scheduled for 2.00pm on Sundays, with the specific intention of exploiting the way in which viewing figures are calculated in order to keep the programme in the channel's top ten. The omnibus was originally intended as a temporary measure, but spectacular ratings success justified its continuation. Combined audience figures rose to around 23 million in February and March 1986, when *EastEnders* became the most popular programme in Britain. Certain carefully storylined and scheduled Christmas episodes have achieved top all-time highest ratings for the BBC, reaching an audience of 27.1 million in early 1987. The serial was also reaching a broad cross-section of the population which was previously unprecedented for a soap opera. *EastEnders* was responsible for a dramatic rise in ratings at a crucial time for the political future and funding of the BBC.

In July 1991, the studio production of *EastEnders* moved into a new purpose-built complex at Elstree. More modern light-weight electronic cameras were introduced. The renewed investment in infrastructure appeared to demonstrate the BBC's strong continued commitment to the continued future of *EastEnders*. On



11 May 1993 a revamped title sequence and signature tune was introduced in preparation for the serial's move to a new thrice-weekly slot.

*EastEnders* was strategically one of the most important programmes produced by the BBC in the eighties, reflecting a dilemma that has faced public service broadcasting since the introduction of commercial television. The soap opera as such is inherently a popular commercial format. For decades, the BBC had shunned the form, preferring to concentrate on workplace drama serials. *EastEnders* emphasised the corporation's commitment to producing popular drama of high quality. In so doing, it lent credibility to the continuing drama serial. With this programme, which demonstrates production values of the highest order, the channel embraced the soap opera genre and made it a legitimate form of television drama.

The success of *EastEnders* was by no means a certainty. Indeed, the history of popular serials is scarred by expensive failures. Granada Television has repeatedly attempted to replicate the cash cow they had in *Coronation Street*, with little success.

*The Practice* was the story of doctors, staff and patients at a Manchester inner-city health centre, which ran from January 1985, shown on Friday and Sunday evenings. Unlike previous romantic hospital serials, it had ambitions to be an authentic medical and social drama, with fictional storylines based on real cases. It was well-received by the critics and achieved respectable viewing figures, rewarded with a second thirteen part series.

*Albion Market*, a twice-weekly serial set in a covered market, was an attempt to emulate the idiom of *EastEnders*. Also shown on Fridays and Sundays from August 1985, the scheduling pattern was widely seen as the serial's undoing. Sunday appeared to be too different in both mood and audience composition to offer the same ritualised viewing pleasures of a weekday evening. After a shaky start, the audience dwindled to around 3.7m and the series was axed after a hundred episodes.

One of the interesting effects of soap opera has been its influence on other conventional genres, creating new hybrid forms. In Britain, the eighties saw the application of some of the narrative strategies of the continuing serial to programmes dealing with the accident and emergency services, blending workplace drama with exciting action to create a particular sub-genre that might be called the emergency drama series. Medicine has provided a traditional soap opera setting since the American radio days, and the relationships of doctors and



nurses are one of the classic clichés of romance fiction. Police and crime series have always been a television staple, with a strong heritage in detective films and fiction. These genres have been successfully blended with a mixture of soap opera narrative construction and documentary feel.

*Casualty*, first shown in September 1986, was set in an accident and emergency ward. Aiming at gritty sometimes gruesome realism, it represented a logical development from *Angels*, far removed from *Emergency-Ward Ten*. Although there was narrative progression through each series, every episode featured a new storyline, based on actual case histories, with great attention paid to authenticity, dealing with social and ethical issues, and providing action drama intertwined with the personal lives of the shift staff. The programme achieved spectacular ratings, prompting proposals for turning it into a continuing twice-weekly serial.

*The Bill* proved that it was possible to update the police serial idiom. The serial grew out of a one-off drama called *Woodentop* by Geoff McQueen, screened in the Autumn of 1983 in Thames Television's *Storyboard* series, a showcase created to try out different ideas with regular series potential. A feature of the narrative construction was that everything was to be shown from a police viewpoint and the style of single-camera direction was influenced by the 'fly-on-the-wall' cinéma vérité documentary. After three series of weekly hour-long episodes, it was decided to change to a twice-weekly year-round half-hour format that began on 19 July 1988. A third weekly episode was introduced in January 1993, initially on Fridays, then moving to strengthen the Saturday evening schedule.

*London's Burning*, dealing with the lives of the members of one watch at a London fire station began as a television film by Jack Rosental first shown on 7 December 1986. It was followed by a five part series beginning on 20 February 1988 and went on to become a highly popular drama programme, attracting an audience of 18.9 million viewers by the end of the fourth series on 1 December 1991. Shot on film, with an incidental score, it has a different feel but remains in the tradition of documentary style realistic workplace drama serials.

### *Neighbours*

While the trend in British serials tended towards the realistic and socially responsible, in the latter half of the eighties saw the rise to phenomenal popularity of imported Australian soap opera. The Australian soap opera industry had



developed as a result of a quota system first introduced in 1960 and progressively raised to protect indigenous drama production. Although antipodean soaps had been seen in the afternoons on independent television in Britain for many years, their successful penetration into the early evenings was quite unexpected, least of all on the BBC.<sup>29</sup>

One of the most prolific producers of soap was an independent company founded by Reg Grundy which had grown on the success of game shows. The diversification into drama was overseen by Reg Watson, who returned to his native Australia having worked in Britain as a writer on early episodes of *Emergency-Ward Ten* and as the first producer of *Crossroads*. A number of serials followed, three of which have been seen on British independent television: *The Young Doctors*, *The Prisoner* shown in Britain as *Prisoner: Cell Block H*, and *Sons and Daughters*. While the Grundy approach might be characterised as quantity rather than quality, other Australian independent companies have produced some highly regarded and successful 'soapies' which have been seen in Britain, notably *The Sullivans*, produced by Crawford Productions from 1977 to 1982 and *A Country Practice*, produced by JNP from 1981. However, it was an unpromising programme, one of the cheapest brands of soap, straight out of the standard mould, which was to become one of the most spectacular success stories on British television, despite being the butt of much comic ridicule.

*Neighbours* was first screened by the Australian Seven Network on 18 March 1985 at 5.30pm, an early evening slot that had not previously been exploited by soap opera. The setting for the fictional Ramsey Street was found in a comfortable cul-de-sac suburban Melbourne. Initially it proved to be a ratings disappointment and after seven months and 171 episodes, *Neighbours* was cancelled, only to be picked up by the rival Ten Network, who commissioned a new series for 1986 and relaunched it at a 7.00pm slot. Only five of the original cast stayed on. Three months later, despite a refit and an injection of more situation comedy, the axe was again poised. Ratings rose following a relentless publicity campaign of personal appearance. The programme's rise was undoubtedly assisted by the introduction in early 1986 of two young actors, Kylie Minogue and Jason Donovan, who suddenly found fame and fortune thrust upon them. By the Autumn, the series was being watched by five million Australians. The series was sold to the BBC, which was looking for material for their new daytime schedules.

*Neighbours* was first seen in Britain on Monday 27 October 1986, inauspiciously scheduled at 1.25pm, with a repeat the following morning. Much



to the surprise of the schedulers, it attracted an enthusiastic audience of five to six million. The repeat was moved to a 5.35pm slot in January 1988. The programme almost immediately doubled its audience because by industry agreement the ratings for programmes with a same day repeat are aggregated. By February, the combined figure of 16.25 million viewers showed that the programme was outstripping *Coronation Street*, only beaten in the top ten programmes by *EastEnders*, which was at the height of its popularity. The programme, costing around £100,000 a week to produce, was originally bought for £27,000 a week, representing five twenty-three minute episodes, each of which is repeated, making it exceptionally good value for ratings, accounting for 6 per cent of all BBC viewing, for only 1.4 per cent of all BBC network output. On occasions, *Neighbours* has been watched by more people in Britain than actually live in Australia. At its peak in early 1990, *Neighbours* drew an average combined audience of around 19 million, peaking at just over 21 million in March. The thousandth episode was seen in Britain on 13 September 1990. Hostile critics observed that it was in every way similar to the preceding nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine. The two-thousandth edition was due for transmission in mid-1994.

The softest of soft soaps, *Neighbours* is characterised by an almost old fashioned belief in the values of family and friendship. In its attainable affluence it offers an optimistic escapist fantasy of the Australian dream of classless society, comparatively untroubled by social problems.

### *Home and Away*

Sydney's Channel Seven, no doubt regretfully realising that dropping *Neighbours* had not been the shrewdest of moves, countered with a serial set in the fictional Australian coastal town of Summer Bay. The seaside setting was deliberately chosen to suggest the sense of a slightly idealised community offering simple escapism. The economic setting is noticeably poorer than *Neighbours*, closer to that of the original radio serials.<sup>30</sup>

*Home and Away* was launched in Australia with a one-hour pilot shown in January 1988. Technically it was a more ambitious production than *Neighbours*, with briefer scenes, more camera set-ups, more location shooting, and a younger cast. Like *Neighbours*, the serial was character-oriented, rather than primarily plot-driven, but targetted particularly at the younger age group as what is known in the industry as a 'kid-led serial'. The story was established around a family and their foster children, so allowing an indefinite number of teenagers to feature.



Initially it scored mediocre ratings, until a new production team was brought in to revamp the programme and bring in even more young people.

In the UK, ITV was also seeking to emulate the audience appeal of *Neighbours*. It had been screening another soap from the Grundy stable, *Richmond Hill*, but production in Australia was cancelled in 1988. As a result, *Home and Away* was introduced in Britain on 12 February 1989 and was shown twice daily from July. Initial audience figures were about four million, building to twelve to thirteen million after a year. Although it has never quite achieved the popular pull of its counterpart, the combined ratings for *Home and Away* are second only to *Coronation Street* on ITV. In October 1992, fearful of losing *Home and Away* to satellite television, ITV bought a further three years supply of 720 episodes at a reported cost of twenty million pounds. The 1,000th episode was shown in Britain on 28 December 1992.

Both *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* were slow to take off in their home markets. The heavy initial inertia in building viewing figures can be attributed to their very ordinariness. However, this weakness is perhaps their greatest strength. Without requiring dramatic plotlines, once the audience is attuned to the tempo, they can run and run. It is interesting that the storylines of these Australian soaps progress at a noticeably accelerated pace. Relationships are formed and frequently frustrated over a period of weeks rather than months. This may be part of the attraction for adolescent viewers, whose own lives may appear to follow a similar pattern. It has been said that the success of both *Neighbours* and *Home and Away* has little to do with the fact that they are Australian, and everything to do with being designed for regular viewing, Monday to Friday. Quite unlike the serials in the British tradition, the daily serials are the nearest thing seen on mainstream UK television to the American daytime soaps.

However far the Australian soap operas may seem from their heritage on American daytime radio, the legacy of the epigraph and organ music lives on their anodyne opening and closing jingles, which have probably permeated the national consciousness, if only because both precede the early evening news on their respective channels.

*Families*, first transmitted at 3.30pm on 23 April 1990, was an attempt by Granada Television to exploit the astonishing success of Australian soap operas. It came about as a result of extensive research in an effort by ITV to find a home-grown soap for their afternoon schedule, with the possibility of moving it into the early evening battleground if it proved popular. Uniquely, it was originally



conceived as a co-production, to be shot in both Britain and Australia. In the event it went ahead with the Anglo-Australian scenario despite Granada's failure to find an antipodean partner. Australian exteriors were shot in blocks on location using local technicians, while all interiors were produced in a Manchester studio, with the cast and production crew commuting between continents. In the course of time, the Australian exteriors were gradually displaced and eventually all the characters were conveniently re-united in England. Although valiantly supported by Granada in its own region, and sold to a number of territories, including New Zealand but excluding Australia, it was announced in June 1993 that *Families* would be dropped from the network schedule.

Soap opera co-productions have had a poor record of success, but that has not prevented producers attempting to find the formula. The quest for soap with pan-European appeal has been one of television's holy grails. The overriding success of supersoaps like *Dallas*, *Dynasty* and their derivatives led to continental countries clubbing together in co-production deals in an attempt to produce a European equivalent. However, these hybrid, high budget, high profile homogeneous productions have been conspicuously unsuccessful in attracting a wider European audience.

*Châteauvallon* was a co-operative effort by companies from France, Italy, Luxembourg and Switzerland. Known in French as a *feuilleton*, after that form of interminable nineteenth-century serial fiction, this derivative 'Dallas-sur-Loire' translated Southfork ranch into a chateau and used the same archetypes as *Dallas*, seasoned with French power dressing. Although a continental success, it did not travel well.

*Black Forest Clinic* was a joint venture by German and Austrian television, modelled on American medical dramas. Set in a hospital in scenic south western Germany, and depicting the professional and private lives of staff and patients, it was enormously successful at home, but again made little impression when sold abroad.

Both serials were shown in Britain on Channel Four. *Châteauvallon* was shown over twenty-six episodes from 26 January 1987. *Black Forest Clinic* was shown over thirteen parts from 9 January 1988. The language barrier proved to be a problem. Dubbed or subtitled programmes appeared to detract from the British expectations of soap opera realism.

*Riviera* was the great hope, created by American producers EC Television, and produced in Paris for a European consortium. The storyline centred on an



aristocratic perfume dynasty, the de Courcey family, living on the Cap Riviera coast. *Riviera* has been shown in France, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Turkey, although in England it has only been seen in the region of the UK distributor, Granada television.

While international collaboration is necessary for expensive drama, the difficulties inherent in attempting to discover a universal appeal among different countries and cultures have so far inhibited the development of a truly pan-European soap and only served to highlight the cultural differences that exist in Europe. It was in this context that the BBC attempted to repeat the success story of *EastEnders* with a continental equivalent.

*Eldorado*, the most significant serial launched since *EastEnders*, was produced for the BBC as an English soap with a European outlook and an eye to continental sales. With the prospect of an increase in cable and satellite viewing and an increasingly commercial opposition, the BBC faced the prospect of a declining share of the audience. Looking for something to complement *EastEnders* and to prop up the early evening schedule left exposed by the waning *Wogan* chat show, they sought a soap solution.

With a view to the new quota requirement to contract a quarter of production to independent companies, the project was put out to tender. It was entrusted to the creative team responsible for *EastEnders*, Julia Smith and Tony Holland, backed by the accomplished independent producer Verity Lambert. It was to be set in southern Spain, the destination of package holiday-makers seeking a fortnight's escape in the sun and the permanent refuge of an entire expatriate community.

The first British serial to be shot completely on location overseas, a suitable site was found in the hills near Coin, between Marbella and Malaga. A permanent production village was constructed under the direction of Keith Harris, the designer of *EastEnders*, at a cost of £1.5 million, to be amortised over three years. The ambitious set included housing complex of villas and apartments set around a swimming pool, a shopping centre with a restaurant and a bar, and a market square complete with town hall, church and police station.

Each episode was to have a budget of around £65,000, about the same as *EastEnders*, at an annual cost of around ten million pounds. Press coverage tended to concentrate on the latter figure and the programme was soon touted as a ten million pound super-soap. The parochial working title 'Little England' was



dropped. With so much depending upon the programme, it was renamed after the mythical city of golden promise: *Eldorado*.

The large multinational ensemble cast of around thirty, included several Europeans and a high proportion of young characters. Unlike Britain as portrayed through the Street, the Close, or the Square of the now traditional soaps, this Xanadu in southern Spain was to be a melting pot in which different classes and cultures could meet and mingle, united in a common pursuit, the search for a new life. In the *Radio Times* creator Julia Smith puffed 'A soap about people learning to be real Europeans and watched by all Europe—that is my dream' she declared, adding 'Which could all go wrong'.<sup>31</sup>

The anticipated Autumn launch was brought forward to July, partly to wrong-foot the opposition, partly to avoid the competition provided by programmes in the new television season, and partly to capitalise on attention to the Barcelona Olympics and the Expo in Seville. It was to be the Summer of Spain. It was to run in the 7pm slot on evenings, with afternoon repeats following *Neighbours* on Wednesdays and Fridays and the *EastEnders* omnibus on Sundays. With such scheduling it could hardly fail to improve on the ratings for *Wogan*, which had stood at around five million in the last year. However, no previous continuing drama had been launched in July, towards the seasonal low in television viewing. In retrospect, the rush to launch the serial proved to be a mistake.

At the press launch it was promoted as a hedonistic combination of 'sun, sand, sangria and sex'. The most ambitious drama project ever undertaken by the BBC, it was proudly described by the channel controller Jonathan Powell as 'the boldest and biggest idea ever attempted in the history of British popular television.'<sup>32</sup> Assured that they had a hit on their hands, no-one really questioned the wisdom of setting up such a show so hastily, without a pilot, to run three times a week.

*Eldorado* was first seen at 7pm on 6 July 1992. The opening episode introduced the characters and locations and generally set the tone, which was fairly low. Drawing on elements from a number of serials, *Eldorado* bore all the hallmarks of Julia Smith and Tony Holland, with a strong family resemblance to its *EastEnders* stable-mate. Although intended as a character rather than issue-led serial, with a lighter touch than its London counterpart, homosexuality, disability, and alcoholism were featured from the start. Technically, early episodes appeared to have been put together in a rush and the sound quality was widely criticised. With a 'whiter-than-white' brightness, *Eldorado* was bold and brassy, but lacked a certain polish.



After all the pre-launch publicity, the press reaction was ambivalent. Anything short of a repeat of the success of *EastEnders* was likely to be judged a failure. This time the stakes were even higher. The audience response was unequivocal. The aggregated ratings dropped from 10.94 million for the first episode to 5.62 million, of which only 2.86 million were watching on Friday 31 July. It appeared the promise of *Eldorado* was only fool's gold. It turned out to be a time share holiday in hell. A new producer was appointed and in time the programme improved, with ratings settling at around seven million, still considerably short of the ten million expected in that time slot. The failure of *Eldorado* to secure a substantial audience sealed its fate.

Amid criticism of the serial from the incoming director general John Birt, there was little love left for the programme and few senior executives were willing to defend it. It was announced in March 1993 that *Eldorado* would be not be recommissioned beyond the first year's 156 episodes. Alan Yentob, the newly appointed controller of BBC1 said that it had not engaged the 'affection and attention' of viewers to a level warranting further investment. The last episode was broadcast on 9 July 1993, one year after it began.

The lack of corporate commitment to the serial appeared to derive from mixed feelings among the management about such programmes. As British television evolved from the days of duopoly into a new era of a multichannel environment, the BBC was faced with a need to change and redefine its role as public service broadcaster complementing the increasingly commercial competition. At a time when the BBC was under pressure to emphasise its distinctiveness and amid arguments that it should position itself upmarket, such a high profile popular drama project was of particular importance to the debate about the future of the corporation. To some, *Eldorado* appeared symptomatic of everything that was wrong with the BBC. It had become more than a programme. It had become a symbol of the sort of programming some felt the BBC should not be involved with. In the run up to the renewal of the charter in 1996, it was a statement of the dilemma facing the corporation. To pursue a populist line risked alienating the chattering classes. To pursue an elitist line risked losing market share, leading to a marginalisation that would make it increasingly difficult to justify the claim on the licence fee.

*Eldorado* illustrated the degree to which, irrespective of the money that is spent, no serial is guaranteed success. The production of a continuing drama requires a major commitment. The launch of a serial therefore involves



considerable risk. It is increasingly difficult to break into the crowded market, and it takes time for a programme to become established and build audience loyalty, but once established, the longer a programme has run, the longer it is likely to run. Soap operas benefit from economies of scale. Once the initial costs have been met, continued production is comparatively cost-effective. One of the most important factors is continued corporate confidence in the production on the part of the broadcasters. The most successful serials have had very modest aspirations but have received encouragement and support which has allowed them to flourish. Successful serials that have been denied resources have eventually tended to flounder.

The first radio serials were necessarily the product of a particular individual, who may have been the creator, writer, producer as well as actor. The demands of continuous output gave rise to an industrialised system of production with a division of labour and this became an absolute necessity with the transition to television. The most successful serials are generally the product of a particular vision and the secret of longevity would appear to be in continuing to keep faith with that original conception. Most deliberate attempts to borrow an existing successful format and redesign it by committee have resulted in failure. A number of expensive failures serve to illustrate that no amount of hyperbolic marketing can sell a serial unless there is something at its heart which appeals to the public. One of the lessons would appear to be that programmes that are the product of careful market research and development are not guaranteed success. If soap opera simply relies on a formula, it remains a closely guarded secret. Of the many serials which have been launched in Britain, only a few have secured lasting success. *Table 6.3* gives chronology of British serials up to the demise of *Eldorado*.

**Table 6.3**  
**UK television soap operas**  
 (Select chronology of British serials)

<b>Programme</b>	<b>Channel</b>		<b>Start Date</b>	<b>End Date</b>
<i>The Grove Family</i>	BBC		9 April 1954	28 June 1957
<i>The Appleyards</i>	BBC		2 October 1952	12 April 1957
<i>Sixpenny Comer</i>	ITV	A-R	23 September 1955	1 June 1956
<i>One Family</i>	ITV	ATV	20 February 1956	1 June 1956
<i>Emergency – Ward Ten</i>	ITV	ATV	27 February 1957	2 July 1967
<i>Starr and Company</i>	BBC		31 March 1958	22 December 1958
<i>Coronation Street</i>	ITV	Granada	9 December 1960	Continuing
<i>Home Tonight</i>	ITV	A-R	2 October 1961	2 November 1961
<i>Compact</i>	BBC		9 January 1962	30 July 1965
<i>Swizzlewick</i>	BBC		18 August 1964	11 November 1964
<i>Crossroads</i>	ITV	ATV	2 November 1964	4 April 1988
<i>199 Park Lane</i>	BBC		3 August 1965	1 October 1965
<i>United</i>	BBC		4 October 1965	2 March 1967
<i>The Newcomers</i>	BBC		5 October 1965	13 November 1969
<i>Weavers Green</i>	ITV	Anglia	7 April 1966	24 September 1966
<i>The Doctors</i>	BBC1		19 November 1969	17 June 1971
<i>The Brothers</i>	BBC1		10 March 1972	18 April 1976
<i>Emmerdale Farm</i>	ITV	YTV	16 October 1972	Continuing
<i>Harriet's Back in Town</i>	ITV	Thames	17 October 1972	17 October 1973
<i>General Hospital</i>	ITV	ATV	19 October 1972	26 January 1979
<i>Rooms</i>	ITV	Thames	5 November 1974	4 August 1977
<i>Pobol y Cwm</i>	S4C	BBC	16 October 1974	Continuing
<i>Couples</i>	ITV	Thames	14 October 1975	14 May 1976
<i>Angels</i>	BBC1		7 Sept 1976	22 December 1983
<i>Together</i>	ITV	Southern	24 January 1980	25 April 1980
<i>Take the High Road</i>	ITV	STV	19 February 1980	Continuing
<i>Triangle</i>	BBC1		5 January 1981	6 July 1983
<i>Brookside</i>	CH4		2 November 1982	Continuing
<i>Miracles Take Longer</i>	ITV	Thames	9 January 1984	15 May 1984
<i>Gems</i>	ITV	Thames	2 January 1985	10 May 1985
<i>EastEnders</i>	BBC1		19 February 1985	Continuing
<i>The Practice</i>	ITV	Granada	18 January 1985	15 August 1986
<i>Albion Market</i>	ITV	Granada	30 August 1985	10 August 1986
<i>The Bill</i>	ITV	Thames	19 July 1988	Continuing
<i>Families</i>	ITV	Granada	23 April 1990	Continuing
<i>Eldorado</i>	BBC1	(Ind)	6 July 1992	9 July 1993



## Summary

Serial dramas are among the most endearing and enduring broadcast formats. The daily daytime drama serial still exists in much the same form as it originated on radio. It has also spawned a variety of distinctive genres that still owe something to these origins. From *Stella Dallas* to *Dallas*, the soap opera has a continuous history that is almost as old as broadcasting. In view of the enormous changes that have occurred in cinema, radio and television over this period, the soap opera genre has remained remarkably constant by comparison. In America, *The Guiding Light* has been broadcast since 1937, an astonishing achievement in the fickle world of network schedules. In Britain, *The Archers* has been broadcast continuously for over forty years, *Coronation Street* over thirty, *Emmerdale* over twenty, and even *Brookside* has been on air for over ten years. Such longevity is unprecedented in the history of narrative forms. Only non-fiction titles such as newspapers and periodicals have a longer continuous history of production. In this sense there are closer similarities with serial publishing than with literature.

In the eighties, the soap opera form enjoyed a considerable resurgence in Britain and widened its appeal. The tabloid press developed an obsessive interest in the soaps and the term became redefined to be increasingly applied to almost any form of popular serial drama. The decade also saw the rise to phenomenal popularity of the American prime time serials spawned by *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, and their subsequent decline. In retrospect, the so-called super-soaps, the seasonal prime time serials, despite their success, might be seen as something of an aberration in the soap opera tradition.

Distinctions can certainly be drawn between various types of drama serial. The American and British forms of soap opera are distinctly different, partly as a result of the institutional ethos of the respective broadcasting systems, although the differences are decreasing. An emphasis on social realism and a documentary concern with lower-middle and working class life emerged in response to trends in film, drama and literature. This has subsequently been employed as the basis of a justification for the respectability of the form. In America there is a clear difference between the daytime and prime time serials that is related to the origin of soap opera on daytime radio. This does not apply so much in Britain, where continuous serials have traditionally run in the early evening and as a result have tended to aim at a family audience.



The early radio serials were explicitly targeted at housewives and offered women listeners a range of positive rather than passive role models. Yet there is an implicit irony in seeing this romantic idealism as an emancipating form of feminine fiction, since the primary purpose was to sell household products to housewives, reinforcing a very traditional view of domestic family life. The serials offered the promise of escape but at the same time succeeded in selling soap and drudgery.

As Robert Allen demonstrates in *Speaking of Soap Operas* (1985),<sup>33</sup> the invariably male voice over narrator of the early radio serial inscribed a particular patriarchal position with respect to the female protagonists and the woman listener. This narrative mode altered significantly with the transition to television and the diminishing role of the narrator.

Early dismissive criticism assumed that the listeners were intellectually or imaginatively impoverished and this stigma has to a certain extent persisted. Much of the recent academic study of soap opera has been written from the perspective of the woman viewer. This broadly feminist body of work has been of great critical importance in bringing critical recognition to soap opera, resulting in a recognisable body of literature in this field, helping to rehabilitate the genre as a legitimate dramatic form.

One particular approach has been to investigate the genre through the eyes of female 'fans'. This perspective is apparent in Dorothy Hobson's *'Crossroads': The drama of a soap opera* (1982)<sup>34</sup> and in Ien Ang's *Watching 'Dallas': Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination* (1982).<sup>35</sup> There has been a tendency to stress the importance of soap opera to its viewers, rather than examining the importance of the serial form to broadcasters wishing to attract an audience.

It has also been argued that there is a particular feminine affinity with the soap opera form. In *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass produced fantasies for women* (1982),<sup>36</sup> Tania Modleski relates the lack of closure in soap opera to its identity as a feminine narrative, in contrast to the closure associated with the more masculine forms of cinema. This argument is echoed in Martha Nochimson's *No End to Her: Soap opera and the female subject* (1992).<sup>37</sup> While this may reflect a profound psycho-sociological difference in the desires of men and women, it ignores the differences between cinema and television as forms of commercial distribution.

The implicit characterisation of soap opera as a feminine form adds to the difficulty of definition. Some American writers have simply appropriated the original use of the term as it applied to radio programmes. That is the strict



definition adopted by Muriel Cantor and Suzanne Pingree in *The Soap Opera* (1983) where they define the form as a continuing daytime drama serial.<sup>38</sup> This definition is problematic as it does not allow the concept to be extended to other fiction forms that borrow heavily from this inheritance. They refuse to admit prime time serial dramas such as *Dallas*, *Dynasty* and their imitators and spin-offs to their conception of soap opera and consistently classify soap opera as women's fiction. Such claims can only be preserved, even in the American context, by recourse to a specific definition of soap as daytime television, at which point the argument becomes a little circular. It is clearly inapplicable in Britain, since such a strict definition would exclude all indigenous drama serials. Indeed, by this token, the only domestically produced broadcast soap opera is *The Archers* on radio, although no doubt many of its regular listeners would shudder at such a definition.

Christine Geraghty, writing from a British perspective on *Women and Soap Opera: A Study of Prime Time Soaps* (1991),<sup>39</sup> opens up the definition of soap opera. She argues cogently that 'It would be meaningless, in a British context, to limit the definition of soap operas to programmes with a regular daytime scheduling. ... Given the blurring of boundaries in the US context and the consistent use of prime time scheduling for the British programmes, it would be perverse to deny that *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Coronation Street*, *Crossroads*, *EastEnders* and *Brookside*, are soap operas in the interests of maintaining the purity of a definition.'<sup>40</sup> Geraghty acknowledges that during the eighties in particular, soaps sought to widen their audience and began to present more complex male characters and introduce more masculine storylines.

The assumption has remained that the audience is overwhelmingly female and that soap opera maintains a particular appeal to women. It is certainly true that, perhaps more than any other dramatic genre, the soap opera offers positive representations of women, asserts the primacy of the family, and concentrates on moral and emotional concerns. However, now that such serials occupy a large slice of the early viewing television schedule, an analysis of actual viewing will reveal that the British soaps are among the most watched programmes on television, among men, women, and children. There remains a bias towards women and the working class, although this reflects the nature of the television audience in general.

In Britain there has been a conscious attempt to lend acceptability to the form through an appeal to authenticity and social realism. *Coronation Street* perhaps



provided the prototype for this particular pattern. One of the most thoughtful commentaries on the British soap opera remains a British Film Institute monograph on *Coronation Street* (1981).<sup>41</sup> Here the focus is on the programme's representation of a particular working class point of view, rather than specifically upon the presentation of women.

The realistic domestic drama serial received an injection of contemporary relevance with *Brookside*, which introduced a social conscience and radically altered the British drama serial. This was confirmed with the introduction of *EastEnders*, which attracted a large audience and considerable acclaim for its high production values. The importance of this serial for the BBC is admirably analysed by David Buckingham in *Public Secrets: 'EastEnders' and its audience* (1987).<sup>42</sup> This explores the complex relationships between the television text and its viewers and stresses the broad audience it addresses, particularly with respect to teenagers.

Meanwhile, the new Australian soaps, *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*, brought the daily drama serial into the weekday early evenings and attracted a large adolescent audience, expanding the scope of soap. The expansion of *Brookside* and *Coronation Street* further filled the schedules. The term soap is increasingly widely applied, and has been extended to include episodic workplace dramas, such as the police and hospital series *The Bill*, *Casualty* and *London's Burning*. These have in common with continuing serials an ensemble cast and a multi-threaded narrative but differ in that the storylines are self-contained within each episode. The use of the label soap to describe such serials adds to the confusion over the defining features of the form.

With more serials than ever on our screens, there is the possibility that the schedules could become super-saturated in a surfeit of soap and as the audience fragments this supernova expansion could collapse and implode. Fashions change and some television genres, such as the single play, have fallen from favour. In America, various genres have waxed and waned, from westerns to detective serials. Sooner or later a saturation point is reached. The glossy prime time soap has apparently been eclipsed for the present. However, continuing drama has much to commend it to television, because it is comparatively cost effective, easy to schedule, and it attracts large and loyal predictable audiences.

The rise of the continuous drama serial has paralleled the decline of the single television play. The reason was chiefly changes in the economic structure of the television industry. In an era of increasing concern with cost-effectiveness, the



cost of the single play became subject to scrutiny. With the arrival of videotape, there was no longer a pressing necessity for live drama. Television programmes could be stockpiled. Serials were cheaper to produce and easier to schedule. One-off drama is comparatively expensive, with none of the economies of scale of the series or serial, which are easier to schedule and tend to build bigger audiences. One way of sustaining single plays was by scheduling them in anthology slots, a compromise that was achieved with varying success. Compared to the comfortably repetitive programmes around it, even in an anthology slot, the single play, with its unpredictability in style and content from week to week was more difficult to sell to viewers, difficult to sell to advertisers, and difficult to sell abroad. Period drama serials had good export potential, contemporary plays did not. Single dramas came to be shot on film, which programme makers tended to prefer and was better suited to international sales. The more audiences became accustomed to the slickness of film, the more tame studio production on tape seemed. The studio play has now all but disappeared to be replaced by film drama.

Increasingly, the notion of a television soap appears to embrace a range of functions, formats, lengths, transmission frequencies and budgets. As programmes are exported to secondary markets, any original distinctions between daytime and prime time, daily and weekly serial drama are further distorted. In Spain, the American daytime drama *Santa Barbara* is shown at noon, while in France it successfully occupies an early prime time slot on weekday evenings. In Italy, the CBS daytime serial *The Bold and The Beautiful* has been shown weekly in the summer schedule and daily during the winter.

Traditionally, because soaps make considerable profits domestically, producers have considered foreign distribution as a bonus. With new outlets opening up, especially with the growth of cable and satellite channels, there is an eager new market for low-cost programming. Soap operas provide cost-effective, high-volume programming in secondary markets. With a trend towards strip scheduling in the same slot through the week, serials are seen as relatively inexpensive and effective programming tools. Distributors can sell back catalogues by the hundred hours. A very real problem is simply knowing where to start, since many serials have been running for years or even decades. The buyer must also make a major commitment to establish a serial, as it can take between six months and a year for a new soap to develop a following.



The growth in the number of channels has led to the development of a European syndication market similar to that which has long since existed in America. Satellite television offered a new, as yet minority outlet for American daytime drama, the first time this format could be seen in Britain. Several such serials, carried on the Astra satellites, could be seen daily by those equipped with a satellite receiver or cable television. From November 1992, serials including *Neighbours*, *Sons and Daughters*, *EastEnders*, *The Bill*, *The Brothers* and *Dallas* were re-run from episode one on UK Gold, a joint satellite venture between the BBC and Thames Television.

There is a definite demand in Europe for indigenous programming rather than imported products. New television channels have turned away from acquired programming. Given the existence of large back catalogues of English language material, one solution has been to adapt and adopt foreign formats to suit the requirements of the local language and culture. The 're-versioning' of existing titles is an extension of the established trade in television entertainment formats such as game shows. While the format of a game show is readily reducible to a set of rules, the format of a soap opera is more complex and difficult to translate. Soaps are inherently domestic in nature and can therefore be difficult to export as a single unit. By stripping away the parochial components of a soap, broadcasters can be offered a package from which they can produce a programme tuned to their own domestic market requirements while benefiting from the security of a proven formula. While a format or concept may have universal appeal, it must speak to its audience in their own language, both literally and figuratively. In this way, the *EastEnders* format has been sold to the Dutch who have also re-versioned a Grundy serial *Restless Years* with considerable success.

It is less clear to what extent other forms belong to the soap opera family. A close cousin is the telenovela, a serial extending over possibly hundreds of episodes, but conceived as being of a finite duration. They are the chief programme export of Brazil and Venezuela, where they dominate evening viewing. Already hugely popular Latin American countries, they have been successfully sold to Portugal, Spain, and Italy, and more recently in Greece and Turkey.

Although the form is easily recognised, there is a fundamental difficulty in defining soap opera. Soap opera can now be extended to include a variety of forms of presentation from grim gritty realism to glamorous glittery escapism. The very extensiveness of the soap opera form makes it difficult to gain a critical



handle on the genre. Any definition of soap opera must admit the difficulty of genre categorisation. It is in the nature of genres to test their limits.

Ultimately, the essence of soap opera has less to do with definitions of scheduling or content than with its unique narrative form. Perhaps the fundamental formal requirement for a soap opera is a certain continuity of storyline between episodes and a resistance to narrative closure. The regularity of transmission and the reflection of real time progression produce a unique and quite distinctive narrational form which one might summarise as the quality of quotidian continuity that stems from their origin as everyday drama.

This continuity supports the impression of realism. The effect is cumulative. Once established, a programme develops its own inertia and has the potential to run and run. The soap opera is predicated upon the invitation to 'tune in tomorrow' and is highly dependent upon recognition and familiarity. Serials are structured to conform to the expectations of the audience, sustaining interest without becoming too predictable. With every episode, the viewer acquires and accumulates knowledge that can be brought to bear on events. The previous viewing of a serial becomes a heavy investment, leading to continued loyalty to the programme. This is at the heart of the peculiar sense of involvement that the committed viewer can feel, an attraction that can escape the casual or occasional critic.

At the heart of the traditional soap opera is a sense of the importance of the family and close communities. As individuals have increasingly lost the sense of belonging to a community, neighbourhood, or extended family, soaps provide comforting traditional social models, even where the characters do not always fit into the nuclear family stereotype. Soaps typically revolve around workplaces, extended families, or tightly knit neighbourhoods, and are concerned with relationships among and between them. It is perhaps significant that British serials have tended to follow the pattern of *Coronation Street* in adopting a place reference as their title.

The domestic focus may relate to the way in which such serials are consumed in the home. It has been said that television allows viewers to be entertained in their living rooms by people they would never allow in their homes. An important aspect of the attraction of soap operas is the vicarious element that allows viewers to observe other people's inner feelings from a safe distance. Schadenfreude, that fascination with the misfortunes of others, plays an important part in the attraction



of soap. Viewer involvement with the characters is in their lives as they are lived through the fictional fabrication of the television text.

The traditional soap opera was presented as a 'slice of life'. The early radio serials were presented as everyday story of everyday people, with the pun being on their daily transmission. Their romantic escapism was rooted in reality. Yet all dramatic realism is a matter of generic convention. Their true realism lay in their unique contemporaneousness, continuity, and lack of conclusion. Unlike any previous narrative form, the daily live broadcast was a unique mode of storytelling. In the transition to television the dominant realistic aesthetic of motion picture narration was adopted. The American soap opera has assimilated many aspects of Hollywood cinema. While there is still a concern with the reality of contemporary existence, there is also a tendency towards a more aspirational, romantic and escapist environment. Subjective dream sequences and narrative flashbacks are not uncommon and accompanying music often plays an important part in underscoring the mood of certain moments and the thematic musical bridges help glue together the discrete segments. This is also a feature of Australian soap operas. In contrast, there is a notable absence of incidental musical accompaniment in British serials, where a realistic tradition with a greater documentary concern has become deeply embedded in the conception of the drama serial. The British tradition has been towards a more documentary socially realistic treatment, with the focus often on lower-middle and working class life, although this often receives a romantic, nostalgic or escapist gloss.

Soap operas are acute indices of changing times, a barometer of the prevailing zeitgeist or spirit of the age. It is therefore useful to distinguish the type of ideal community that each of the serials appears to propose. The original radio soaps perpetuated something of the myth of small-town America. The longest-running daytime television serials began as complex kinship sagas. In their prime time equivalents these became dynastic dramas of feuding families in a world of aspirational affluence. In Britain, the importance was placed on the community, particularly coming from the lower-middle and working class. An institutional distaste for the soap opera genre has been offset by a strong tradition of social realism, although this is often combined with a certain nostalgic idealism. Ambridge in *The Archers* and Beckindale in *Emmerdale* are presented as the embodiment of rural village life. *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* locate a similar sense of community in an urban culture, although both hark back nostalgically to an idealised recollection of the past. *Brookside* attempts to reflect



a contemporary suburban setting, but there is little sense that the socially integrated but quarrelling cul-de-sac community represents any form of Utopia. The Australian daily dramas represent to the British a lifestyle that is sufficiently mundane, yet sufficiently different to achieve popular appeal. *Eldorado* attempted to create a classless society in the sun, although it appeared too ordinary to be truly aspirational and too distant to be readily identifiable.

Given their time of transmission, soaps assume a family audience and this places certain restrictions on their content. The boundaries of acceptability are constantly changing, however, and continuing serials have tackled almost every social taboo. In this respect they perform an agenda-setting function by placing topics into the arena for debate. Soap opera serves to provide the public with a constant reassurance of certain social values. The soap opera has a fundamentally moral message. Although such serials provide a measure of escape, they also provide a comment on contemporary society. For the audience, the continuing drama serial fulfils a function that is as old as fiction. There is a distant continuity with the telling of stories in the oral tradition. Soap operas are modern myths or folk fiction. They are the camp-fire stories of the global village.

Although it first found application in attracting a housewife audience, the form of the continuing serial may be seen as primarily a product of the technology and commercial institution of broadcasting as a mass-medium. As a genre, the continuing serial is closely related to the requirements of scheduling and the need to attract a loyal and predictable audience. Born out of the requirements of commercial radio sponsorship, the soap opera form is apparently perfectly fitted for broadcasting and its enduring success continues. Having given rise to a variety of offspring with a certain family resemblance, the soap opera genre can no longer be defined simply as a daily daytime drama serial. The single most important common characteristic is the resistance to resolution. The never-ending story is a unique contribution to the forms of narrative fiction. Continuous drama serials are now more popular than ever. How long they will continue to reign supreme in the face of increasing competition and audience fragmentation, only time will tell. The future fate of the soap opera form is, fittingly, yet to be written.



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- 37 Nochimson, Martha (1992) *No End to Her: Soap opera and the female subject*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
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- 39 Geraghty, Christine (1991) *Women and Soap Opera: A study of prime time soaps*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
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- 41 Dyer, Richard; Geraghty, Christine; Jordan, Marion; Lovell, Terry; Paterson, Richard; and Stewart, John (1981) *'Coronation Street'*, British Film Institute TV monograph 13, London: British Film Institute.
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## Chapter 7

# Soap viewers

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There is a danger associated with reception theories of narrative comprehension in assuming that the text is interpreted by a model reader. It is therefore important to consider that television texts are viewed by actual audiences. An understanding of the target audience is an essential part of any understanding of a particular text. While the numbers viewing television are enormous, the television audience is not a monolithic mass. It is incorrect to continue to think of television in terms of a massive, passive audience. The notion of video literacy implies an attention to the competence of the viewer in constructing a coherence from which to comprehend the television text. It has long been recognised that television supplies a range of uses and gratifications in the audience. Increasingly, individual viewers are coming to be understood as receivers of a text, deploying decoding skills and strategies in making meaning. According to this account, each viewer's reading of a television text will differ. Central to an understanding of the operation of this hypothetical viewer is an accurate assessment of the actual audience. This requires a reassessment of some of the prevalent premisses about soap opera audiences: the assumption that they are only watched by other people, that these people are unintelligent, and that they tend to be women. These presumptions are both insulting and inaccurate.

Traditional elitist academic cultural criticism has generally adopted the patronising approach that popular programmes are only watched and enjoyed by the masses. The frequent implicit assumption is that viewers of popular programmes are in some way inadequate, as if they are less literate than the viewers of more demanding programmes. Partly because of its resistance to conventional critical strategies, serial drama is often considered inferior to serious drama, which is still thought of in terms of the literary adaptation, costume drama, or the well-made play.

The viewers of popular serial drama are often considered to be uncritical. Often cited are instances in which individual viewers develop such a personal



association with the characters that they appear to confuse fact and fiction, failing to distinguish the on-screen personae and the personality of the actors who play them, treating the storylines as if they are true. This slight schizophrenia is evidenced in correspondence to television companies which reportedly receive presents for weddings, booties for babies and even wreathes for fictional funerals. This confusion is probably confounded by the media which blur the boundaries between fact and fiction. In the resulting intertextual tangle it is hardly surprising that the performers become so intimately identified with their parts, some of which they have been playing for a decade or more. More common is an ironic form of interaction, often arising out of genuine affection for the characters, where viewers appear to place themselves in the position of co-authors of such serials, suggesting future storylines and attempting to influence decisions about the programme. Many viewers appear to enjoy the degree of conventionality of formulaic fiction and appear to play a game with the programme, pointing out its predictability while eagerly awaiting the next instalment to see if their speculations are confirmed. For the majority of the audience, the involvement is quite sophisticated and maintains an ironic critical distance. Rather than being a passive uncritical consumer of fictional fantasies, the soap opera viewer can be considered as an active agent in the soap opera process of making meaning.

The first serious studies of the early radio soap operas in America grew out of the emerging techniques of audience research. At the time, the programmes were unambiguously targeted at the housewife audience that was available during the day. The majority of the literature on soap opera either tacitly or explicitly continues to assume a predominantly female audience. Much of the renewed academic interest in the form is a result of feminist criticism which has contributed to a recognition that popular serial drama is a worthy object of serious study. However, in the British context, in which soaps are transmitted in the early evening, the gender of the genre is more ambiguous than with daytime American television. The British soap opera audience, although it remains weighted towards women and the working class, has become increasingly demographically representative of the population as a whole.

Any discussion of audience viewing by genre must be seen in the context of total television consumption. If the precise nature and extent of the soap opera audience is examined, it may be found to be reasonably representative of all television viewing. Therefore in order to appreciate the average serial viewer, 'Joe Soap', it is necessary to look at the television audience in general. The rationale



for concentrating on the demographic composition of the audience is that this provides the currency with which the television industry operates and upon which the success of its programmes are increasingly judged. The discussion of audience figures which follows is based upon data for the period over which particular soap operas were studied. Although the size and composition of these audiences can shift, the general findings may remain valid for some time.

## **Audience measurement**

In the UK, qualitative and quantitative audience data are provided by BARB, the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board, an organisation jointly owned by the BBC and ITV. The Television audience measurement service is provided by AGB Television and RSMB Television Research. Since the end of 1984 AGB has employed 'people-meters' to record minute by minute viewing amongst individuals on a panel comprising some 3,000 homes, representative of regional distribution by population, age, sex and social grade. In August 1991, the viewing panel was increased to 4,350 homes and the measurement system was adjusted. For the first time viewing figures for timeshifted video playback of programmes within a week of the original transmission were also included. It was found that around three per cent of the total 'consolidated' audience for an average programme watches in timeshift mode, rising to around five per cent for drama, films and comedy programmes. Viewing figures also took into account satellite television channels, whether received by dish or cable. By early 1992, 13 per cent of the population could receive satellite, with satellite viewing responsible for 30 per cent of viewing in homes able to receive it, accounting for 4 per cent of total television viewing.

Viewing is defined as presence in a room with a television set on, and can therefore only be considered as a measurement of the opportunity to view. It says nothing about the viewer's degree of involvement. Audience research data only represents an estimated statistical map of the audience, subject to standard errors. However, it offers a model of viewing patterns which is at least internally consistent and allows longitudinal comparisons over time to be drawn. The BARB survey sample gives audience data that is often only robust for major audience categories, and may be unreliable for minor subdivisions, particularly at a regional level. The panel for the Yorkshire Television region, for example, consists of only about four hundred homes. Nevertheless, this data represents the most complete



continuous picture available of the composition and extent of the viewing audience.

The audience figures which are widely quoted in the press and included in the published 'league tables' for each channel are for the total number of viewers, given in millions. Where a programme is repeated within the same week, as is the case with most soap operas, the audience figures for both transmissions are aggregated to produce 'headline' figures which can be slightly misleading. In fact, the prime importance to television companies of such combined audience figures is in their public relations value. They are of little use to the commercial television industry which is more concerned with who is watching at any one time. On this they receive much more detailed demographic data.

The currency of the television advertising industry is the TV Rating or TVR, a percentage which measures the popularity of a programme by comparing its audience to the population as a whole. Ratings are calculated minute by minute and programmes take their TVR from the average of the relevant minute ratings, and therefore represent the average audience over the duration of a programme. TVRs can be produced for population categories to provide a programme's audience profile. The main categories employed are: all individuals, adults, men, women, children, and housewives. Children are those aged between 4 and 15. A housewife is defined as the male or female member of a household who is mainly or solely responsible for the household duties. If a programme achieved a housewife TVR of 25 it means that a quarter of all housewives watched an average minute of that episode, while the other three quarters either watched another channel or were not watching television at all. These main categories can be divided into sub-categories, usually by age and social grade. The age divisions commonly employed are 4-15, 16-24, and thereafter in bands of ten years through to 65+. Frequently these may be further subdivided in the case of children, or combined into broader bands in the case of adults. Socio-economic categories are determined at the household level by the occupation of the head of the household or chief wage earner. As defined by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, groups A and B are respectively categorised as higher or intermediate managerial, administrative or professional personnel. Group C is divided into the 'white collar' C1 supervisory or clerical, and junior managerial administrative or professional personnel, and the 'blue collar' C2 skilled manual workers. Group D consists of semi-skilled and un-skilled manual workers, while group E contains casual workers, the long-term unemployed, pensioners or widows. Across the UK

there is an approximate 40:60 split between ABC1s and C2DEs. This varies by up to 10 per cent between ITV regions. ABC1s make up just over half the number of homes in the London television area, compared with under a third in the North East of England.

The TVR should not be confused with the term Share, which expresses a percentage proportion of those actually viewing over a given period of time. A programme with a TVR of 20, that is 20 per cent of the population, may have a 50 per cent share of the audience actually watching television at that time. Share may therefore provide a better indication of viewer preference.

A measure of the efficiency in reaching a certain sub-category audience at a particular time can be expressed as an Index. This is given by dividing the subcategory audience profile by the subcategory population profile and multiplying by a hundred. Thus an index of 100 indicates that the proportion of a particular sub-category in the audience exactly reflects their distribution in the population as a whole.

### **Appreciation**

In addition to this quantitative analysis, the BBC conducts qualitative studies of audience appreciation, acting as a data supplier for the BARB Television Opinion Panel. This involves sending a self-completion booklet to a nationally representative sample of viewers to provide a weekly measure of programme appreciation. Women consistently give slightly higher average appreciation returns to almost all genres, including sport. This makes it difficult to discern whether they actually enjoy programmes more than men, or whether they simply have lower expectations. In general terms, viewers tend to say that they enjoy those programmes they choose to watch. The ultimate rejection of a programme is not to watch at all, meaning that no score is given. As a result, on an audience appreciation index or AI of 1-100, soap operas tend to score around 75, which is average across the range of television output. AI ratings for soaps are higher among women, older viewers, and lower social grades. The AI figures for soaps suggest that viewers, while they may be loyal, are not fanatical about the serials they watch.



## General television viewing

Every day, over three-quarters of the country tunes into television at some time. The average amount of daily television viewing per head in 1990 was 3 hours 19 minutes, amounting to one full day a week. A slight decrease in the number of hours of terrestrial viewing over recent years has been compensated for by additional time-shifted video and satellite viewing. As more signal sources become available, it is unlikely that the total amount of viewing will increase significantly. Therefore existing broadcasters are likely to see their share of viewing decrease.

The number of hours viewed by different audience categories is related to the availability to view. The biggest single variable is age. Contrary to popular belief, children watch a quarter less television a week than the population in general. Pensioners watch half as much again. Women watch slightly more television than men. On average members of the ABC1 socio-economic groups watch the least, just under three hours a day, while the DEs watch the most hours of television, just over four hours. People generally watch slightly more television on Saturday and Sunday. Average daily viewing hours decrease to just under three hours in the summer and increase to four hours in the winter. Viewers in Wales, the North of England and Scotland watch the most television, while those in the South and East watch the least.

There are slight variations in the audience profiles across the four main television channels. The ITV audience is slightly older and more downmarket than BBC1, which is reasonably representative of the social distribution of the population. *Table 7.1* gives average channel profiles for the fourth quarter of 1990. At that time, the channel share of total viewing was: BBC1 39 per cent, BBC2 10 per cent, ITV 42 per cent, and CH4 9 per cent.

The nature and extent of the soap opera audience should be seen firmly in the context of the general viewing patterns of total television consumption. A quarter of all viewing time is spent watching drama programmes. Drama is the most popular category of programming, ahead of news, light entertainment, and films. Taken together, these categories account for nearly three-quarters of all viewing time, as shown in *table 7.2*.



**Table 7.1**  
**Channel profiles**  
Fourth quarter, 1990

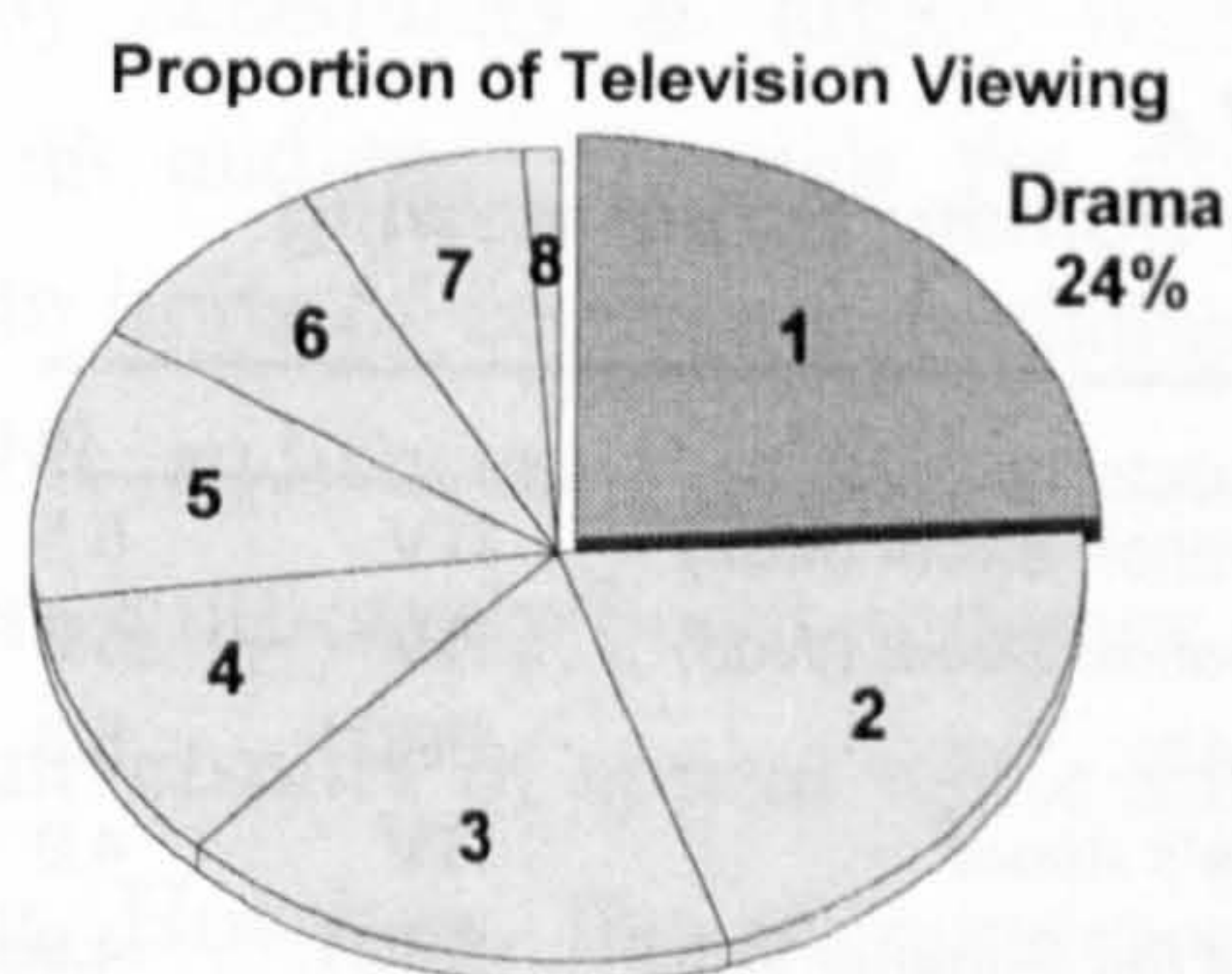
	UK Population (Aged 4+) %	BBC1 %	BBC2 %	ITV %	CH4 %	Any TV %	All Viewing (per week) hrs:mins
<b>Sex</b>							
Male	48	46	49	42	46	45	23:26
Female	52	54	51	58	54	55	26:45
<b>Age</b>							
4-15	17	13	10	12	11	12	18:53
16-24	14	09	08	10	10	09	17:58
25-35	15	14	14	15	15	15	24:04
35-44	15	15	13	13	13	13	22:59
45-54	12	14	13	12	13	13	26:39
55-64	11	13	15	14	14	14	31:18
65+	16	22	27	24	24	24	35:19
<b>Social Grade</b>							
AB	17	17	17	11	14	14	17:30
C1	25	25	24	22	24	24	23:11
C2	27	27	25	28	26	27	25:49
DE	31	31	34	39	36	35	31:38

Source: BBC/BARB/AGB Q4 1990, BBC Broadcasting Research Data (1991) pp. 4-5

**Table 7.2**  
**Television viewing by programme type**  
1990

Programme Type	
1 Drama	24%
2 News	21%
3 Light Entertainment	17%
4 Films	11%
5 Sport	11%
6 Documentaries and Features	8%
7 Childrens	7%
8 Other	1%

Source: BARB/AGB, *Social Trends* (1992) p. 178





One notable factor is that women are more ready to admit to watching soap operas than men. A survey asked respondents to choose from a list of 150 programmes what they would like to watch.<sup>1</sup> The results are summarised in *table 7.3*. Men showed a preference for news, sport and documentary programmes. Women showed a preference for serial drama and crime programmes. The most popular programmes among men did not include a single soap opera, whereas women nominated a number of serials. However, viewing data shows that *Coronation Street* is the most popular programme amongst both men and women, as shown in *table 7.4*. In fact, all but three of the top fifteen programmes over a three week period were the same for both men and women. The apparent mendacity of men might be due to a social stigma associated with watching soaps, otherwise it must be assumed that the men were watching programmes they do not choose to see.

**Table 7.3**  
Men and women: stated viewing preferences

Men				Women			
1	<i>Nine O'clock News</i>	BBC1	54%	1	<i>Coronation Street</i>	ITV	58%
2	<i>News at Ten</i>	ITV	54%	2	<i>Early Evening Local News</i>		49%
3	<i>The Natural World</i>	BBC1	52%	3	<i>Antiques Roadshow</i>	BBC1	48%
4	<i>Early Evening Local News</i>		49%	4	<i>Neighbours</i>	BBC1	48%
5	<i>Athletics</i>		40%	5	<i>EastEnders</i>	BBC1	46%
6	<i>A Question of Sport</i>	BBC1	39%	6	<i>Inspector Morse</i>	ITV	46%
7	<i>Tomorrow's World</i>	BBC1	39%	7	<i>Crimewatch</i>	BBC1	46%
8	<i>The Sweeney</i>	ITV	38%	8	<i>The Bill</i>	ITV	41%
9	<i>Snooker</i>		37%	9	<i>Taggart</i>	ITV	41%
10	<i>The Match</i>	ITV	35%	10	<i>Murder She Wrote</i>	ITV	40%

Source: BMRB/TGI, Broadcast Partnership (1991)

**Table 7.4**  
Men and women: actual viewing

Men				Women			
			m				m
1	<i>Coronation Street (Mon)</i>	ITV	5.5	1	<i>Coronation Street (Mon)</i>	ITV	8.6
2	<i>Coronation Street (Wed)</i>	ITV	5.3	2	<i>Coronation Street (Wed)</i>	ITV	8.2
3	<i>'Allo 'Allo</i>	BBC1	5.3	3	<i>Coronation Street (Fri)</i>	ITV	7.7
4	<i>Beadle's About</i>	ITV	4.9	4	<i>EastEnders (Tue)</i>	BBC1	6.9
5	<i>Last of the Summer Wine</i>	BBC1	4.9	5	<i>EastEnders (Thu)</i>	BBC1	6.7
6	<i>Bread</i>	BBC1	4.9	6	<i>Blind Date</i>	ITV	6.4
7	<i>Top Gun</i>	ITV	4.8	7	<i>Casualty</i>	BBC1	6.3
8	<i>Blind Date</i>	ITV	4.8	8	<i>'Allo 'Allo</i>	BBC1	6.3
9	<i>Coronation Street (Fri)</i>	ITV	4.7	9	<i>London's Burning</i>	ITV	6.3
10	<i>London's Burning</i>	ITV	4.7	10	<i>Bread</i>	BBC1	6.3

Source: BARB/AGB, 1-21 October 1990

## Soap opera viewing

### Scheduling

Television viewing is related to programme scheduling. The programmes people watch are partly dependent upon what is broadcast and when. In turn, television output is governed to a great extent by the degree to which the behaviour of this actual audience can be predicted. The texture of the television schedule is intended to create and sustain patterns of viewing.

The emergence in the late eighties of imported serials on both main channels in the early evening every weekday, together with the addition at the start of the nineties of a third additional weekly episode of *Coronation Street* and *Brookside*, and the temporary introduction of the thrice-weekly *Eldorado*, followed by the addition of a third weekly episode of *The Bill*, resulted in a significant growth in the number of hours of soap opera on British television during main evening viewing.

Soap operas collectively contribute significantly to both of the main channel's share of audience viewing. Soap operas are among the most popular type of television programme, constituting around a tenth of total television output and taking up around a tenth of all viewing time. The top ten rating positions for each channel are largely dominated by continuing serials and soaps now hold the vast majority of the places in the top fifty television programmes, in some weeks to the exclusion of all other programming.

Enjoying perennial popularity in a world where ratings success is frequently ephemeral, soaps play a key role in the programming mix. Attracting large numbers of loyal viewers, they are seen by schedulers as highly important building blocks in creating and sustaining an audience through the evening. Commercial television transforms viewers into units of economic exchange, and serials deliver high volume, predictable, stable audiences. For non-commercial channels, serials which attract large audiences significantly boost audience share, justifying the public service commitment to universality of appeal while allowing them to schedule a variety of programming. However, the preponderance of serials in the early evening also leads to a certain stagnation in the schedules.

Broadcasters are careful not to place successful serials against similar programmes and risk splitting the available audience. The result has been the emergence in Britain of a complimentary pattern of serial scheduling, within



which serials do not compete directly for an audience. As a consequence, the dedicated soap viewer could potentially watch all the weekday evening serials without any conflict, although in practice most viewers select one or more serials and then tend to stick to them. As a result they compete, like cereals in a supermarket, as a variety of market leading brands. *Table 7.5* gives a typical weekday evening schedule for the main networked soap operas.

**Table 7.5**  
**Soap opera schedule**  
1992-1993 season, early evening viewing

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI
17.10	<i>Home and Away</i> ITV	<i>Home and Away</i> ITV	<i>Home and Away</i> ITV	<i>Home and Away</i> ITV	<i>Home and Away</i> ITV
17.35	<i>Neighbours</i> BBC1	<i>Neighbours</i> BBC1	<i>Neighbours</i> BBC1	<i>Neighbours</i> BBC1	<i>Neighbours</i> BBC1
18.00					
18.30					
19.00	( <i>Eldorado</i> BBC1)	<i>Emmerdale</i> ITV	( <i>Eldorado</i> BBC1)	<i>Emmerdale</i> ITV	( <i>Eldorado</i> BBC1)
19.30	<i>Coronation Street</i> ITV	<i>EastEnders</i> BBC1	<i>Coronation Street</i> ITV	<i>EastEnders</i> BBC1	<i>Coronation Street</i> ITV
20.00	<i>Brookside</i> CH4		<i>Brookside</i> CH4		
20.30					<i>Brookside</i> CH4

*Home and Away* Repeat of lunchtime broadcast (18.00 in Central, Granada, and Anglia regions).  
*Neighbours* Repeat of lunchtime broadcast (not in Northern Ireland).  
*Eldorado* From 6 July 1992 to 9 July 1993. Repeated 13.50 on Wednesday and Friday and at 15.00 on Sunday.  
*Emmerdale* Repeated 12.55 (13.20 in Scotland) on Tuesday and Thursday from 7 September 1993.  
*Coronation Street* Repeated 12.55 (13.20 in Scotland) on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 6 September 1993. Previously repeated at various times in certain regions only.  
*EastEnders* Omnibus repeat 14.00-15.00 on Sunday.  
*Brookside* Omnibus repeat 17.10-18.30 on Saturday.

## Ratings

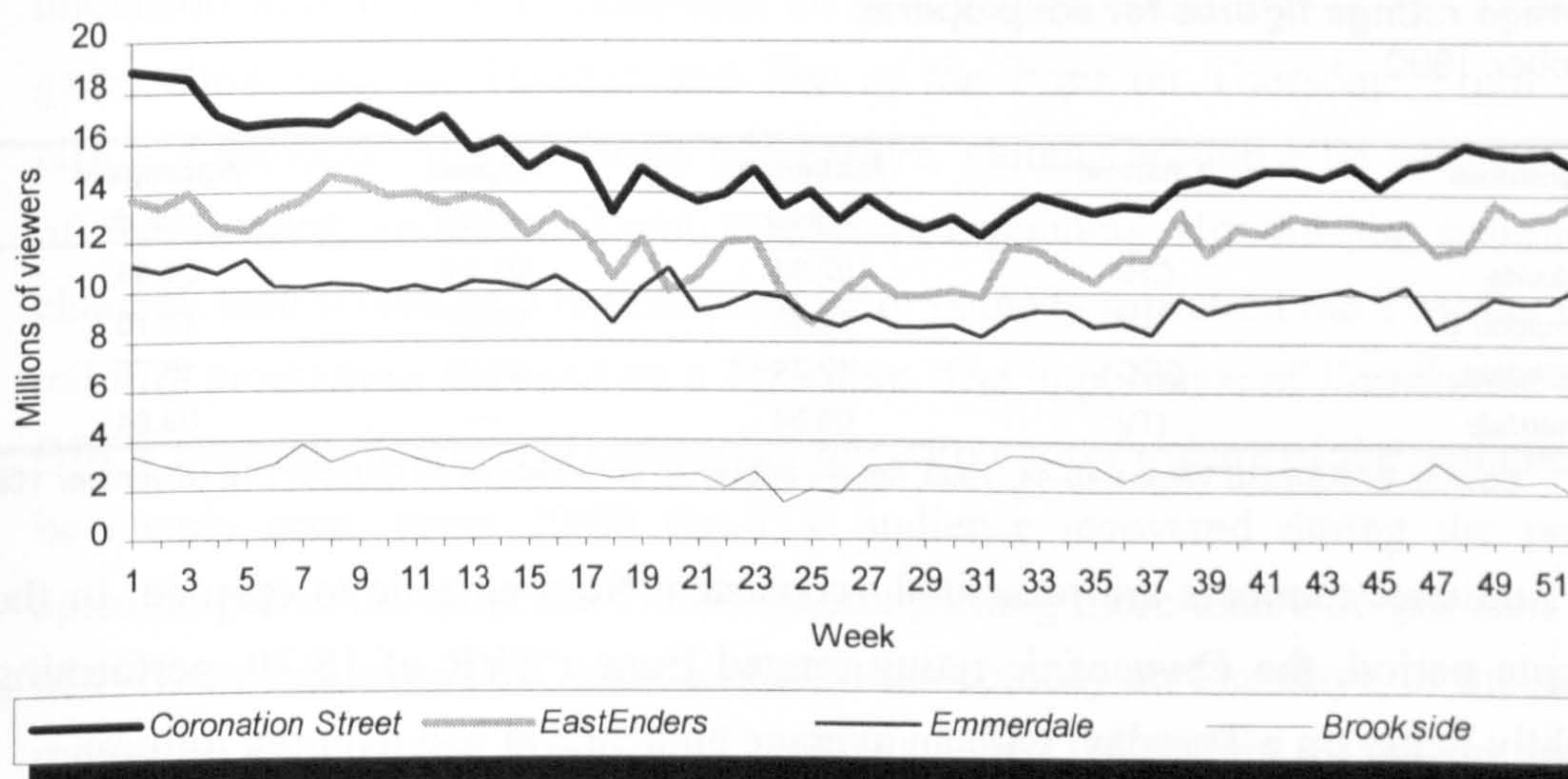
Audience ratings demonstrate just how popular soap opera is. The following discussion of audiences for the main networked soap operas is based upon an analysis of detailed demographic data relating to the study period. *Table 7.6* gives average ratings trends for four networked soap operas in 1990.

In 1990 the highest audiences for a single screening of *Coronation Street* were 19.21 million on Monday 1 January, and 18.90 million on Wednesday 10 January. The highest single audience of the year for *EastEnders* was 14.86 million on



Thursday 27 December, closely followed by the episode on Tuesday 20 February which attracted 14.76 million viewers. These were respectively the highest single television audiences of the year. The highest *Emmerdale* audience of 1990 was 11.79 million on Tuesday 9 January. *Emmerdale* was alone among the major soaps in not receiving a repeat screening until the introduction of lunchtime repeats in September 1993. Disregarding repeats, *Brookside*'s highest weekday audience was 4.58 million on Wednesday 11 April. The programme was at that time in a transition period and ratings subsequently improved significantly. Seasonal variation accounts for a dip in ratings in the summer months, when television viewing is light. *Emmerdale* retained its audience over the summer better than *Coronation Street* or *EastEnders*, perhaps because its older and more down-market audience were less likely to be engaged in other activities or taking holidays. *Coronation Street* lost viewers over the year, while the other programmes remained relatively steady.

**Table 7.6**  
**Soap opera seasonal ratings trends**  
 1990 (weekly average audience, excluding repeats)



Programme	Channel	Audience million	Repeat million	Aggregate million
<i>Brookside</i>	CH4	02.84	01.66	04.50
<i>Coronation St</i>	ITV	15.05	02.69	17.74
<i>EastEnders</i>	BBC1	12.22	04.11	16.33
<i>Emmerdale</i>	ITV	09.72	—	09.72

Source: BARB/AGB 1990, figures published in *Broadcast* 1990



There was some variation in performance according to the day of the week. *Emmerdale* did consistently better on a Tuesday. *Brookside* did best on a Wednesday, with Friday trailing. *Coronation Street* also performed marginally better on a Wednesday, although variation across the days was less marked.

The five week period from 1 October 1990 relating to this study can be seen to be as broadly representative of average audience sizes. In October 1990, *Emmerdale* attracted an estimated average audience for each unrepeated episode of just under ten million, a TVR of 19 per cent or almost a fifth of the viewing population. In the same period, whether or not repeat viewing is taken into account, *Coronation Street* was the UK's highest rating soap opera, and on average the highest rating programme, closely followed by *EastEnders*. Channel Four's *Brookside*, then at a low ebb with an average TVR of 9 including the omnibus repeat, nevertheless the programme continued to dominate the top ten for the minority channel. Together with their repeats, *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* drew 31 per cent of the total television audience. Table 7.7 gives average audience figures over five weeks from 1 October 1990.

**Table 7.7**  
Average ratings figures for soap operas  
October 1990

Programme	Channel	Audience million	Repeat million	Aggregate million
<i>Brookside</i>	CH4	02.84	01.74	04.58
<i>Coronation St</i>	ITV	14.83	02.27	17.10
<i>EastEnders</i>	BBC1	12.79	03.95	16.75
<i>Emmerdale</i>	ITV	09.84	—	09.84

Source: BARB/AGB Weeks 40-44, 1990, figures published in *Broadcast* 19 October - 16 November 1990

Audience numbers are reasonably consistent from episode to episode. In the sample period, the *Emmerdale* rating ranged from a TVR of 18-20, performing slightly better on a Tuesday, with an average audience of just over ten million.

These figures exclude time-shifted video playback viewers, which are now included in the ratings. In October 1991, the additional video playback audience for an episode of *Coronation Street* was over three quarters of a million viewers. *EastEnders* and *Emmerdale* added over four hundred thousand, and *Brookside* around three hundred thousand video viewers.

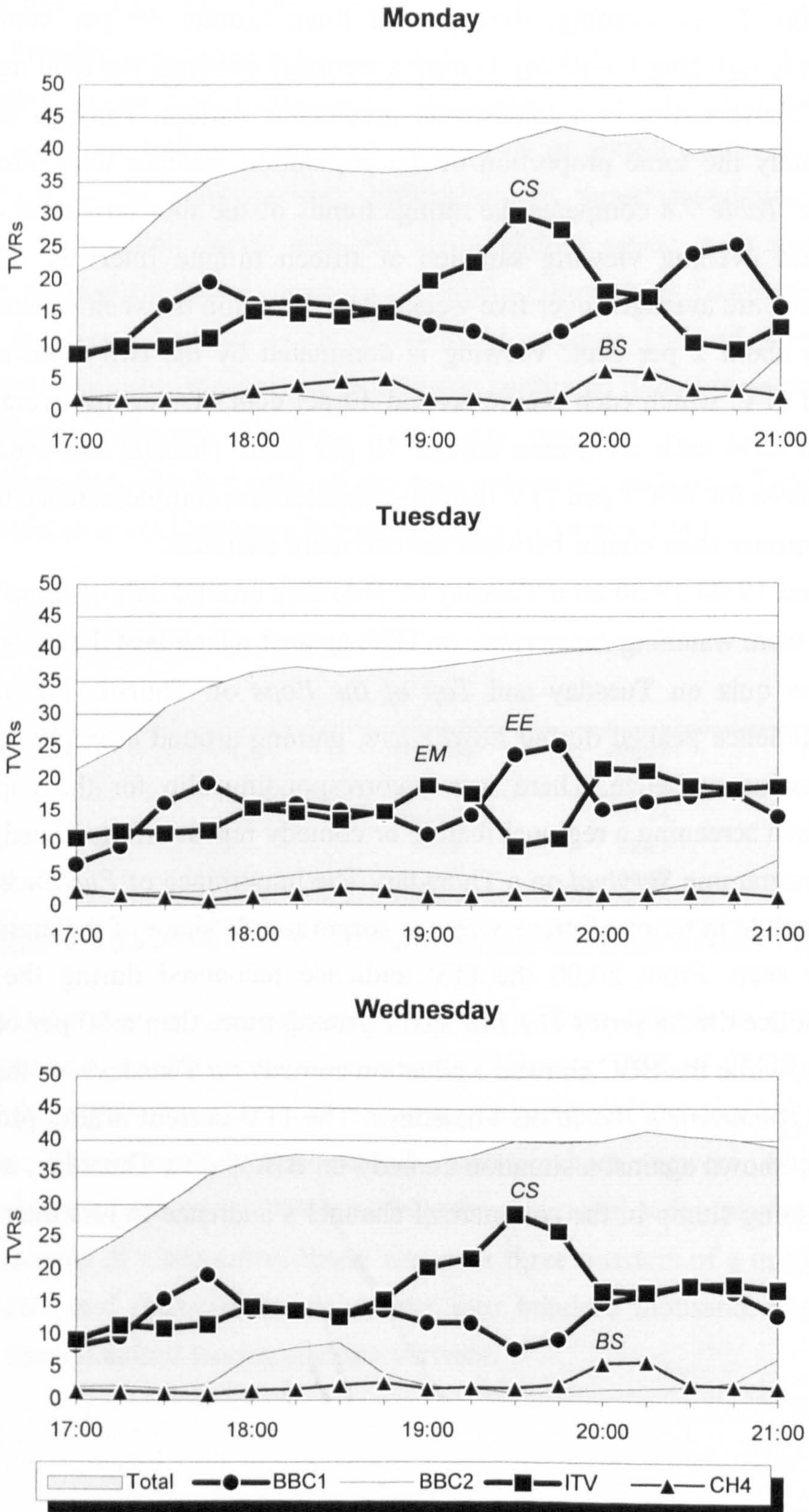
### Viewing patterns

The audience figures for particular programmes should be considered in the context of the number and type of viewers watching television at the time of transmission. Every evening, during peak time, around 40 per cent of the population is watching television. During a weekday evening, the total number of television viewers rises in a consistently predictable pattern. Through the week, approximately the same proportion of the population watches television at any given time. *Table 7.8* compares the ratings trends of the four terrestrial channels across main evening viewing sampled at fifteen minute intervals. The TVR figures given are averaged over five weeks. The deviation between weeks was not more than about 2 per cent. Viewing is dominated by the two main channels, BBC1 and ITV, which each secure around 40 per cent of viewing overall, while BBC2 and CH4 each contribute around 10 per cent. Through the evening, the audience sizes for BBC1 and ITV display characteristic complementary trends, as viewers exercise their choice between the two main channels.

Between 19:00-19:30 on a Tuesday or Thursday around half of those viewing television were watching *Emmerdale* on ITV, against which BBC1 was showing a game show quiz on Tuesday and *Top of the Pops* on Thursday. From 19:30 BBC1's audience peaked during *EastEnders*, gaining around a 65 per cent share of the viewing audience. There was a corresponding slip for the commercial channel, then screening a regional feature or comedy repeat on the Tuesday or the wildlife programme *Survival* on a Thursday. The importance of *EastEnders* to the BBC1 schedule in terms of preserving the corporation's share of the audience can be clearly seen. From 20:00 the ITV audience recovered during the popular episodic police drama series *The Bill* again gaining more than a 50 per cent share of viewers, while the BBC showed a situation comedy on Tuesdays, or the science magazine *Tomorrow's World* on Thursdays. The ITV current affairs programme *This Week*, shown against a situation comedy on BBC1 on a Thursday, accounted for the ensuing slump in the commercial channel's audience to less than a 20 per cent share.

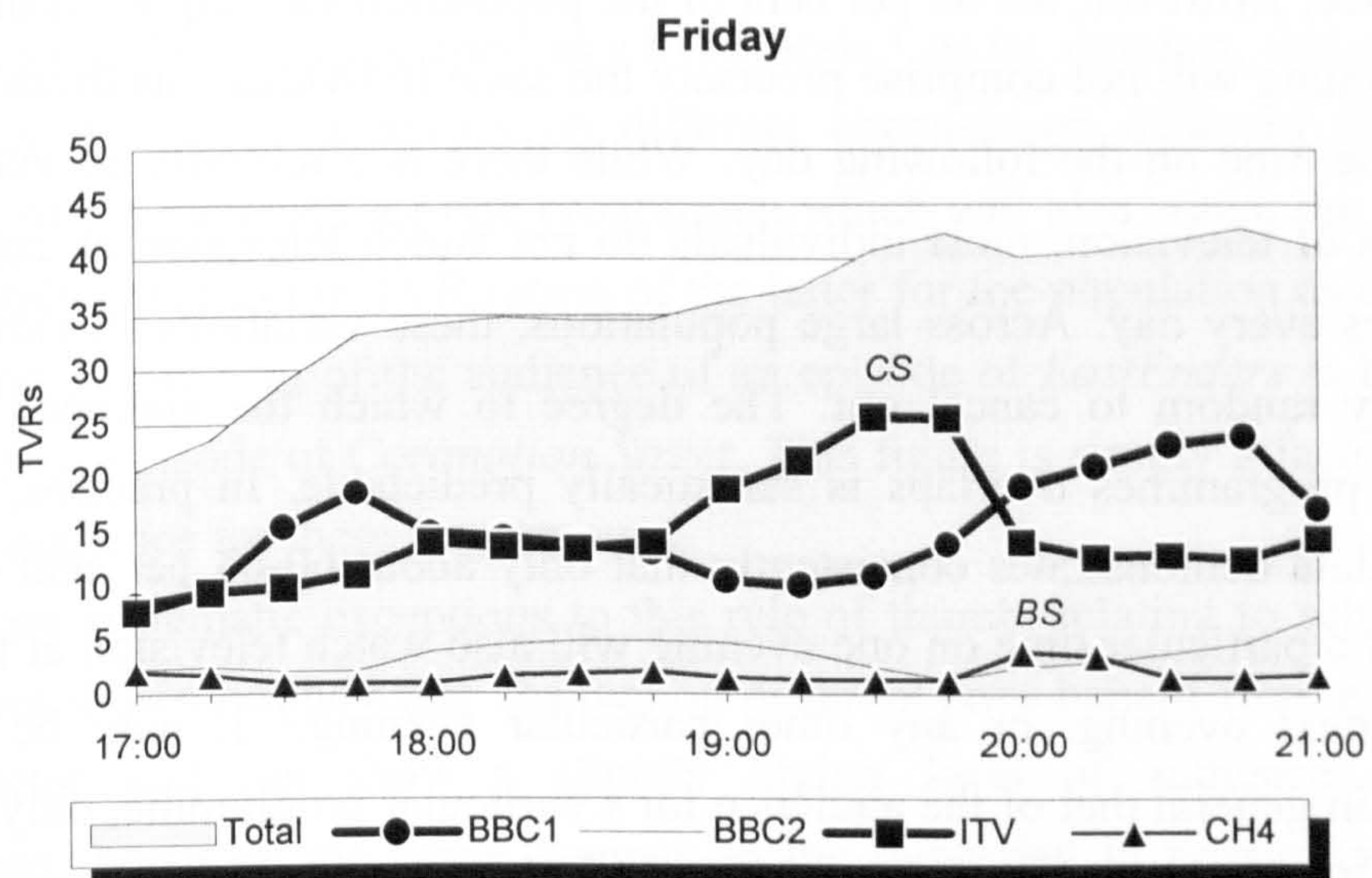
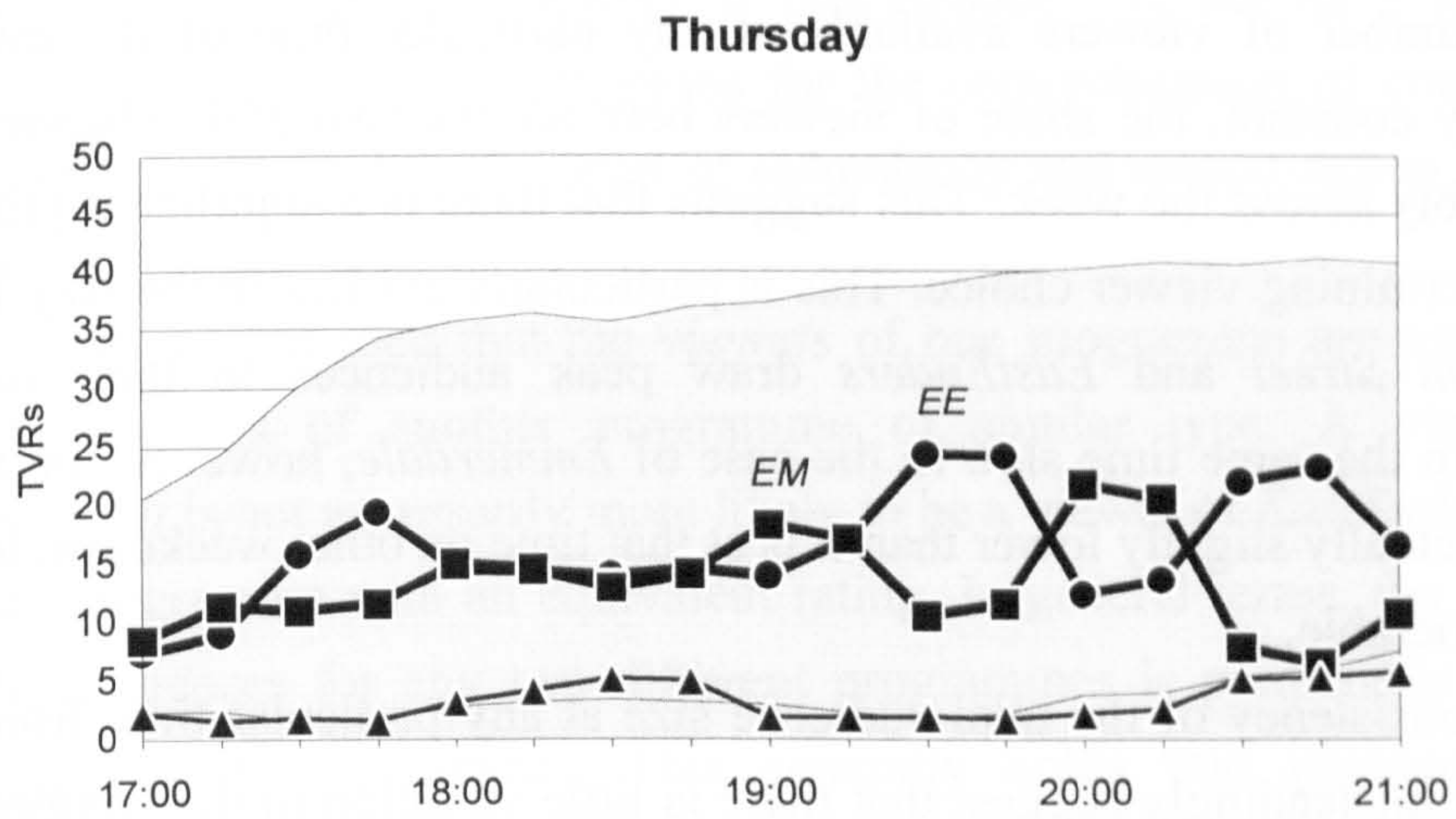


**Table 7.8**  
**Average ratings trends in main evening viewing by channel**  
 October 1990 (percentage of population viewing, weekday evenings)





**Table 7.8** (Continued)  
**Average ratings trends in main evening viewing by channel**  
 October 1990 (percentage of population viewing, weekday evenings)



Source: BARB/AGB, Weeks 40-44, 1990



Given that there is a very large potential viewing audience available during the early evening, it might be argued that any programme transmitted at that time might attain a reasonably high rating. This assumption may be tested by comparing channel share at the same time slot across the week. Although the overall number of viewers available at any particular time of the evening is reasonably constant, the share of viewers between the two main channels varies considerably across the week. This suggests that there is a significant programme effect determining viewer choice. This is particularly evident in the way in which *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* draw peak audiences to their respective channels in the same time slot. In the case of *Emmerdale*, however, the audience rating is actually slightly lower than it is at that time on other weekdays, leaving it rather vulnerable.

The consistency of the total audience size at any particular time from day to day might misleadingly suggest that there is little variation in the composition of the audience. However, the 40 per cent of the population viewing at eight o'clock on one evening will not comprise precisely the same individuals as those viewing at the same time on the following day. While there is a minority of very heavy consumers of television, most individuals do not watch television at exactly the same times every day. Across large populations, these variations in viewing are sufficiently random to cancel out. The degree to which the audience for two particular programmes overlaps is statistically predictable. In practice, detailed audience data demonstrates consistently that only about 60-65 per cent of those viewing at a particular time on one evening will also watch television at the same time the next evening, or any other particular evening.<sup>2</sup> It may be said of television in general that of the audience for a particular programme, only half the viewers will have seen the previous edition or episode of that programme. This has been found to apply across various programme types, although the degree of audience overlap tends to increase with the size of the audience and may be somewhat higher for serial genres such as soap opera which encourage greater loyalty.

One might expect a greater degree of audience loyalty for continuing drama serials. A BBC audience research study in 1989 found audience loyalty to particular soap operas to be high compared to other television programmes.<sup>3</sup> Averaged over a period, 50-70 per cent of viewers who watched at least half of one episode went on to watch at least half of the next episode. The figures were highest for those programmes with older audiences, with 68 per cent viewing



consecutive episodes of *Emmerdale Farm* (as it was then), closely followed by *Coronation Street* at 66 per cent. Among the over 65s, an extraordinary 82 per cent watched consecutive episodes of *Coronation Street*, demonstrating a very high degree of programme loyalty. However, even with such popular programmes, a third of all the viewers of one episode will not have seen the preceding one. This has clear implications for the comprehension of continuing storylines and helps to explain the level of redundancy and recapitulation built in to most soap opera narration.

It should not be assumed that the viewers of one programme are especially likely to be viewers of another programme of similar type. A viewer of *Coronation Street* is not necessarily more likely to be a viewer of *EastEnders* than of any other programme with an equivalent rating. In general terms, the overlap between the audiences for any two different programmes is predictable simply from the size of their audiences. This generally holds true irrespective of programme type or content and has been termed the duplication of viewing law, although it should only be regarded as a hypothesis.<sup>4</sup> At its simplest, this suggests that for any pair of programmes on different channels on different days, the percentage of the audience for one programme which will also watch the other is approximately equal to the TVR rating of the latter for the population as a whole. Thus around 30 per cent of the audience of an episode of *EastEnders* is likely to watch the next episode of *Coronation Street*. This figure is simply a factor of the size of the audience for these programmes.

There are systematic exceptions to this rule of thumb, relating to scheduling. Programmes shown on the same channel on different days benefit from a channel loyalty factor and can show a slightly higher level of audience overlap. Programmes shown on the same channel on the same day in proximity benefit from an audience inheritance effect. Programmes shown during the day on weekdays can have higher levels of audience duplication, because of audience availability to view. Finally, serials may yield greater audience overlap than other programmes. Taking all these factors into account, potential audience overlap may be predicted with reasonable reliability from ratings data alone, without reference to programme type or title. However, soap operas have been found to produce greater cumulative viewing than other comparably scheduled programming.



## Demographics

Television is a broadcast mass medium, and the audience for a programme generally reflects a broad cross-section of those available to view at that time. The social composition of the BBC1 audience closely follows that of the population, while that for ITV is slightly skewed towards the lower social grades. Where there are significant and predictable variations in the audience profile for a particular programme, these can be exploited by those buying airtime for commercials in order to increase the number of target viewers reached for a given cost per thousand. The composition of the soap opera audience is particularly stable and predictable. Although in absolute terms, soap operas attract larger numbers of AB men than most minority programmes aimed more specifically at that group, it is relatively expensive for advertisers to reach such individuals through the former, and this is reflected in the commercials that such serials attract. Although the audiences are numerically large, in composition they tend to be skewed towards those that are older and less affluent. Nevertheless, the large numbers of housewives watching makes these programmes an attractive proposition to many advertisers, particularly those promoting staple goods or household products. *Tables 7.9 to 7.12* illustrate selected programme profiles with respect to age, sex and social grade. These are based on the detailed demographic data presented in *tables 7.16 to 7.19*.

### Age

The age profile of the audience is the main distinguishing factor among different soap operas. *Emmerdale* has a significantly older audience profile among the soaps. Over a third of those watching are over the age of retirement, indexing at 212, relative to an index of 100 for their distribution in the population as a whole. Over half of the audience is over the age of fifty-five. Only 37 per cent of the total *Emmerdale* audience is under the age of 45, compared to 50 per cent of the television audience in general and 60 per cent of the population. *Coronation Street* has a similarly 'greying' audience, with just under half the audience under 45, and over a quarter over the age of 65, indexing at 160. The audience for *EastEnders* is nearer to the age distribution for the population, with the highest index at 128 for those aged 25-34, while *Brookside* tends towards the young, with an index of 153 for this age group, and with 70 per cent of viewers under the age of 45. The age profiles are consistent across categories, being similar for men and



women, although marginally more women than men aged 16-24 watch *Brookside*, while slightly more women over 55 watch *EastEnders*.

Looking at the share of the television audience, it can be seen that nearly eight out of ten 16-24 year-olds watching television during *EastEnders* were watching that programme, compared to four out of ten of those aged 65 or over. That pattern is almost reversed in the case of *Emmerdale*, where the 16-24 share is 38 per cent and the 65+ share is 68 per cent. *Coronation Street* is equally popular amongst young and old alike, with a 72 per cent share at each end of the spectrum.

### *Sex*

The soap opera has been consistently characterised as a woman's form, largely for historical reasons and as a result of the genre's low perceived prestige. Women generally have a higher stated opinion of the genre than men. While the composition of the audience is weighted towards women, it must be remembered that these programmes are also seen by large numbers of men, and this cannot be ignored by any theory which attempts to account for the popularity of the genre.

In October 1990, among the soap operas, *Emmerdale* had the highest index for men at 92. It was watched on average by one in six of the adult male population, over 3.5 million men, higher than the ITV peak average. *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*, with their larger audiences, were each seen by about a quarter of adult males, around 5 million men. Very few programmes have larger absolute numbers of male viewers than these two serials. *Brookside* had on average 0.9 million male viewers, indexing at 80. The total audience for *Emmerdale* is around 60 per cent female, and six out of ten adult viewers are women. Similar ratios were found in the case of *EastEnders*, *Coronation Street* and *Brookside*, the latter having a marginally higher proportion of women watching. In fact the ratio of female to male viewers for British soap operas is consistently close to 3:2. It should be understood that women generally watch more television than men. The average adult audience profile for ITV is 58 per cent female and 42 per cent male, while across all television it drops to around 55 per cent female and 45 per cent male. This ratio remains broadly the same across most programme categories, the main exception being sport, for which men make up the majority of the audience, typically around 65 per cent. In this context, the relative number of women viewing soap operas in main evening viewing is not particularly remarkable.

Looking at the share of the audience viewing television during a particular programme, the proportion of men watching each soap opera is only around four



per cent below the share of all adults watching the same programme. Just under half, 48 per cent, of all men watching television during *Emmerdale* were tuned to that programme, compared to just over half, 52 per cent, of all adults. So while men constitute a 40 per cent minority of the adult audience for soaps, they are almost as likely as women to be watching a soap opera if they are viewing television at that time.

### *Social grade*

The audience for *Emmerdale* is significantly downmarket, with the largest proportion of adult soap opera viewers in the DE social grade, indexing at 144. Only 28 per cent of *Emmerdale*'s adult audience are ABC1s, against an ITV average of 33 per cent and compared to 38 per cent of the audience for all television. However, it should be remembered that this still represents over two and a half million individuals. The AB group make up only 8 per cent of the adult audience, with an index of 48, the lowest for any demographic group among the soaps. *Brookside* and *Coronation Street* are also heavily weighted towards the DEs, indexing at 120 and 129 respectively. Nevertheless, ABC1s make up nearly a third of the adult audience, that is over four million individuals, over a million of whom are the elusive ABs. The audience of *EastEnders* is again more representative of the population, although it remains light of AB viewers. All the serials have a low AB penetration, although this group watches less television generally. The social grade profiles for men and women are generally similar, although there is a slightly higher proportion of DEs among the women.

In terms of audience share, *EastEnders* is again reasonably representative of the population's social distribution, with a 59 per cent share of AB adults, almost the same proportion as those in the DE group. In the case of both *EastEnders* and *Coronation Street*, of those viewing television at the time, more than half of those in any social group were tuned to those programmes. *Emmerdale* achieved an AB adult share of only 36 per cent, compared to a 62 per cent DE share, confirming its down-market appeal.



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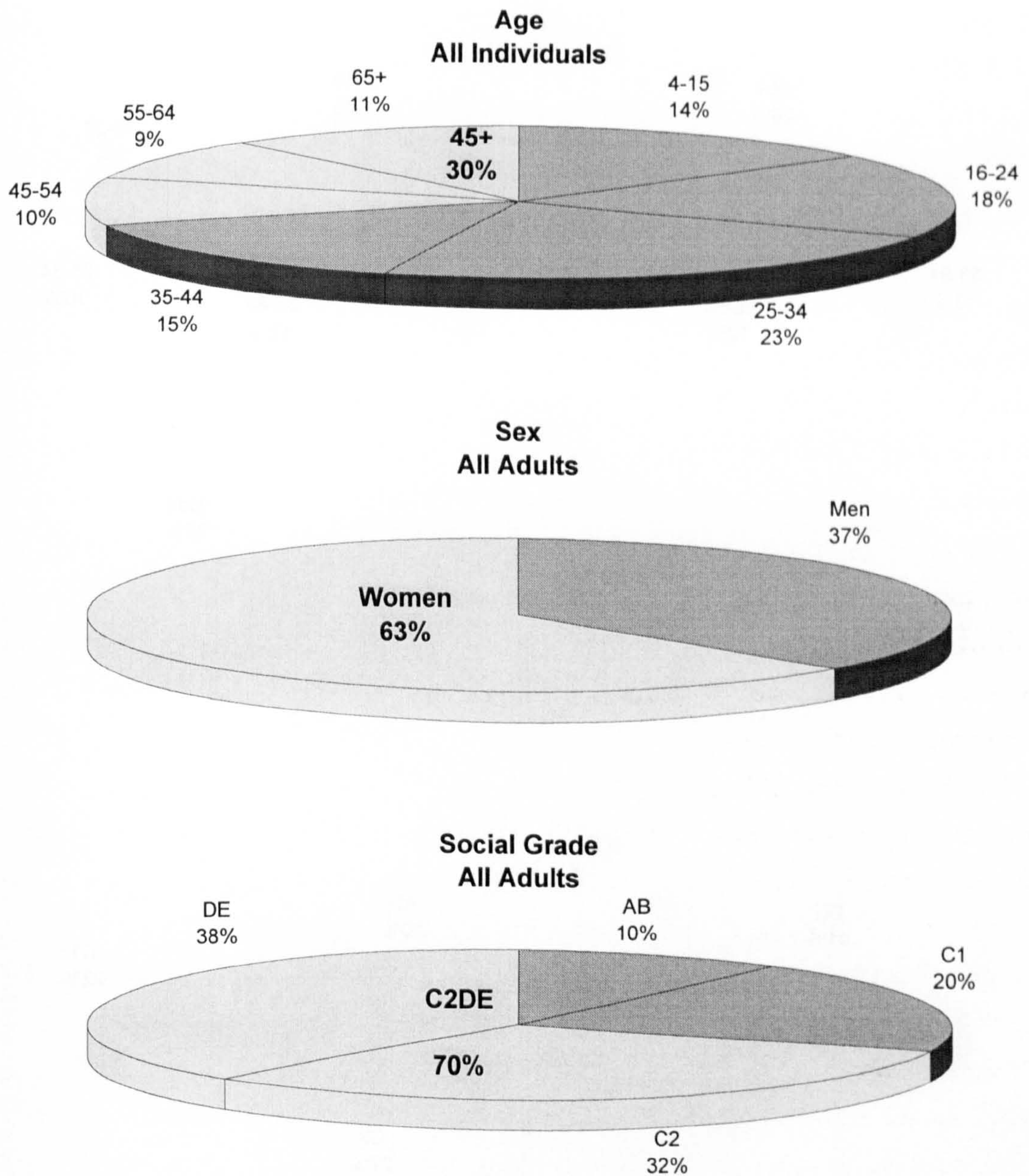
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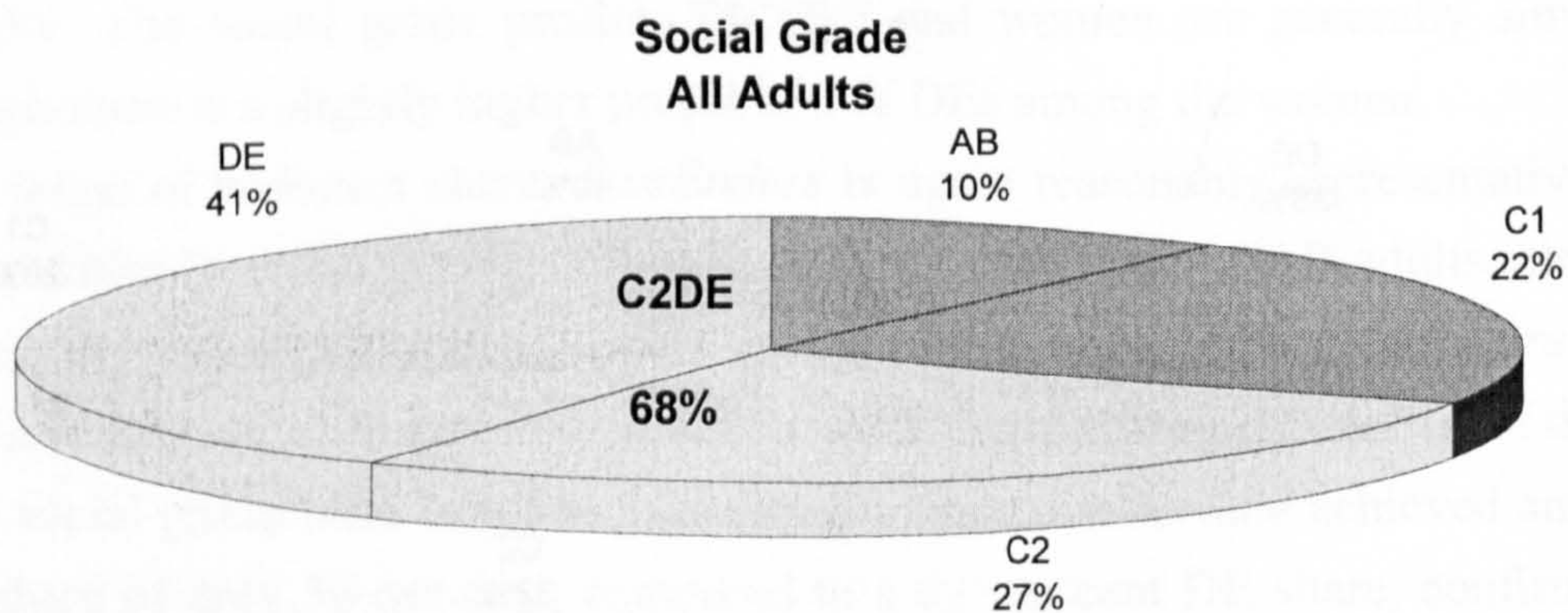
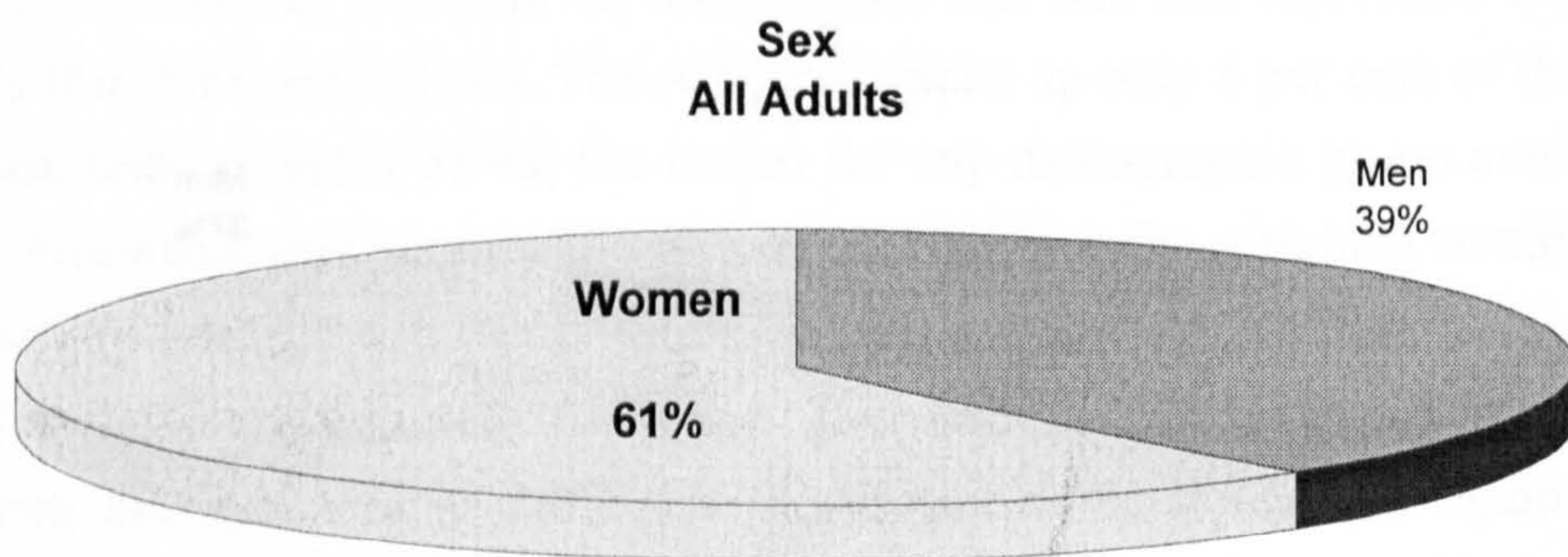
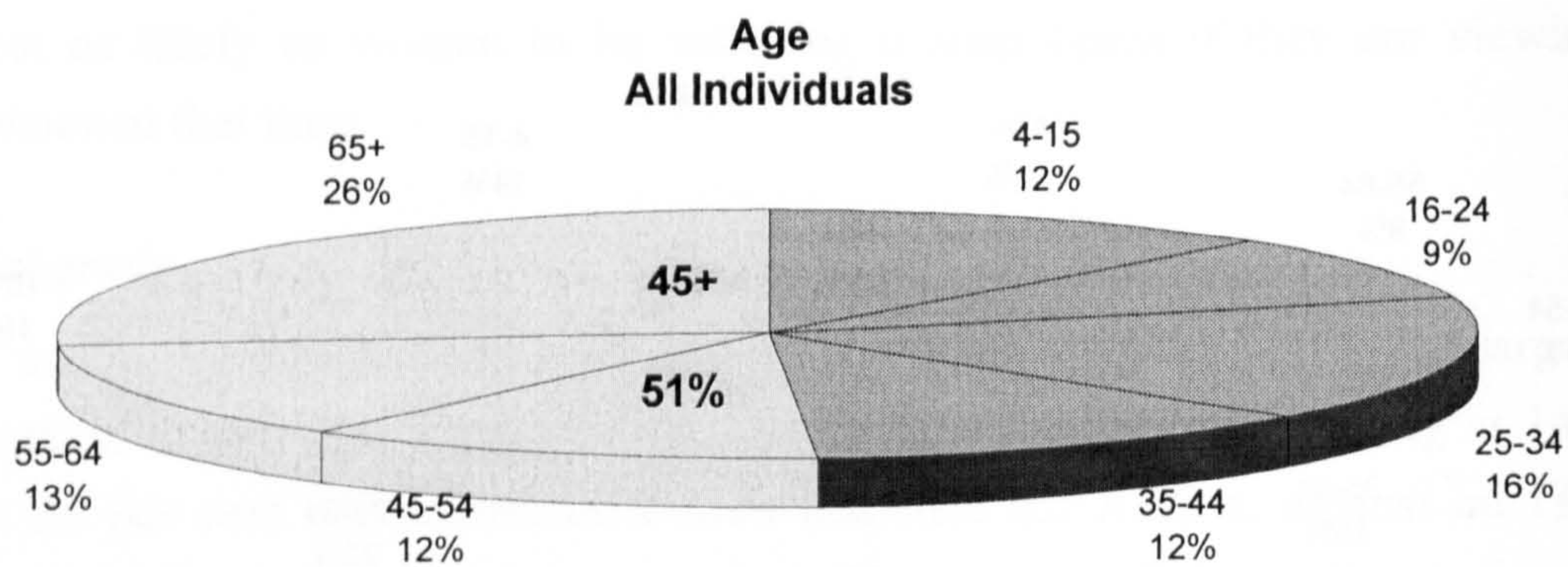
**Table 7.9**  
**Brookside weekday audience profile**  
 October 1990



Source: BARB/AGB Programme Profiles, weeks 40-44, 1990



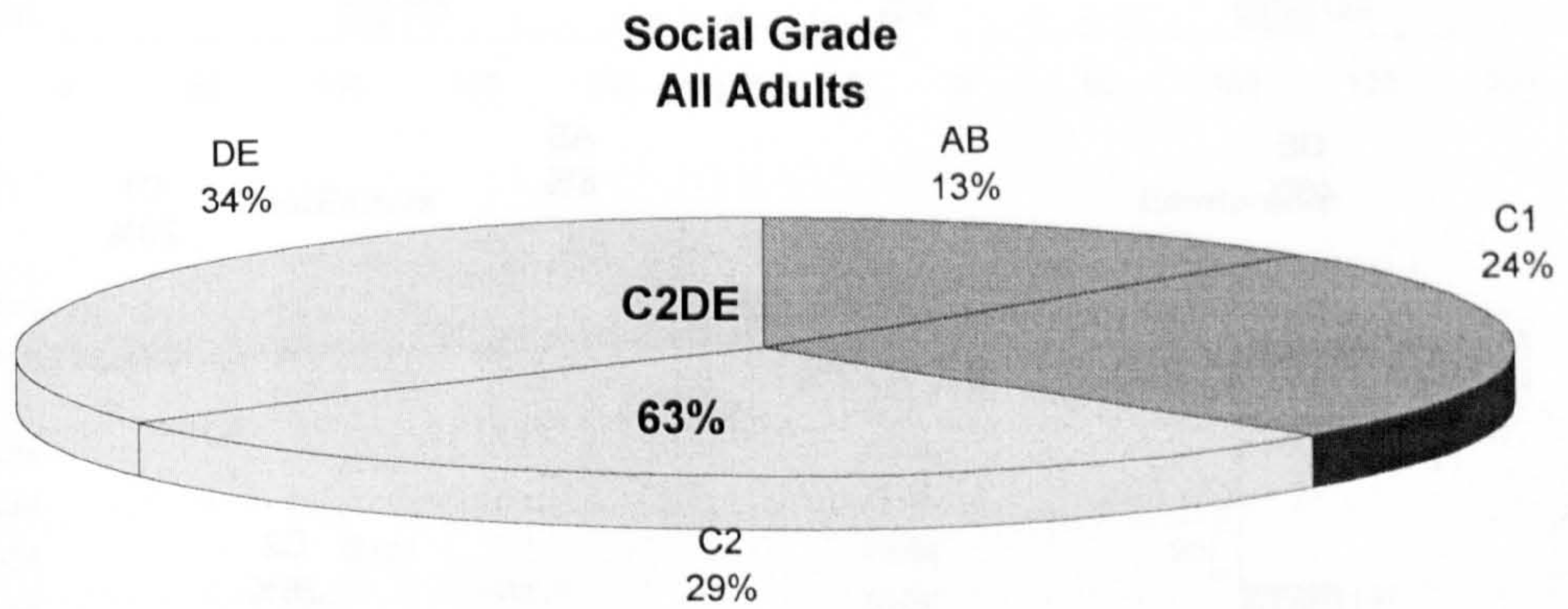
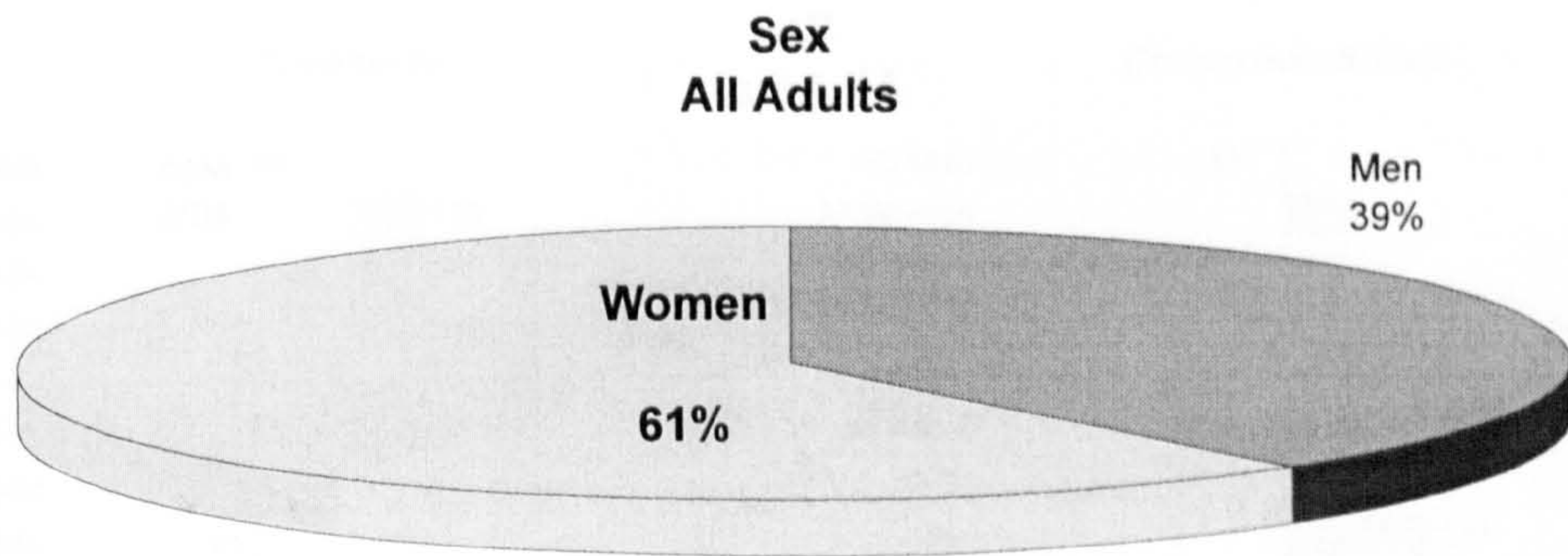
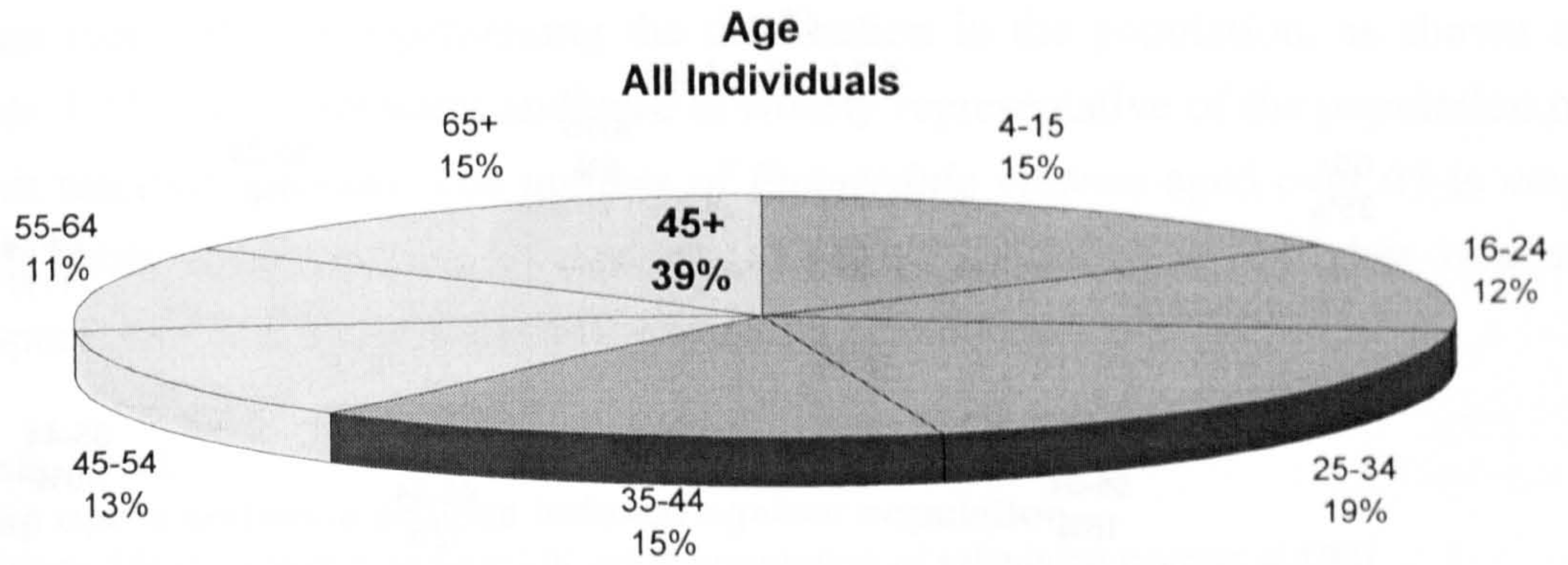
**Table 7.10**  
**Coronation Street weekday audience profile**  
 October 1990



Source: BARB/AGB Programme Profiles, weeks 40-44, 1990



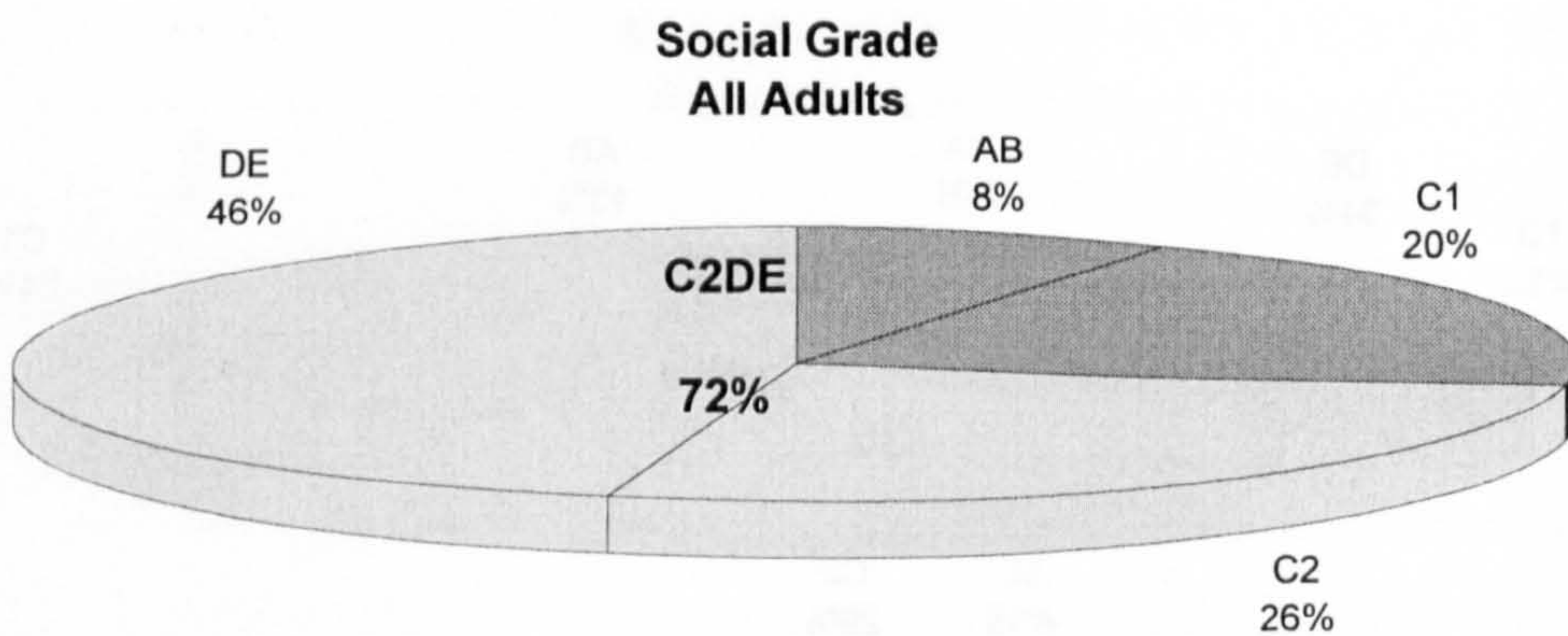
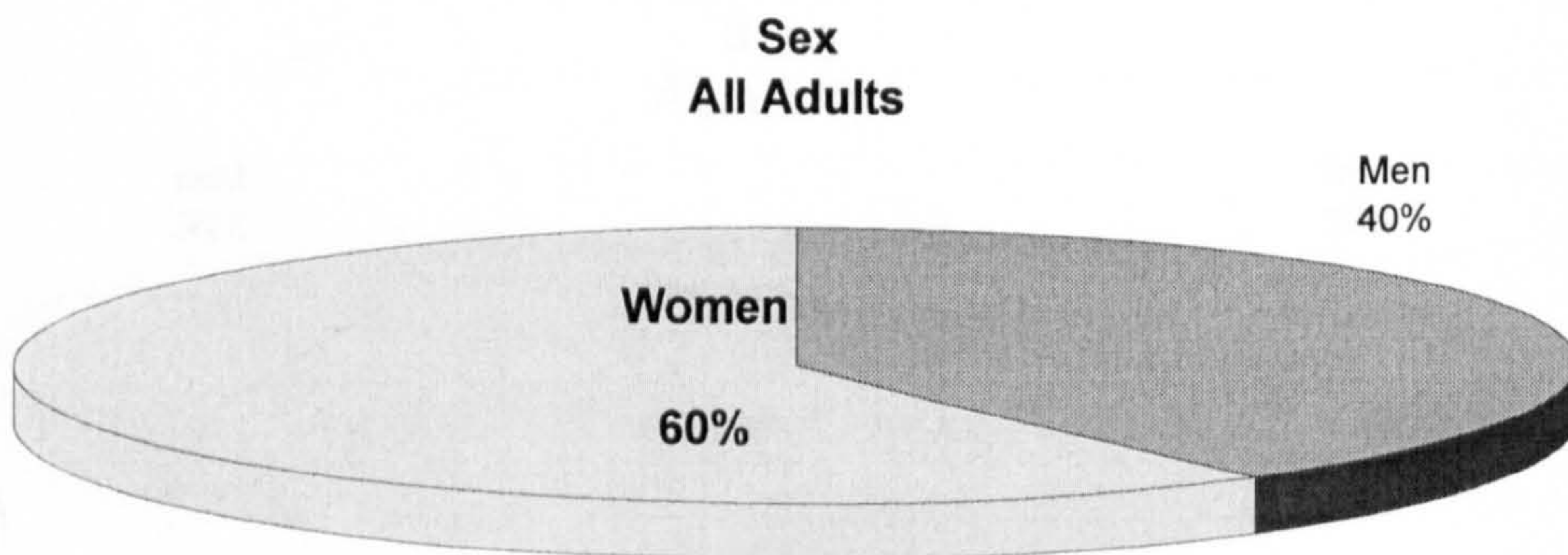
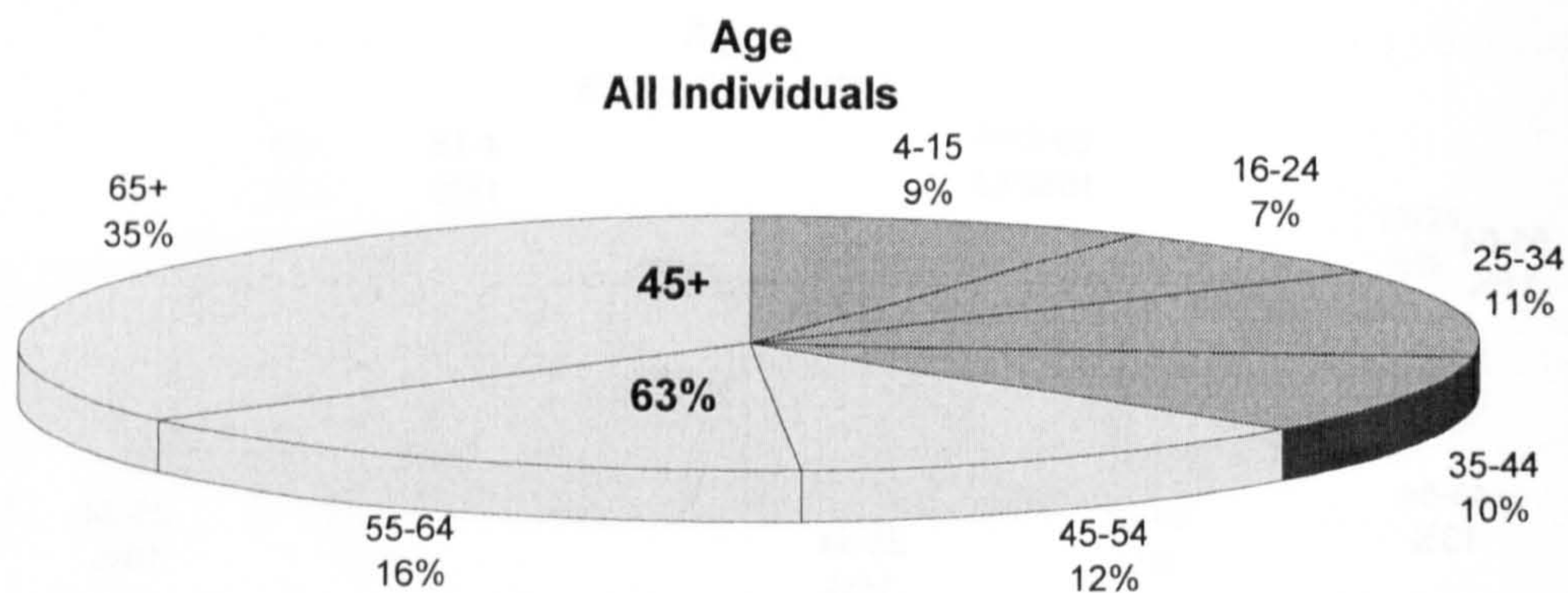
**Table 7.11**  
**EastEnders weekday audience profile**  
 October 1990



Source: BARB/AGB Programme Profiles, weeks 40-44, 1990



**Table 7.12**  
**Emmerdale weekday audience profile**  
 October 1990



Source: BARB/AGB Programme Profiles, weeks 40-44, 1990



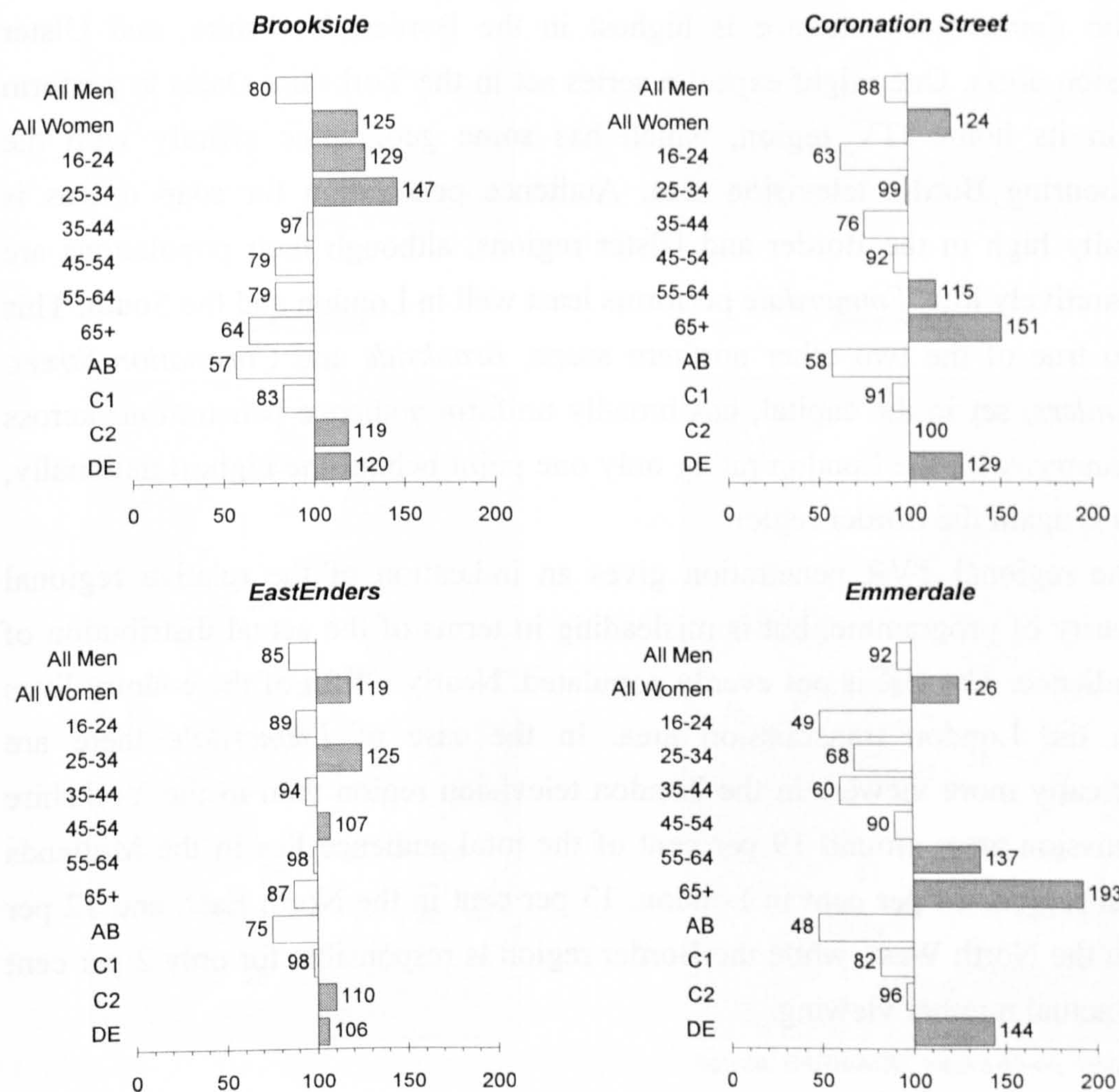
### Index

An index figure provides a means of measuring the composition of the audience of a programme compared to the population as a whole. This is measured relative to an index of 100, representing the distribution in the population, as shown in *table 7.13*. The *EastEnders* audience is closely representative of the population of adult television homes. The number of *Emmerdale* viewers aged over 65 is very high relative to the population. All four programmes have a higher relative proportion of women and a lower proportion of men viewing.

**Table 7.13**

**Soap opera audience profiles indexed against population**

October 1990 (indexed against UK adult population of television homes = 100)



Audience profile of adult viewers. The bars show how the programme audiences differ from the adult population of all television homes, which is indexed at 100. Groups represented by bars falling to the right of centre are relatively over-represented in the audience.



### *Region*

Regional variations are apparent in the viewing of soap operas. *Table 7.14* gives the average audience penetration for soap operas by region in percentage terms. The boundaries shown are illustrative only, as actual transmission areas overlap and the definition of BARB regions upon which these figures are based are both complex and copyright.

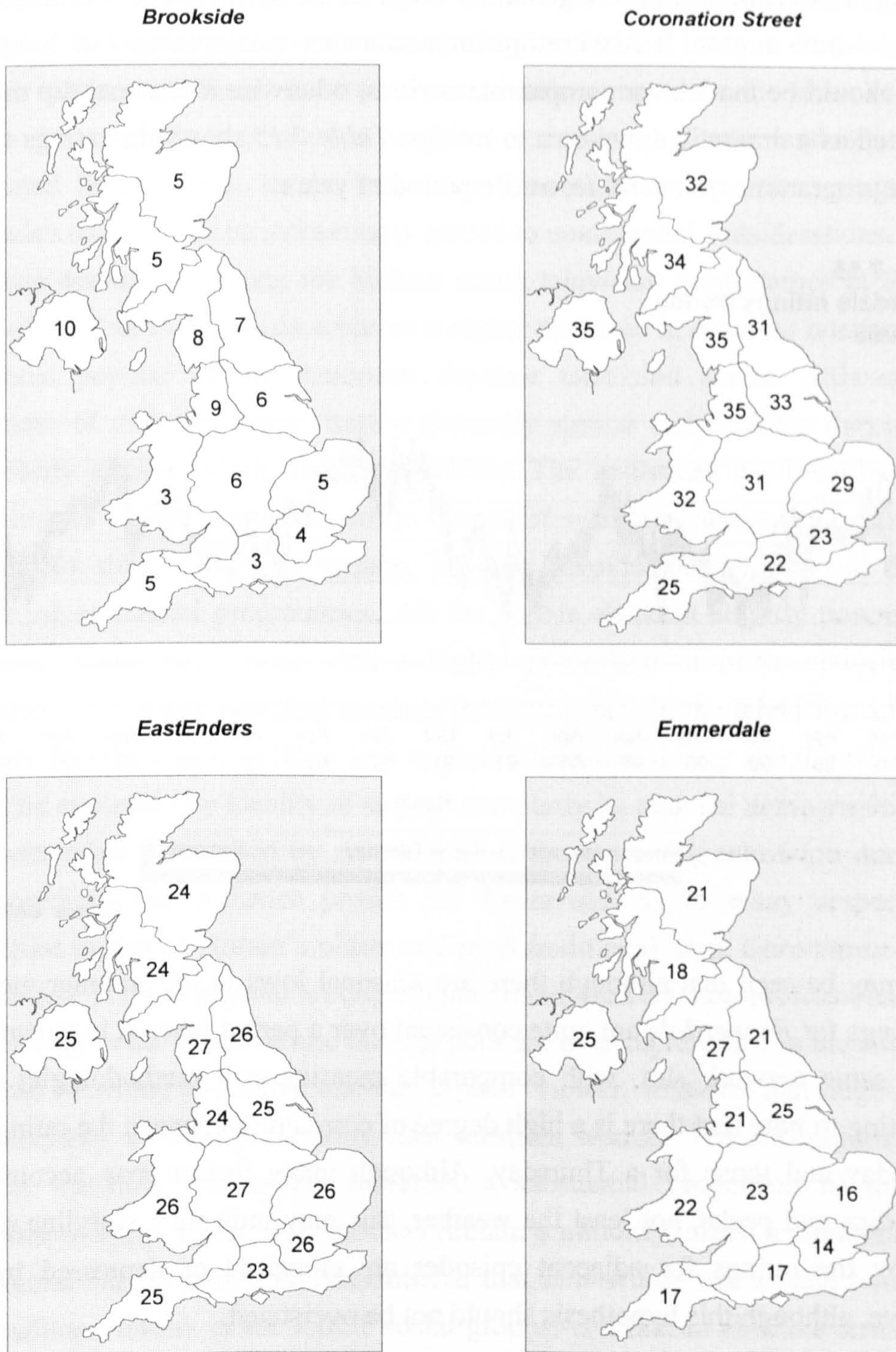
The generally higher soap opera audience penetrations in the North may be partly accounted for by the over-representation in these areas of the lower social grades, but in addition there appears to be a regional effect. This may be partly a factor of the locality in which the serials are set. In each case the audience penetration in the region in which a serial is produced is among the highest in the country.

The *Emmerdale* audience is highest in the Border, Yorkshire, and Ulster television areas. One might expect a series set in the Yorkshire Dales to perform well in its home ITV region, which has some geographic affinity with the neighbouring Border television area. Audience penetration for soap operas is generally high in the Border and Ulster regions, although their populations are comparatively low. *Emmerdale* performs least well in London and the South. This is also true of the two other northern soaps, *Brookside* and *Coronation Street*. *EastEnders*, set in the capital, has broadly uniform audience penetrations across the country, with the London rating only one point behind the highest nationally, which is again the Border region.

The regional TVR penetration gives an indication of the relative regional popularity of programme, but is misleading in terms of the actual distribution of the audience. The UK is not evenly populated. Nearly a fifth of the country lives within the London transmission area. In the case of *Emmerdale* there are numerically more viewers in the London television region than in the Yorkshire transmission area: around 19 per cent of the total audience lies in the Midlands Central region, 14 per cent in London, 13 per cent in the North East, and 12 per cent in the North West, while the Border region is responsible for only 2 per cent of the actual number viewing.



**Table 7.14**  
**Soap opera audiences by ITV region**  
 October 1990 (percentage of regional population viewing, weekdays)



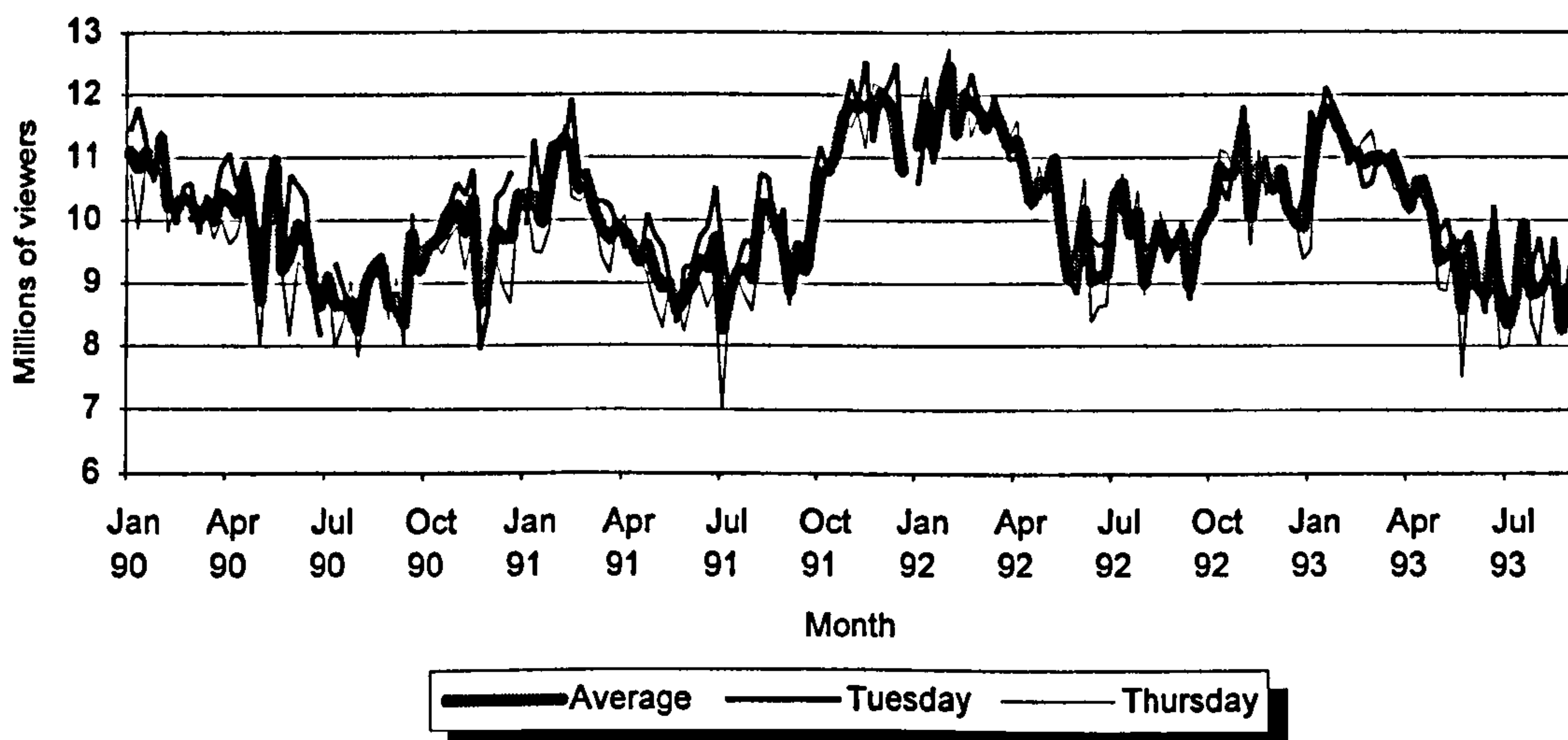
Source: BARB/AGB, weeks 40-44, 1990



## Trends

In reading ratings figures, it is important to take into account seasonal trends in viewing. Television ratings are generally lower in the light summer evenings than on cold winter nights. It is therefore important that measurements of long-term trends should be made over comparable periods, otherwise a seasonal dip may be presented as a dramatic down-turn in ratings. *Table 7.15* shows the ratings trends for one programme, *Emmerdale*, over a period of years.

**Table 7.15**  
**Emmerdale ratings trends**  
1990-1993



Source: BARB/AGB

It may be seen that although there are seasonal lows in the summer months, the ratings for *Emmerdale* are quite consistent over a period when it is transmitted in the same network slot, with comparable measurement methodologies. It is interesting to note that there is a high degree of correlation between the ratings for a Tuesday and those for a Thursday. Although many factors may account for minor dips and peaks, not least the weather, this may indicate a storyline effect, whereby the ratings for adjacent episodes are enhanced or depressed by the narrative, although this hypothesis should not be overstated.

Despite significant changes to the programme over the corresponding period, including a change of producer, there does not appear to be any long-term change in the average audience size, although there may have been shifts in the demographic profile. If anything, there has been a failure to capitalise on a modest gain in early 1992 in the succeeding year.



## Summary

Commercial television does not so much sell its advertisers airtime as it sells an audience. Television viewers are graded into groups according to type, and auctioned in bundles of a thousand to the highest bidder. Even in Britain, where there is a strong public service tradition, channels compete for the same audience within the carefully cultivated duopoly of compulsory licence and advertiser-supported broadcasting. In the new era of increased competition, programme schedules are likely to be increasingly geared to commercial considerations.

Soap operas are among the highest rating television programmes in Britain. Each of the four main serials achieves a higher audience in absolute numbers than the most popular of the American daytime television soaps. Although the audiences of different serials have a generally similar composition, they do not necessarily consist of the same individuals. The audiences are broadly based, appealing to a wide age-range, across the social spectrum, across the county, but are slightly skewed towards women. There is considerable variation in the age profile of individual programmes. All the serials attract a slightly downmarket audience, particularly those with a higher proportion of older viewers. The proportion of women watching exceeds the inbuilt bias in the television audience towards female viewers. There is a regional variation among serials, which can partly be explained by locality of setting, and partly by national demographics.

*Emmerdale* is watched by around half of those viewing television during its transmission. The audience profile for *Emmerdale* is in many respects not dissimilar to that of Britain's oldest and most traditional soap, *Coronation Street*. *Emmerdale* is more popular among women, older viewers, non-professionals, and those living in the North. While these groups are over-represented in the audience, it would be wrong to assume that the 'typical' viewer, whatever that might mean, is necessarily an elderly, working-class northern woman. The 3.8 million C2DE women watching *Emmerdale* represent a substantial proportion of the total audience of some 10 million, but they remain a minority, albeit a significant and substantial one. It should be remembered that *Emmerdale* has around two and a half million viewers in the ABC1 social groups, and that in absolute terms there are more *Emmerdale* viewers in the London region than in Yorkshire. The audience profile appears to have changed only marginally in recent years, despite the introduction of younger characters and 'sexier' storylines. While growing only slightly, the *Emmerdale* audience has moved marginally upmarket, gaining



around 3 per cent AB viewers. It is also more youthful, with slight gains in the 10-15 and 25-44 age groups, while the proportion of those over 55 fell slightly. The performance of *Emmerdale* improved in London, the South and South East, and the South West. At the time, *Emmerdale*'s audience figures suffered in comparison to other soap operas because of the lack of a repeat broadcast, which was eventually introduced in September 1993.

In general, the audience for these programmes is not broadly dissimilar to the typical television audience profile. Although skewed towards certain elements of the population, by virtue of their sheer size these audiences still include substantial numbers of men and the professional classes. Against the background of broader patterns of television viewing, the ratio of male to female viewers to peak time soaps would not appear to entirely support the prevalent assumption that soap operas are almost exclusively a 'women's genre'.

The focus on audience demographics reflects the fact that television audiences are conceived as commodities delivered by programmers to advertisers. While the industry assiduously accumulates data about the mass audience, the research into the viewing of individuals is by comparison negligible. Although programmes can be readily compared with respect to audience size and composition, there is no widespread method of comparing the programmes themselves in a similar statistical manner.

It is important to remember that although they are sold by the thousand, members of the television audience are individuals. For them, watching television is an activity. Television viewing is not a passive process. It is through making sense of television that satisfaction and pleasure are obtained. Among the most popular programmes, soap operas provide a shared narrative experience for millions of people. A rating of twenty means that one in five individuals in the country participated simultaneously as a member of the audience of a particular programme. For some soaps this regularly rises to one in four, a figure matched only by major state and sporting occasions. During this time, it must be assumed that each viewer is engaged in similar processes of perception by which they derive meaning and pleasure from the programme. The cultural significance of such pervasive programming must make it a candidate for serious study. The fundamental question must be: 'what is going on in these people's heads while they are watching?'



**Table 7.16**  
**Brookside weekday audience profile**  
 October 1990

<b>All Individuals</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
Population 000s/%	52176	17.1	24.2	27.3	31.4	13.6	15.2	15.1	12.0	10.8	16.3
Average 000s	2841	272	559	911	1100	515	659	430	282	252	307
Average TVR	5	3	4	6	7	7	8	5	4	4	4
Average Profile	100	9.6	19.7	32.1	38.7	18.1	23.2	15.1	9.9	8.9	10.8
Average Index	100	56	81	118	123	133	153	100	83	82	66
Average % Share	13	9	11	16	15	27	21	15	10	9	6

<b>All Adults</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
Population 000s/%	43337	16.8	24.6	26.8	31.8	16.4	18.3	18.1	14.5	13.1	19.6
Average 000s	2445	232	496	783	934	515	659	430	282	252	307
Average TVR	6	3	5	7	7	7	8	5	4	4	4
Average Profile	86.1	9.5	20.3	32	38.2	21.1	26.9	17.6	11.5	10.3	12.6
Average Index	104	57	83	119	120	129	147	97	79	79	64
Average % Share	13	9	11	16	14	27	21	15	10	9	6

<b>All Men</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55+</b>
Population 000s/%	20613	17.6	24.1	29.1	29.2	17.2	18.6	18.8	15.1	30.3
Average 000s	900	89	163	327	320	159	255	165	101	221
Average TVR	4	2	3	5	5	4	7	4	3	4
Average Profile	31.7	9.9	18.2	36.4	35.6	17.6	28.3	18.3	11.2	24.6
Average Index	80	56	76	125	122	102	152	97	74	81
Average % Share	11	7	9	14	12	22	18	13	8	6

<b>All Women</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55+</b>
Population 000s/%	22724	16.2	25.0	24.6	34.2	15.7	18.0	17.6	13.9	34.9
Average 000s	1545	144	333	456	613	356	404	266	181	338
Average TVR	7	4	6	8	8	10	10	7	6	4
Average Profile	54.4	9.3	21.5	29.5	39.7	23.1	26.2	17.2	11.7	21.9
Average Index	125	57	86	120	116	147	146	98	84	63
Average % Share	14	10	13	17	15	31	22	16	12	7

Source: BARB/AGB Programme Profiles, weeks 40-44, 1990



**Table 7.17**  
**Coronation Street weekday audience profile**  
 October 1990

<b>All Individuals</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
Population 000s/%	52176	17.1	24.2	27.3	31.4	13.6	15.2	15.1	12.0	10.8	16.3
Average 000s	14813	1455	3261	4076	6021	1350	2375	1796	1753	1967	3868
Average TVR	28	16	26	29	37	19	30	23	28	35	45
Average Profile	100	9.8	22	27.5	40.6	9.1	16	12.1	11.8	13.3	26.1
Average Index	100	57	91	101	129	67	105	80	98	123	160
Average % Share	69	51	65	71	77	72	72	65	65	66	72

<b>All Adults</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
Population 000s/%	43337	16.8	24.6	26.8	31.8	16.4	18.3	18.1	14.5	13.1	19.6
Average 000s	13109	1274	2943	3524	5368	1350	2375	1796	1753	1967	3868
Average TVR	30	17	28	30	39	19	30	23	28	35	45
Average Profile	88.5	9.7	22.5	26.9	41	10.3	18.1	13.7	13.4	15	29.5
Average Index	106	58	91	100	129	63	99	76	92	115	151
Average % Share	69	52	65	71	76	72	72	65	65	66	72

<b>All Men</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55+</b>
Population 000s/%	20613	17.6	24.1	29.1	29.2	17.2	18.6	18.8	15.1	30.3
Average 000s	5121	491	1078	1570	1981	474	995	712	721	2219
Average TVR	25	13	22	26	33	13	26	18	23	35
Average Profile	34.6	9.6	21.1	30.7	38.7	9.3	19.4	13.9	14.1	43.3
Average Index	88	55	88	105	133	54	104	74	93	143
Average % Share	64	45	59	68	72	64	70	59	59	65

<b>All Women</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55+</b>
Population 000s/%	22724	16.2	25.0	24.6	34.2	15.7	18.0	17.6	13.9	34.9
Average 000s	7988	782	1865	1954	3387	876	1380	1085	1033	3615
Average TVR	35	21	33	35	44	25	34	27	33	46
Average Profile	53.9	9.8	23.3	24.5	42.4	11	17.3	13.6	12.9	45.3
Average Index	124	60	93	100	124	70	96	77	93	130
Average % Share	73	58	70	74	79	78	74	70	70	74

Source: BARB/AGB Programme Profiles, weeks 40-44, 1990



**Table 7.18**  
**EastEnders weekday audience profile**  
 October 1990

<b>All Individuals</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
Population 000s/%	52176	17.1	24.2	27.3	31.4	13.6	15.2	15.1	12.0	10.8	16.3
Average 000s	12794	1663	3041	3792	4298	1597	2499	1862	1691	1396	1866
Average TVR	25	19	24	27	26	23	31	24	27	25	22
Average Profile	100	13	23.8	29.6	33.6	12.5	19.5	14.6	13.2	10.9	14.6
Average Index	100	76	98	108	107	92	128	97	110	101	90
Average % Share	63	62	65	68	59	79	78	70	66	51	40

<b>All Adults</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
Population 000s/%	43337	16.8	24.6	26.8	31.8	16.4	18.3	18.1	14.5	13.1	19.6
Average 000s	10911	1380	2634	3214	3684	1597	2499	1862	1691	1396	1866
Average TVR	25	19	25	28	27	23	31	24	27	25	22
Average Profile	85.3	12.6	24.1	29.5	33.8	14.6	22.9	17.1	15.5	12.8	17.1
Average Index	103	75	98	110	106	89	125	94	107	98	87
Average % Share	61	60	63	67	56	79	78	70	66	51	40

<b>All Men</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55+</b>
Population 000s/%	20613	17.6	24.1	29.1	29.2	17.2	18.6	18.8	15.1	30.3
Average 000s	4288	567	922	1388	1342	588	1015	767	686	1233
Average TVR	21	16	20	23	22	17	27	20	22	20
Average Profile	33.5	13.2	23.1	32.4	31.3	13.7	23.7	17.9	16	28.8
Average Index	85	75	96	111	107	80	127	95	106	95
Average % Share	56	56	56	62	52	73	74	65	60	40

<b>All Women</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55+</b>
Population 000s/%	22724	16.2	25.0	24.6	34.2	15.7	18.0	17.6	13.9	34.9
Average 000s	6623	813	1643	1826	2342	1009	1484	1096	1005	2030
Average TVR	29	22	29	33	30	28	36	27	32	26
Average Profile	51.8	12.3	24.8	27.6	35.4	15.2	22.4	16.5	15.2	30.6
Average Index	119	76	99	112	104	97	124	94	109	88
Average % Share	65	63	68	70	59	83	80	74	71	47

Source: BARB/AGB Programme Profiles, weeks 40-44, 1990



**Table 7.19**  
**Emmerdale weekday audience profile**  
 October 1990

<b>All Individuals</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
Population 000s/%	52176	17.1	24.2	27.3	31.4	13.6	15.2	15.1	12.0	10.8	16.3
Average 000s	9838	816	1947	2580	4496	722	1112	971	1170	1619	3405
Average TVR	19	9	15	18	27	10	14	13	19	29	40
Average Profile	100	8.3	19.8	26.2	45.7	7.3	11.3	9.9	11.9	16.5	34.6
Average Index	100	49	82	96	146	54	74	66	99	153	212
Average % Share	50	34	43	48	61	38	39	41	48	58	68

<b>All Adults</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>65+</b>
Population 000s/%	43337	16.8	24.6	26.8	31.8	16.4	18.3	18.1	14.5	13.1	19.6
Average 000s	8999	729	1815	2321	4135	722	1112	971	1170	1619	3405
Average TVR	21	10	17	20	30	10	14	13	19	29	40
Average Profile	91.5	8.1	20.2	25.8	45.9	8	12.4	10.8	13	18	37.8
Average Index	110	48	82	96	144	49	68	60	90	137	193
Average % Share	52	36	45	50	62	38	39	41	48	58	68

<b>All Men</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55+</b>
Population 000s/%	20613	17.6	24.1	29.1	29.2	17.2	18.6	18.8	15.1	30.3
Average 000s	3580	278	688	1059	1555	288	457	388	463	1984
Average TVR	17	8	14	18	26	8	12	10	15	32
Average Profile	36.4	7.8	19.2	29.6	43.4	8.1	12.8	10.8	12.9	55.4
Average Index	92	44	80	102	149	47	69	57	85	183
Average % Share	48	31	39	49	59	37	38	37	42	61

<b>All Women</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>AB</b>	<b>C1</b>	<b>C2</b>	<b>DE</b>	<b>16-24</b>	<b>25-34</b>	<b>35-44</b>	<b>45-54</b>	<b>55+</b>
Population 000s/%	22724	16.2	25.0	24.6	34.2	15.7	18.0	17.6	13.9	34.9
Average 000s	5419	450	1128	1262	2579	433	656	583	707	3040
Average TVR	24	12	20	23	33	12	16	15	22	38
Average Profile	55.1	8.3	20.8	23.3	47.6	8	12.1	10.8	13	56.1
Average Index	126	51	83	95	139	51	67	61	94	161
Average % Share	54	39	49	52	64	39	41	44	52	67

Source: BARB/AGB Programme Profiles, weeks 40-44, 1990



**Notes**

- 1 Clayden, Beth (1991) 'Spot the Difference: Setting the scene, women... are you being served?', unpublished report, London: The Broadcast Partnership Ltd.
- 2 Barwise, Patrick T. and Ehrenberg, A. S. C. (1988) *Television and its Audience*, London: Sage, p. 17.
- 3 Hemming, Andrew (1989) 'Soap Operas' in BBC Broadcasting Research Data (1989) *Annual Review of BBC Broadcasting Research 16*, London: John Libbey, pp. 27-34, p. 32.
- 4 Barwise and Ehrenberg (1988) pp. 32-33.

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## Chapter 8

# Emmerdale

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The continuing drama serial or soap opera is one of the most interesting narrative genres in broadcasting. Often critically derided, it remains one of the most popular forms of programming. While there can be no such thing as a typical soap, it is possible to discern certain characteristic features that are common to the genre. The phenomenon is perhaps best observed by taking one particular serial as a case study. To understand how such a serial operates requires an examination of its historical development, the practicalities of production, and the nature of the narrative.

### Case study

Yorkshire Television's *Emmerdale* has run for more than two decades, making it Britain's second longest-running television serial. It began as an afternoon drama serial, *Emmerdale Farm*, and has gradually evolved into an early evening soap opera running throughout the year. Over more than twenty years, under a succession of producers, the programme has changed almost beyond recognition, while still remaining faithful to its origins. In contrast to the urban soap operas, it is above all a rural serial, and the continuing story of the dramatic undercurrents of this country community provides millions of regular viewers a twice-weekly window on a world of village life of which most have no direct experience. Despite its broad appeal, *Emmerdale* has the reputation of being a soft soap and receives comparatively little critical attention. Stories about the serial are more likely to appear in a women's weekly magazine than in the tabloid press. Equally, while *Coronation Street*, *Brookside* and *EastEnders* have been subjected to academic scrutiny in the past, *Emmerdale* has only been the subject of commemorative illustrated coffee-table books.<sup>1</sup> However, if one is to study the phenomenon of the British soap opera, *Emmerdale* warrants closer attention.

## History

### Yorkshire Television

*Emmerdale* is produced by Yorkshire Television, the fifth of the 'big five' independent television franchises in the United Kingdom. Based in Leeds, the franchise area covers a population of some six million people, extending well beyond the Yorkshire region to take in half of north-east England.

The first major addition to the original commercial television system, Yorkshire Television was launched on 29 July 1968, created out of the weekday and weekend franchises of Granada and ABC Television, two of the original four main independent contractors. The early days were not uneventful. Within the first week, the independent television network was blacked out by a pay dispute. The following year, the station's main transmitter mast collapsed.

Although Yorkshire had been equipped for colour from day one, the move from VHF to UHF transmissions threatened to change the effective franchise areas. To overcome the overlap problems, Yorkshire Television combined operations with neighbouring Tyne Tees Television under a new holding company, Trident Television, formed in 1970. In re-awarding the franchises in 1980, the authority required that Yorkshire and Tyne Tees should be separately owned and managed. As a result, the companies were formally separated in 1982. However, following the 1990 franchise round, economic considerations led to the effective takeover of Tyne Tees by Yorkshire and the formation of a new group, Y-TTTV. In the new economic climate, the long-term outlook appeared uncertain.

Yorkshire Television has always faced something of a struggle to maintain its status as a major player in independent television. With this position came the opportunity and the obligation to contribute a proportion of programmes to the national network. For a franchise holder, a networked serial set in the region is a sign of competence. Although Yorkshire has built a high reputation for documentaries, light entertainment, comedy, quizzes, education, and popular drama programmes, *Emmerdale* is perhaps the production with which the company is most closely identified. Being best-known for a soap opera has also proved to be something of a mixed blessing.



## Rural background

One of Yorkshire Television's first serials was *Castle Haven*, which ran for fifty-two episodes from 1 April 1969. It was screened in the early evening in the Yorkshire region, and at various times in other areas. Set in a small seaside resort around two large houses converted into flats, it was the story of the struggling tenants for whom money was always a problem. The serial itself suffered from a lack of resources, and there was a distinct absence of exterior material. It was described as a slice of life without the sugar by the producers who claimed 'Future generations will refer to *Castle Haven* when they wish to know what life was like in the seventies'. Unfortunately for future historians, all the recordings were subsequently wiped.

The opportunity for a daytime serial came about as a result of an extension of broadcasting hours in 1972. Yorkshire Television's programme controller at the time was Donald Baverstock, who had been the assistant controller of programmes at BBC television when *Compact* was commissioned. He wanted to produce a twice-weekly serial set on a farm. There was a successful precedent in *The Archers* on the radio, and Anglia Television had previously produced a rural serial in *Weavers Green*, an attempt to break into network drama that was effectively sabotaged by the major companies.

Kevin Laffan, who had created *Castle Haven* and written a number of plays for Yorkshire Television, was approached to write a rural serial. It was decided that the title should reflect its setting in the picturesque Yorkshire Dales and should include the word 'farm'. Laffan, who had previously worked in theatre and had written for the West End stage, approached it not as a soap opera, but as a play in parts. The scripts were originally written as a serial of twenty-six episodes, with the possibility of second series.

In keeping with its rural setting, *Emmerdale Farm* was from the start to make the most of its scenic possibilities and comprise a considerable amount of location material and this remains one of the programme's strengths. It was originally suggested that the company could buy a farm on which to shoot the serial, with the option of selling it later at a profit, but this was not done for financial reasons. Instead, a suitable location was found in the form of a tenant farm between Leeds and Harrogate and an agreement was made to use it for exterior sequences, using a combination of film and television outside broadcast production. Other exteriors were to be filmed many miles away at Arncliffe, a small village in Littondale,



originally known as Amerdale. The area was an inspiration for Charles Kingsley's Vendale in *The Water Babies* and the 'deep fork of Amerdale' is mentioned in William Wordsworth's 'White Doe of Rylstone'. The village public house provided the exterior for the programme's original hostelry, The Woolpack. All interiors were shot back at the television studio in Leeds. Thus despite the realism conferred by location filming, the fictional world created was a composite.

### **Matinée première**

*Emmerdale Farm* opened on 16 October 1972. It began with a funeral, which was potentially starting on a downbeat, but it immediately introduced a family crisis with dramatic potential. Coincidentally, perhaps, a funeral had also provided the opening episode of the BBC serial *The Brothers* which had begun in March that year. The opening episode was directed by Tristan de Vere Cole and the producer was David Goddard. The opening theme music, 'The Emmerdale Suite' was composed by Tony Hatch. The *TV Times* billing for the first episode ran:

'In the beginning is the end...

Old Jacob Sugden, owner of Emmerdale Farm in Yorkshire, has died, leaving his wife Annie, her old father Sam, her daughter Peggy and younger son Joe. Jack, the elder son left home eight years ago and little has been heard of him.

The family set off in Jacob's funeral procession, passing by The Woolpack, the Beckindale village pub. And from there, they are watched.

Jack, the 'prodigal son' has returned to find that he has inherited the farm. Annie only hopes he will run it properly. Joe sees him as an interloper. And big sister Peggy, now married to Matt who works on the farm, is seething that the farm hasn't been left to her.'

The initial expectations for the serial were modest, in contrast to the later launches of continuing serials that reflected substantial investments and consequently came under the full glare of the media circus spotlight. Nevertheless, it had a certain gritty earthiness that appeared promising. The *Yorkshire Post* critic praised the first episode: 'Obviously in terms of rustic drama (with spice of sophisticated overtones) YTV achieved an immediate success. Alas, this finely produced product was wasted at such an arid viewing period. Rarely does one find a serial making its clear-cut impact in its opener as did *Emmerdale Farm*.'<sup>2</sup> Initial viewing figures were 2.2 million.

In retrospect, the technical quality of the pictures at this time was comparatively poor by modern standards. Seen today on the original broadcast recording, the 16mm film sequences appear grainy and dirty, the splices can be seen on screen, and the pictures do not match the electronic images of the outside



broadcast unit and the studio scenes. This was generally true of the programmes of its day. As a result, the impression of realism was invariably compromised.

The run was extended and the following April, transmission was switched to the early evening on Yorkshire and neighbouring Tyne Tees Television, which introduced hour-long reprise editions of *The Early Days of Emmerdale Farm* at 10.30pm. The audience rose to around three million.

In the early days, *Emmerdale Farm* gained a reputation as a soft soap about a slow and sleepy village in which very little happened. This was often far from true. Early episodes included arson, rape, suspicious deaths, and murder, although often admittedly happening off-screen. The programme also recorded a great deal of the trivia of rural life, in a community where the village cricket match, harvest festival, or Christmas bazaar, were the highlight of the social calendar. In any event, the repercussions could normally be felt in the Emmerdale farm kitchen. The characters spoke with softened Yorkshire Dales accents and the dialogue featured suggestions of local dialect.

The development of the serial required a long term commitment from the cast, as a result of which there were a number of changes. The second year saw the unexpected death of the character Peggy Skilbeck, followed by the tragic loss of her two twin children. The following year, Jack Sugden moved to Rome, to return two years later played by a different actor.

### **First move**

In 1976, production constraints compelled the company to seek a new location for the fictional village of Beckindale, nearer to the Leeds production base. The relocation of The Woolpack was attributed to subsidence. While the original location for the farm itself was retained, a suitable site for the village was found on the outskirts of Bradford, offering a pub, a church, a shop, and incidentally a large water treatment works. The estate was administered by the water authority and much of the property was municipally owned, and so ironically, the undoubtedly picturesque setting found for this rural serial was a council estate next to a sewage farm on the fringe of a major conurbation. The area's woollen industry had previously produced sufficient grease in the effluent that it had been recovered to produce lanolin for cosmetics, proving the old Yorkshire adage that 'where there's muck there's brass'. After consultation, the villagers accepted the television company's proposal to produce a new kind of soap there.



Following Peter Holman, and Robert D. Cardona, the appointment of the programme's fourth producer, Michael Glynn, who had made his reputation in the fast-moving police drama *Z-Cars*, marked a change of pace. More characters were introduced and more use was made of the countryside. From November 1976, *Emmerdale Farm* moved into a late afternoon slot, settling into a regular time at 3.50pm on Mondays and Thursdays. In April of the following year, it was switched to 7.00pm on Tuesday and Thursday in the Yorkshire, Tyne Tees and Border regions, where it had proved most popular, followed by ATV (later Central), Southern (later TVS, later Meridian), and Ulster in August. In many other areas, it was shown at 5.15pm, and in various evening slots on different days elsewhere. With this increase in exposure, despite lacking a single network slot, viewing figures reached around ten million. In February 1979, the audience rose to an impressive 14.0 million, subsequently dropping back to around twelve million.

### Growing popularity

Through the years the programme slowly evolved into a continuing serial. Anne Gibbons, producer from June 1979 to June 1983, saw the need to introduce new permanent characters and increase the serial element, replacing a succession of shorter storylines and several peripheral characters. A more mature Jack Sugden returned to his roots, played by a different actor, and soon became romantically involved with a former girlfriend, Pat. The two were later married, mirroring the off-screen wedding of the actors playing the couple.

As producer from July 1983 to June 1986, Richard Handford accelerated the pace by including more scenes in each episode. An injection of drama was provided by Jack Sugden having an extra-marital affair. Some viewers complained that this was out of keeping with the character, but ratings rose. In January 1985, the total national audience figures for a single episode of *Emmerdale Farm* reached an all-time peak at 15.76 million viewers.

The high ratings coincided with the launch of *EastEnders* on BBC1. The commercial channel had responded by screening *Emmerdale Farm* across most of the network in the same 7.00pm slot, providing unexpected opposition, until the BBC conceded by moving *EastEnders* to a slot half an hour later. In August 1985, after a disagreement about increasingly sensational storylines, Kevin Laffan, the creator of *Emmerdale Farm*, stopped writing for the serial, although he remains a consultant to the programme.



Meanwhile, Jack and Pat were expecting a baby, reflecting the situation of the real husband and wife acting team. It was intended that their child would be seen on-screen, but there was a dispute about whether it should be called by the same name. As a result, another baby played the part. Pat was later written out in a dramatic car crash.

### **Modernisation**

Stuart Doughty joined the serial as producer in January 1988, replacing Michael Russell. Having previously worked on the gritty Channel Four soap *Brookside*, his brief was to increase the audience without alienating the serial's loyal followers. Promising evolution rather than revolution, his aim was to increase the pace of the programme, incorporating more storylines, with contemporary themes, addressing modern farming issues, and to introduce new, younger, characters, while remaining faithful to the original concept. The writers were organised as a team, working to storylines agreed by the producer. While addressing similar issues to *Brookside*, he was eager to preserve the individual identity of life in Beckindale, which offered a breath of fresh air and a vision of a more pleasant lifestyle in contrast to the often depressing existence portrayed in other urban soaps.

Following the demise of *Crossroads*, in January 1988, *Emmerdale Farm* moved to a new time slot, at 6.30pm on Wednesdays and Thursdays. For the first time in its fifteen year history, the programme was fully networked and was now to run throughout the year without seasonal breaks. So it remained for just over a year until 15 February 1989 when Central and Anglia Television moved it to 7.00pm. Other changes saw the introduction of fresh faces. New blood was introduced in the form of Kate Hughes and her teenage children Mark and Rachel, played by a real-life brother and sister partnership, who were to move into Emmerdale. The Tate family were introduced as the new owners of Home Farm, so establishing the classic structure of two families, often at odds with each other, that is a cliché of American soaps.

Meanwhile, Yorkshire Television introduced an interesting experiment in 'interactive' soap opera, with a weekly serial entitled *Hollywood Sports* which ran regionally from 7 April to 18 August 1989. At the conclusion of each episode, viewers were asked to phone in and vote for one of three alternative plot developments and suggestions for future storylines were solicited. Although considered modestly successful, this unique form of viewer involvement was not continued.



## Second move

The biggest change in the production of *Emmerdale* was not intended to be noticeable to viewers. Marking a considerable commitment to the serial, Yorkshire television invested nearly £2m in moving the entire production unit to its own self-contained base some six miles from the main Leeds studios to the nearby suburb of Farsley, where the spinning block of a working worsted woollen mill was converted to resume a new role 'spinning yarns' on production line principles. The four storey factory offered a more cost-effective and efficient approach to production. By giving the programme an autonomous production base, Yorkshire Television could more flexibly approach the new economic climate of television in the nineties and the possibility that the company might not regain its franchise in the forthcoming auction of licences, retaining the option to continue production for the new network as an independent company.

From November 1989, in an effort to broaden the popular appeal of the serial, a new title sequence was introduced, and, without reference to the programme's creator, it simply became known as *Emmerdale*, in recognition that the stories it told were not just about the farm itself but were also concerned with the wider community in the dale. From Tuesday 2 January 1990, *Emmerdale* began the new decade back at 7.00pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays, once again nationally networked.

*Emmerdale* came of age in October 1990, celebrating both its eighteenth birthday and the 1500th episode. The occasion was comparatively low key. After all, Granada's *Coronation Street* was to turn thirty that Autumn. *Emmerdale* had reached its position by stealth, almost unnoticed in the shade of its more popular cousins. For many of its eighteen years it had moved around the schedules and had not run throughout the year. Now in a regular evening slot shown twice a week across the full ITV network, *Emmerdale* had average viewing figures hovering quite respectably just below the ten million mark, a twenty per cent share of the audience, just inside the top twenty ITV programme ranking.

A number of popular characters left the serial. Jackie Sugden and Matt Skilbeck departed, as did Dolly Skilbeck. Amos Brearly left in January 1991 when Ronald Magill retired. With the death of the actor Arthur Pentelow in August 1991, having played the part of Henry Wilks from the beginning, the fictional funeral that followed was a poignant farewell for the cast. Between them, Amos and Henry had formed a remarkable double act, which for many viewers



personified the programme. Only two of the original cast remained: Sheila Mercier and Frazer Hines, respectively playing the characters of the matriarchal Annie Sugden and her youngest son Joe.

The middle of 1991 also saw the retirement of the tenant farmer at the location used for *Emmerdale*. His stock and machinery were sold at auction and the grass grew tall in the meadow. Negotiations to buy the two hundred acre holding from the Horton-Fawkes family, descendants of Guy Fawkes, who ran the estate, failed when television executives considered the asking price excessive. The programme was forced to compromise by shooting from the public road and at alternative locations. As a result, the farm began to feature less prominently in the serial.

Meanwhile, the brewery that owned the 'Commercial Inn', the setting for the serial's public house, finally capitalised on the association and it was formally renamed 'The Woolpack'. This eliminated the need for the crew to put up a fake sign during shooting, although it was some months before one of the studio backcloths was repainted to match.

In September 1991, having rejuvenated the serial in the run-up to the auction of independent television franchises, Stuart Doughty moved on to pastures new, to produce *Heartbeat*, a successful rural police drama serial set in North Yorkshire. Story editor Morag Bain, a former script editor with *EastEnders*, took over as producer. Her brief was to continue to broaden the audience to the programme.

Yorkshire Television made much of the success of *Emmerdale* in their licence application to retain their franchise, writing:

'Drama is one of the foundations of the service we propose. It provides, through the serial, the bedrock of a loyal and consistent attachment to the Channel 3 which we envisage. A billion times, people switch on to our own *Emmerdale* each year. A commercially successful channel in Britain is unthinkable without such programmes. If one were to disappear, it would be necessary to create one or extend existing successes.'<sup>3</sup>

The company pointed out that continuing drama serials would prove to be an important factor in retaining audience levels and loyalties in the new Channel 3 network. It argued that *Emmerdale* had performed successfully as a principle prop in the ITV programming and could continue as a cornerstone of any future network schedule. Outside observers noted that while the loss of *Coronation Street* was almost inconceivable, the future of *Emmerdale* was less secure. Conscious of the programme's reputation for attracting an older and therefore less commercially attractive audience, great stress was made on the incorporation of younger characters which were gaining an increasingly younger and upmarket audience. Yorkshire suggested that in its use of locations which captured the



realism of rural life, their serial offered a genuine alternative in its presentation of a northern, non-urban lifestyle. The programme was presented as a 'green' drama for an increasingly environmentally aware audience.

The company retained their region, albeit at considerable cost, with a sealed franchise bid of £37.7m a year on a total turnover of £195m in 1991. To say the least, this left the company financially vulnerable. In February 1992, Yorkshire Television acquired a 19 per cent stake in the adjacent Tyne Tees region, acquiring the remaining shares that July. The combined group, Y-TTTV, faced an annual joint licence payment of £52.75m for the right to broadcast, that is more than a million pounds a week, plus a further 5.5 per cent of advertising revenue. The merger spread the crippling cost over a broader base, but the continued viability of such an arrangement remained uncertain.

The move to reposition *Emmerdale* continued. The serial has never achieved quite the same success in the South of England, despite concerted efforts to raise the programme's profile. A number of promotional poster campaigns have been run on the London Underground. In 1992 there was a further effort to increase the teenage audience, with an award-winning campaign in teenage magazines depicting some of the younger members of the cast in provocative poses with the caption 'You learn about sex earlier in the country'. Considerable press coverage resulted.

The twentieth anniversary in October 1992 saw the introduction of another new title sequence and an up-tempo rearrangement of the theme music. The sequence depicted a number of actual locations in the area around the original setting for the serial. *Emmerdale* remains a composite creation in the best fictional tradition. Significantly, perhaps, the new titles closed not on the farm, but on The Woolpack pub.

Meanwhile, in the storylines there was the suggestion that in the prevailing economic climate and agricultural policies, the farm might no longer be profitable to run. Unable to reach an agreement with the landlord of Lindley Farm, Yorkshire Television took the almost unthinkable step of abandoning the landmark that had dominated the skyline and the storyline of *Emmerdale* for over twenty years. In an intended irony, the enforced move was ascribed to subsidence, the same condition that had been held responsible for the move from the original Woolpack.

In April 1993, the Sugdens moved into a new farmhouse, 'Hawthorn Cottage'. The new location, some seven miles from the production centre, was a picturesque



four-bedroomed farmhouse on a working sheep farm. Unlike its predecessor, it was also to be seen from the inside, as the producers had secured an agreement to shoot interiors on location, a major departure from previous production schedules, adding considerably to the impression of authenticity.

While the farm remains a key element of the programme, the serial has spread its roots into a wider community. Although not shy of dealing with controversial problems, by the nature of its rural setting, the programme has previously found it difficult to accommodate more urban issues such as racism or drug problems. As a result, the serial extended its coverage to include storylines set in the nearby city of Leeds. Difficult social issues, such as child abuse, have also been sensitively tackled. While attempting to maintain its contemporary relevance, the serial remains less overtly issue-oriented than other serials, although it achieved something of a first by revealing one of its attractive younger characters to be a lesbian. However, the homely element survives, and the farmhouse kitchen table remains as a focal point for family discussions.

*Emmerdale* has effectively been repositioned and rejuvenated, from a sedate existence on the margins to the maelstrom of the mainstream. A crucial component in contributing to the continued success of the serial was the development into a year-round continuing format. The importance of this cannot be underestimated. Securing a full network transmission was also a significant factor. This was underwritten by a confident investment in resources. The producers have always taken pride in the programme, which has been seen as a respectable example of its particular genre of popular drama. As a result, *Emmerdale* managed to assume the place of *Crossroads* as ITV's second soap without garnering the same critical odium.

Programme buyers have been impressed by the stress on strong storylines and the importance placed on family life, reflecting the traditional values of a country community. As a result, *Emmerdale* has been sold to Ireland, Norway, New Zealand, Canada and America.

Even with the introduction of younger characters, more modern storylines, an increase in location shooting, and a faster pace, *Emmerdale* remains a characteristic soap opera with a slightly old-fashioned feel. It appears at times to be a daytime soap shown in peak evening viewing, betraying its lunch time origins, but it is no less appealing for that. Despite every attempt to attract younger and more upmarket viewers, the *Emmerdale* audience remained



predominantly middle-aged or over. It appeared that new viewers were not staying with the serial long enough to become loyal.

As the only networked evening serial not to have a repeat transmission, *Emmerdale* had been penalised by the ratings system that aggregates viewing figures for other serials that are repeated in the same week. As a result, the programme suffered in comparison to other soaps in the ratings league table. With other serials now broadcast three times a week, with repeats, *Emmerdale* did not receive the same exposure as its urban competitors. Although it consistently attracted between ten to twelve million viewers per episode, it was often squeezed out of the top twenty programmes, and consequently failed to receive as much attention as some of the more popular programmes.

With the uncertainties associated with the subsequent change to a system of central scheduling there was a possibility that *Emmerdale* might be sacrificed. However, the serial was recommissioned and its immediate future of *Emmerdale* on the ITV network appeared secure. In a revamp of the afternoon schedule which ousted *Families* and *Take the High Road*, the network centre also asked for daytime repeats of *Emmerdale*, without paying any extra for the additional screenings. Yorkshire proposed new contracts with the actors which would include the standard 50 per cent repeat fee, while cutting basic rates, a formula that was rejected. As a result, the dispute was put in arbitration, with the possibility that the company might cut the cast in order to contain costs. With the matter unresolved, repeat showings began on 7 September 1993, at 12.55pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays, with repeats of *Coronation Street* on alternate weekdays.

Meanwhile, Phil Redmond, the creator of *Brookside*, was brought in as a consultant to the *Emmerdale*, to give the programme what was described as 'an overall spring clean'.<sup>4</sup> Any fears that the character of the serial might change were refuted, just as they had been when Stuart Doughty had left *Brookside* to join *Emmerdale* as producer. The intention was to build on the serial's rural values, which were seen as a strength, and to re-establish the geography and character relationships, with a view to changing people's perceptions of the programme and introduce it to a new audience. Although there had been repeated attempts to attract more young, upmarket viewers, this initiative was evidence of an increasingly ratings-driven ITV in which every programme came under pressure to justify its existence, with intense competition to replace any programme that might appear the slightest bit tired.



*Brookside*, having pulled through its own period of change, demonstrated more attractive demographics. Phil Redmond's intention that television drama should be issue-led had created some powerful plots. At the time in *Brookside* a body was lying buried under a patio, like a dramatic time bomb waiting to go off. It was said that the *Emmerdale* cast, rather than being used as expensive extras in the bar, should be allowed to get into more dramatic storylines. Veiled criticisms were reserved for the writing team. The involvement of Phil Redmond coincided with the resignation of story editor Ann Tobin over what were termed 'artistic differences'. It was also revealed that after two years, producer Morag Bain would not have her contract renewed. Shortly afterwards, it was confirmed that a number of leading characters were to be killed off in a dramatic disaster storyline planned for transmission at Christmas. Advance publicity hinted at the possibility of an air crash. This was to be the most dramatic development in the serial's twenty-one year history, intended to make viewers take another look at *Emmerdale*. With the prospect of stronger storylines and additional ratings through afternoon repeats, *Emmerdale* confidently faced its future.

## Production

### The soap factory

Soap manufacture takes place on production line principles. The production of a continuous serial is very different from that of a seasonal series or a one-off drama. The demands of continuous output require a system of production which in turn affects the structure and content of the serial. A factory system of production involves dividing the labour of production into a number of specific and repeatable tasks. The product is then assembled according to a strict schedule. Given that soap opera is all too often considered 'run of the mill', it is perhaps fitting that Yorkshire television should have converted a dark satanic woollen mill for the cost-effective production of their soap.

Production moved to Farsley on 17 July 1989 with the recording of episode 1379. As a 'soap factory', it provides two floors of semi-permanently rigged interior sets, together with a dedicated production and technical area. The layout offers greater efficiency than had been previously achieved in a conventional studio, where sets have to be built and struck overnight. This enables simpler shooting schedules. As all the sets are continuously available, there are fewer restrictions placed upon the writers and the programme can include a greater



variety of scenes. However, it also brings certain disadvantages. With only half the headroom of a full-height studio, the sets had to be cut down to fit and the low lighting rig caused problems with shadows. Unlike a traditional studio, there is no special sound-proofing and only inadequate heating and air-conditioning. However, the savings were such that the cost of establishing the centre was quickly recouped.

New lightweight cameras allow lighting levels to be reduced and scenes rendered more naturalistically. The lighting grid is fully computer controlled, to allow set-ups to be instantly recalled for speed of turnaround. This inevitably introduces compromises in comparison to film production, where the director of photography will individually place each lamp. A conscious decision was taken not to employ a television lighting designer. Instead, the involvement of the lighting cameramen was encouraged to allow them to have greater creative control over their pictures.

Of the four cameras available, three are generally employed on the production floor. On location two cameras are available, each recording independently onto a dockable video cassette recorder. This replaces the multi-camera outside broadcast style of production previously employed for location video sequences. According to the preference of the director, location scenes are either shot single camera, exploiting the increased flexibility of film-style shooting techniques, or with two independent cameras, which often allows faster production. The use of video as opposed to film on location results in a different look and feel, producing pictures that are crisper and clearer, integrating better with material shot in the studio.

Production values and the impression of realism, while steadily rising with the introduction of new technology remain subjectively lower than those for the other main networked serials. It has not been unknown for camera reflections or sound boom shadows to appear in shot. Painted scenery backcloths are frequently betrayed through windows and doors. Two sets of scenic backdrops are available: with leaves and without, changed twice a year according to season. The net result is an indefinable air of theatricality, to the extent that one half expects the dialogue to be punctuated with the forced laughter associated with tired situation comedies.

Increasingly, the serial is shedding this image, making more use of real interiors where possible. *Emmerdale* is at its best on location, where the genuine scenery is perhaps the true star of the show, contributing to the impression of realism and providing the programme with a compelling advantage. The setting



for Home Farm, a manor house dating back to the sixteenth century, is a particularly appealing asset to the serial. One perceived problem is the lack of continuity between the separate locations. The fictional geography of *Emmerdale* is described as 'fairly fluid', and this can diminish the sensation that it represents a real dramatic world. It is not possible to point to a real Emmerdale. It is a figment of the fictional fabrication of the serial.

### **Blocks of soap**

Long-term storylines are mapped out up to a year ahead by the producer. More detailed storylines are then devised about five months in advance at a monthly writers' meeting. Blocks of episodes for each week are then detailed to individual writers. Each script goes through three draft stages before a rehearsal script is produced around eight to ten weeks ahead of transmission. This is the basis of the final camera script that includes the director's cutting instructions.

At the heart of continuous serial production is the shooting schedule. *Emmerdale* is shot in blocks over two thirty-seven hour weeks, delivering four new episodes every fortnight. In any two week period there are three blocks in various stages of production. One director is involved in preparation and rehearsal, while another is shooting, and a third is editing and dubbing. Each block is assigned to a team comprising a director, a unit manager or first assistant director, a stage manager, and a production assistant.

The shooting takes place over two weeks, with all location scenes shot in the first week, followed by all the scenes on the interior sets the next week, to allow for continuity matches according to changing weather conditions. Within each production block, scenes are shot out of story sequence to make the most efficient use of time and resources. The rate of production averages at around nine to ten screen minutes per working day. The relative rate of production efficiency directly affects the ratio of studio to location time on screen. Over any one block this will tend to work out at a ratio of around 60:40 studio to location production. Although it is possible to change this balance, it is a product of the production schedule, which is ultimately constrained by the programme budget. There follows one week of editing, in which twenty or so videotapes are edited to produce four episodes. A further final week is allowed for dubbing to 'sweeten' the soundtrack and add atmospheres music and effects. Each block is finally finished about four weeks ahead of transmission.

With fewer restrictive practices than were once prevalent in television, once known as the last bastion of restrictive practices, there is a certain amount of flexibility in working agreements, and as a result, production schedules can be slightly more supple. However, the relentless requirements of continuous production still necessitate a highly ordered operation. With over a hundred episodes shot in year, there are only two fortnight periods when the programme is out of production, to allow for cast holiday leave. To accommodate these, in May and October eight extra episodes are produced in parallel in a system known as 'double-stranding'.

The output of episodes per week is subject to the practical constraints of the schedule. It would be possible to create a schedule that would support a third weekly episode, although this would impose restrictions on production, and anything more than this would severely affect production values.

Over a year about a dozen directors will be employed. It would be possible to use half this number, but a higher rotation avoids stagnation, ensures freshness, and keeps the actors stimulated. Freelance directors are generally hired for two adjacent blocks on a thirteen week contract. Many will be experienced drama directors who may also work on other series and serials. Newer talent will also be taken on to maintain variety. Although many directors will work on other drama series, there is effectively a circuit of freelance directors working in soap operas. Although they may bring something different to each programme, this may contribute to a normalisation of soap opera direction style.

There are three production teams comprising a unit manager, stage manager, and production assistant. The crew comprises two lighting cameramen who alternate in that role and two camera operators, four sound crew, three electricians, a grip, and a runner. In the studio there is a vision mixer, technical supervisor, and an engineer. Three people are employed in properties, three in costume, and three in makeup. The regular cast numbers around twenty. The production team also includes a researcher, video editor, story editor, script editor, production supervisor, producer, plus secretarial and catering staff. The team is claimed to be one of the smallest, most tightly-knit units in television serial production.



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## Narration

### Scenes from rural life

There are two important elements to a soap opera, its setting and its characters. A sense of community and family life are central elements of the traditional soap. In the modern urban environment, such elements are disappearing, and attempts to represent them appear artificial. The neighbourliness of the street, the square, or the close, is increasingly alien to the urban experience. In this context, village life represents something of an idyllic ideal. There is a tradition in literature of the pastoral, an idealisation of shepherd life that displays a nostalgia for the lost innocence of a pre-lapsarian world. *Emmerdale* is perhaps a modern pastoral, telling the tale of a world that is tainted by trials, travails, trauma and tragedy.

*Emmerdale* is essentially the saga of the Sugdens, a fictional farming family in a small country community in the picturesque Yorkshire Dales in the North of England. The family has farmed at Emmerdale for generations. Their land covers some 320 acres, ranging from rough moorland on the tops, grazed by hardy upland sheep, to lush pasture in the valley with a pedigree dairy herd, and beef cattle. Emmerdale is within walking distance of the village of Beckindale, which grew up around the neighbouring Home Farm estate, formerly the major landlord and employer. A traditional small English village, Beckindale has two public houses, a small post office shop, village hall, and a church, St Mary's, strung along its single Main Street. The nearby village of Connelton offers local shopping, while the small market town of Hotten is about six miles away, and the nearest large town is Skipdale. The real locations of Harrogate and Leeds have also featured.

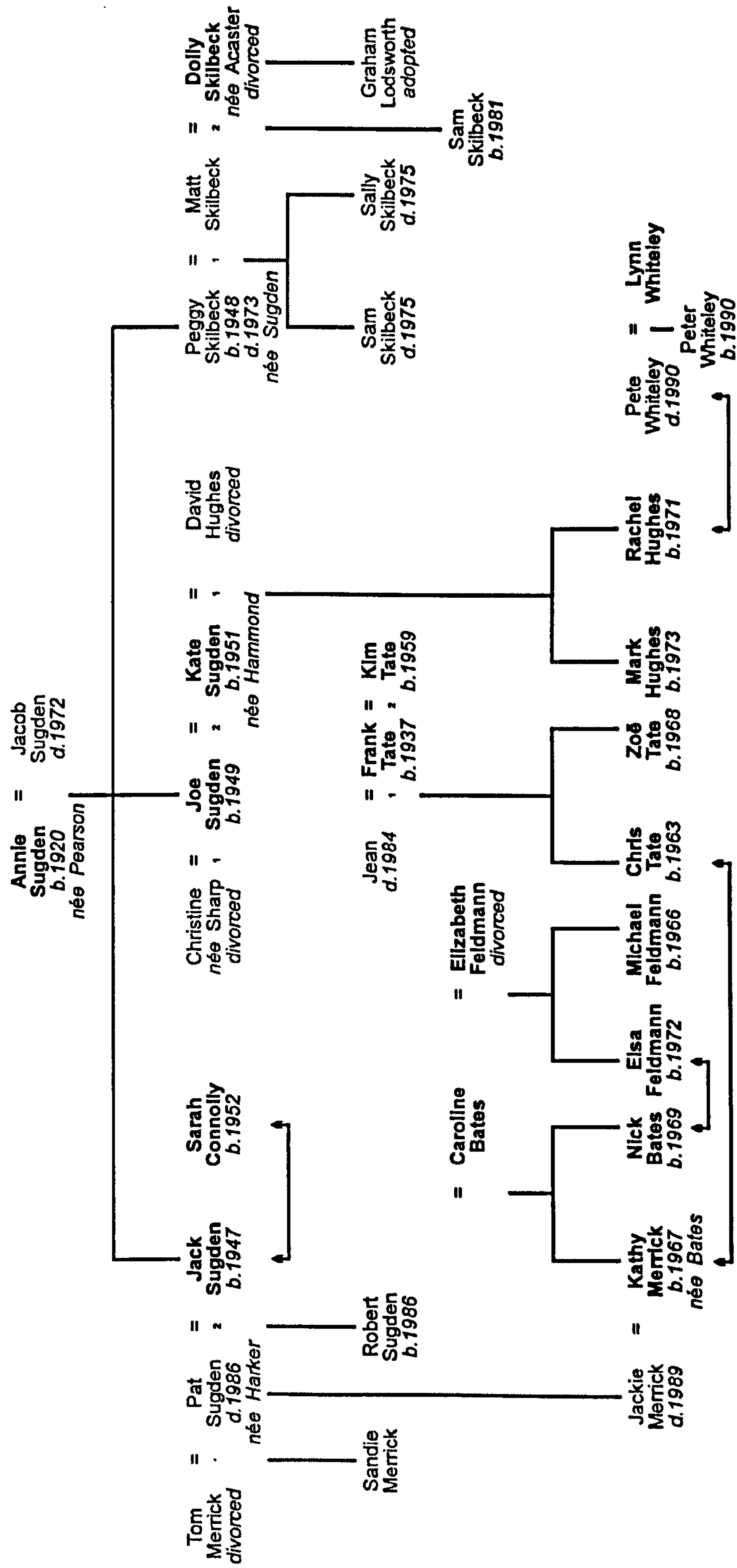
Over the years, the serial has reflected a gradual process of social change in the farming community. Following the breakdown of the essentially feudal tenant farming system, large-scale commercial methods were introduced. Latterly, with changes in agricultural policy and practice, the countryside has witnessed the rise of the *nouveau riche* landowner for whom farming is not the only use for the land. In difficult economic circumstances, the established traditional Dales farming methods are seen to be less viable.

The Sugden family is central to the structure of the serial, and the idea of the family is very important to the Sugdens. Through blood ties or romantic relationships, the Sugdens are involved with many of the main characters. The

whole community is very closely knit. As a result, characters are often related to each other in more than one dimension. This produces a great complexity in interpersonal relationships which are often almost incestuously interwoven, so that any one character may have multiple genetic, familial, and emotional relationships to other characters. The main family and romantic relationships at the time this study commenced are illustrated in *figure 8.1*.



Figure 8.1  
Emmerdale family tree



## The story so far

It would be an impossible task to summarise succinctly the cumulative story of *Emmerdale*, the first eighteen years of which were told in around 750 hours of television, representing over 4.5 million words of dialogue. The following brief outline, intended to establish the basic character relationships, is based on production records, including episode summaries and the biographies that form the programme's reference 'bible', a document detailing the format of the programme and its fictional world.

The action centres around three main areas: the eponymous Emmerdale Farm itself, The Woolpack public house, and the Home Farm estate.

### *Emmerdale Farm*

ANNIE SUGDEN (Sheila Mercier), known to her family as Ma, is an archetypal matriarch. She was first seen following the death of her husband, Jacob, whose funeral took place in the first episode, and she has been coping quietly with family crises ever since. Jacob had been a heavy drinker and most of the farm work had been left to Annie and her three children: Jack, Joe and Peggy.

JACK SUGDEN (Andrew Burt, succeeded by Clive Hornby) had left the farm eight years previously at the age of eighteen, returning as a prodigal son. He did not attend his father's funeral and was met with a cool reception. He had no wish to claim the inheritance of the run-down farm. Jack has always been the black sheep of the Sugden family, and is perhaps the most complex character. Initially he was seen as a moody individual, and he continues to be whimsical and unpredictable. He had written a successful novel, and after a year he went off to turn it into a screenplay. Subsequently his writing has been quietly forgotten.

JOE SUGDEN (Frazer Hines), the youngest, felt aggrieved when his brother returned unexpectedly. The two have continued to argue over the running of the farm ever since. Joe is progressive and ambitious for the farm, sometimes over-ambitious in his keenness to succeed.

PEGGY SKILBECK (Jo Kendall) was also resentful of Jack's inheritance, since her husband Matt and brother Joe had done so much to keep the farm going in his absence. Peggy died three months after giving birth to twins, Sam and Sally, who were both tragically killed two years later in a car accident on a level crossing. Annie was very supportive as her son-in-law came to terms with the loss of his



family and he continued to work on the farm. Matt was later wedded to blonde barmaid Dolly, but their marriage eventually broke down and he left her.

Annie Sugden has also had to cope with the death of her father, Sam Pearson, known to all the family as Grandad, who had been very much the traditional Dales farmer. He had started out as a farm labourer and rose to become farm manager for the local landowners, the Verney family. The widowed Annie is staunchly supportive of her family in public, but is quick to criticise in private and frequently arbitrates between her two sons' sibling rivalry. At the age of seventy, she announced her retirement, although she would continue to cook and look after the farmhouse, while her two sons looked after the farm.

Jack's first wife was Pat, a former girlfriend whom he meets again as a divorcee and mother of two teenagers. It later emerges that he was the father of her first child. She bears him another son, Robert, but dies soon after in a car crash. Jack now lives with SARAH CONNOLLY (Madeleine Howard). Accustomed to living alone, the independent-spirited Sarah moved in with Jack on the basis that they were sharing a house, rather than a life. Initially she was reluctant to help on the farm, but she has become eager to prove her worth.

Joe's first wife only stayed for five weeks. He later had an affair with the vicar's daughter. His second wife, KATE SUGDEN (Sally Knyvette), preferred to be considered a farmer, rather than a farmer's wife. She has two teenage children by an earlier marriage, MARK and RACHEL HUGHES (Craig and Glenda McKay). Kate became pregnant by Joe, but suffered a miscarriage. Meanwhile, her daughter Rachel was growing up quickly. Shortly after arriving at Emmerdale, she had an affair with a married man, Pete Whiteley. Their relationship began innocently enough, but was consummated at her eighteenth birthday party. He ended the affair, and shortly afterwards his wife Lynn announced that she was pregnant. There was a show-down when she learnt of the liaison, and soon afterwards the Whiteley's left Beckindale to salvage their marriage and start afresh.

### *The Woolpack*

HENRY WILKS (Arthur Pentelow) had taken early retirement from his Bradford textile business and settled in Beckindale in a large house adjacent to Emmerdale that later burnt down. Initially hostile, he soon became firm friends and business partners with the Sugdens, and a one-time suitor of Annie. He bought the Emmerdale leasehold in anticipation of Jack marrying his beautiful daughter, Marian, and reorganised the farm as a limited company in equal partnership with



the rest of the family. Henry Wilks went on to become joint owner of The Woolpack public house. Henry remained at the pub, preferring it to life alone, although very much the junior partner despite his substantial investment income.

AMOS BREARLY (Ronald Magill), long-standing landlord and licensee of The Woolpack, was a fiercely proud Yorkshireman, proud of his wartime service and inordinately proud of his position as occasional village correspondent for the local paper, a role that allowed him to maintain a close eye on village life. Together Amos and Henry established a quietly comic double act, as they continually bickered over domestic trivia, their relationship more like that of a long-married couple, although Amos always resolutely referred to Henry as Mr Wilks. Amos eventually retired to Spain, and Henry Wilks subsequently died.

SETH ARMSTRONG (Stan Richards), a former poacher, turned gamekeeper when recruited to prevent the thefts for which he himself was responsible. Now one of the Woolpack regulars, he is something of a clown.

### *Home Farm*

Much of the local farming estate had belonged to the paternal landlord, George Verney. His death left crippling death duties that forced the sale of the land and the tenanted farms. It was bought by NY Estates, an anonymous farming conglomerate distantly run from Lincoln through a succession of managers.

ALAN TURNER (Richard Thorp) eventually became estate manager. Originally a devious and lazy southerner with aspirations to the upper-middle class, he rather fancied the hunting, shooting and fishing lifestyle. Head office sent him a secretary to help organise his life. CAROLINE BATES (Diana Davies) proved to be his salvation. He mellowed, becoming more of a bumptious buffoon, and although often pompous he has proved capable of endearing charm. When Caroline divorced her husband after discovering that he was having an affair, Alan Turner found an empty cottage in Beckindale for her and her two teenage children, Nick and Kathy. Her relationship with Turner, originally professional and platonic, developed to the point at which she was due to marry him but the wedding was called off by mutual consent. Nevertheless, he managed to manipulate his way into ownership of the cottage without sharing it with her. When NY Estates pulled out of Beckindale, Home Farm was bought by Alan Turner and Joe Sugden, who struggled to make it pay. A lonely but likeable man, Turner remained in the village as a self-appointed community leader and has latterly taken over as licensee of The Woolpack where he has opened up a cordon bleu restaurant.



NICK BATES (Cy Chadwick) had lacked a direction in life since leaving school, until he fell in love with ELSA FELDMANN (Naomi Lewis). After their first night together she fell pregnant. Nick asked her to marry him but her mother was initially very protective toward her teenage daughter. ELIZABETH FELDMANN (Kate Dove) is a tough Yorkshire woman, with old-fashioned values. After her husband left her, she struggled to make a go of their meagre smallholding with her son MICHAEL FELDMANN (Matthew Vaughan). Despite her disappointment in her daughter, she decided to support her decision to have the baby. Impressed by Nick's responsible attitude, she subsequently asked him to move in with them, on the understanding that he slept in a separate room.

KATHY BATES (Malandra Burrows), Nick's attractive sister, married Jackie Merrick, revealed to be the natural son of Jack Sugden and therefore heir to Emmerdale Farm. In a double tragedy, she suffered a miscarriage and was later left distraught by the death of her husband in a shotgun accident. She was taken in by the Sugden family and continued to work on the farm. Latterly Kathy became involved with the very eligible CHRISTOPHER TATE (Peter Amory), whom she subsequently marries. He loves her deeply and lavishes her with gifts but their relationship suffers from his selfish childishness and belief that money is the answer to everything.

FRANK TATE (Norman Bowler), Christopher's father, is one of the *nouveau riche*. A self-made man, he built up his own road haulage business that he runs as Chairman, with his son in day-to-day charge as Managing Director. Frank's daughter, ZOË TATE (Leah Bracknell), graduated from veterinary school and went on to work at a local small animal practice. Frank's first wife had suffered from liver cancer, and he helped her take an overdose. When this emerged, his son and daughter were desolate, particularly since it was clear that he had been having an affair with his secretary at the time, who later became his second wife. The glamorous KIM TATE (Claire King) is over twenty years his junior, and he is acutely conscious that she would have been a more obvious match for his son. Once the wife of a former lorry driver she has been elevated in social status. Now she breeds horses, but is also desperate to start a family of her own.

The Tate family is a symbol of the new Beckindale. Frank's purchase of Home Farm was an attempt to begin a new life. He had become the effective lord of the manor after buying the million pound estate including the imposing sixteenth-century manor house, a grade two listed building, with its tree-lined drive, walled garden, courtyard and stables, together with a total of 400 acres of farmland and



250 acres of woodland. Frank firmly believes that the old Dales farming methods are out of date. He is no great believer in hunting, shooting and fishing. He saw the acquisition of Home Farm not only as an entrepreneurial opportunity, but also as a chance to leave a lasting impact on the area. Having recovered the purchase price of the estate through shrewd business deals, he intended to demonstrate his own form of countryside management, developing the business potential of the land, to open it up to the public and ensure its preservation. He is not above making some sacrifices to commercial development if the profits enable him to achieve his dreams for the bulk of the estate. His plans for a holiday village are indicative of his approach. Frank is happy to accept money for leaving part of his land idle, under a set-aside scheme that pays farmers to take farmland out of production. This philosophy has frequently set him at odds with the Sugdens, although Joe has a sneaking admiration for the success he seems to be having.

### *Births, deaths, and marriages*

From this brief synopsis of the complex historical basis of the Sugden saga, it will be readily apparent that relationships, affairs, marriage, birth, miscarriage, death, and divorce are woven through the tangled tapestry of life at Emmerdale. Tragedy often strikes repeatedly in the world of soap. Although death represents one form of resolution in the continuing serial, inevitably it also introduces a dramatic disruption that will introduce to have future ramifications. Through all this turbulence, Annie Sugden has remained a source of strength and wisdom in the farm kitchen to her family and friends.

With their emphasis on emotional relationships, it is not surprising that rites of passage play an important part in soap opera. They also provide a pragmatic solution to the problem of introducing new characters and disposing of established ones. The introduction of new blood is an important means of developing the soap opera world. Although pregnancies present story possibilities, births present practical complications. In many cases it is preferable to introduce new characters whose past can be constructed with a free hand. For this reason, the inclusion of a single parent with teenage children is a useful means of extending the already extended family relationships. These soon become bound into the structure of the serial, forming new sets of relationships through which new patterns emerge.



## **Emmerdale's diary**

Seen in summary the dramatic events that punctuate the serial seem impossibly implausible. Over the course of a number of episodes, however, very little apparently happens. Plot lines are progressed at an often glacial pace and so achieve a certain credibility. This gradual development can be seen looking at the scenario over a three month period. Thus the events of October 1990 can be seen to owe their immediate genesis to incidents that took place some months previously.

### *August*

Pete Whiteley returns to Beckindale in the hope of resuming his affair with young Rachel. However, after an argument in The Woolpack, Rachel storms out of the pub with his car keys. Kate Sugden causes a scene in the bar when she slaps Pete in the face and warns him to stay away from her daughter. Several drinks later, Kate insists on driving home with her friend Fran. On the way back to Emmerdale she knocks down a lone figure by the roadside. The victim dies in hospital in the early hours. Kate admits her involvement and is taken with Fran to the police station for questioning. Unaware of the incident, Rachel goes off to her new job at Tate's Haulage in high spirits having received her 'A' level exam results. Pete Whiteley's pregnant wife Lynn later learns that her husband is dead. Returning from work, Rachel overhears Kate's husband Joe arguing with Fran and is stunned to learn that her mother had killed her lover. Rachel feels responsible for his death. Annie urges them to rally round as a family. On the day of Pete Whiteley's funeral, news arrives that Lynn has given birth to a boy.

### *September*

Kate Sugden is charged with causing death by reckless driving and bailed to appear in court the following month. She is overcome by guilt at the thought of killing the man her daughter loved, and receives an offer of support from Tony Charlton, the new village curate, a modern churchman in his first post since ordination.

Mrs Bates demands compensation from Alan Turner. She had been a sitting tenant of his, but he had bought the cottage when they had planned to live there together. He later unwittingly agrees to pay her a retainer for the next ten years.

Dolly arranges to buy Demdyke cottage as an investment, and agrees to a secret subsidy from Mrs Bates to enable Nick and Elsa to afford the rent.

### *October*

Kate Sugden's trial date draws closer. She receives support from the new vicar, the Reverend Tony Charlton, and becomes very involved in fund-raising for a new Church youth club. Seth slyly takes the opportunity to run a sweepstake on the side, but he is shamed into donating his takings to charity.

The press are prowling around and begin to harass Kate and later her daughter Rachel. The story is later picked up by a Sunday tabloid, and Rachel is appalled at being portrayed as teenage temptress, with the implication that her mother deliberately killed the man with whom she had been having an affair.

At the instigation of her boyfriend Christopher, Kathy reluctantly decides to leave Emmerdale and its memories and to start a new life at Home Farm, working as a stablehand with Kim Tate.

Under pressure from his wife, who is feeling broody, Frank Tate has a vasectomy reversal operation, but returns to his secret drinking. This is known to their housekeeper Dolly who covers up for him.

Joe Sugden assumes that Dolly and Frank are having an affair, when in fact the recently divorced Dolly is becoming involved with another married man, Charlie Aindow, and takes the opportunity of purchasing Demdyke cottage where they meet secretly.

Nick Bates is surprised at Mrs Feldmann's change of heart in encouraging him to think of marrying her teenage daughter, but Elsa is reluctant to leave her mother and marry. Nick threatens to move into Demdyke with or without her and packs his bags. Elsa is persuaded by her mother that she should follow.

The low-key comedy continues as publican Amos Brierly, recovering from a recent stroke, astounds the Woolpack regulars with his new found powers of memory, attributable to a box he found in the cellar that contained his old diaries. This provides an occasion to recall a significant anniversary, as Amos remarks: 'Do you realise it's eighteen years today since they buried Old Jacob Sugden—Annie's husband?' The return of Amos to work behind the bar is greeted by the entire village who assemble in front of the Woolpack, and the first pint he pulls is auctioned for charity.

Meanwhile, in preparation for the annual game-keepers' dinner-dance, Seth Armstrong applies to a local introduction service that he refers to as a 'mating'



agency, but his photograph is returned as unsuitable and his application, which he bases on Turner's own slightly exaggerated description of himself, is later rejected.

By an unfortunate co-incident, Kate Sugden meets Lynn Whiteley who has returned with her baby to come to the trial. Henry Wilks discovers that he will be required to give evidence against Kate. In court Kate pleads not guilty. Her counsel, an efficient but somewhat unsympathetic young woman barrister, suggests that the best form of defence is to play on the feelings of the jurors: 'There but for the grace of God go I'. The vicar appears as a generous character witness, but is later discounted by the judge as being an impressionable young man. The jury find Kate guilty of causing death by reckless driving and she is sentenced to two years imprisonment.

The Sugdens are devastated by the outcome of the trial. Annie encourages everyone to bear up and assures Rachel and Mark that they will always be made to feel at home at Emmerdale. Henry Wilks and Annie Sugden quietly confess that Kate's punishment was probably just. Kate's friend Fran admits that she was partly to blame for dragging her away from the scene of the crime, while Joe blames himself for letting it happen.

### *Melodramatic themes*

Soap opera melodrama involves a combination of tragedy, romance, and comedy. Unlike their classical formulation, the perspective is that of the everyday. Life is shown to be a mixture of trials, tribulations and trivia. The dramatic context and the objective presentation encourage viewers to form their own moral judgements.

Tragedy is inherent in the potentially self-contained plot of Kate accidentally killing the married man who was having an affair with her teenage daughter, the birth of his wife's son, and the subsequent trial, conviction and prison sentence. This narrative is integrated into the action over the course of more than three months. The origins of the story go back much further in the past, and the developments will continue to reverberate into the future.

Romantic interest is provided at different levels, particularly in the development of the relationships between young Elsa and Nick and between Kathy and Chris. Although not unproblematic, these relationships can be seen in contrast to the earlier affair between Rachel and Pete Whiteley from which the main plot was sprung. Meanwhile, Frank is assumed to be having an affair with his housekeeper, but she is actually involved in an illicit liaison with another



married man. No doubt a psychoanalytic critic might make much of his anxiety about having a vasectomy reversal in order to satisfy his broody young wife. There is also comic counterpoint in the unlikely idea that the toothless Seth, himself married to an unseen wife, is attempting to fix a date through the local 'mating' agency.

Comedy is often provided by characters who appear to be representative of certain stock types, not so much figures from the soap opera idiom, as from the broader canvas of the native narrative tradition of English literature. The bumptious Alan Turner has something of the village squire about him. Seth Armstrong is reminiscent of a 'rural rustic', whose apparent stupidity conceals a crafty country cunning. Amos Brierly could be seen as a comic clown figure. At this level there are elements of the folk tale.

There is considerable use of dramatic irony and coincidence. It is ironic that Pete Whiteley should accidentally be run down on the road by his lover's mother, that his son should be born on the day of his funeral, and that his wife should return in time for the trial. While this may seem improbable, it is not impossible, and remains credible in the context of the narrative. The presentation is naturalistic, with no sense that fate is predestined.

### *Courtroom drama*

The courtroom trial with which this storyline culminates in the 1,500th episode is a classic soap opera set-piece. Such periodic climaxes, concentrating on a single main theme, are an occasional feature of the continuing serial. They provide an opportunity to take stock, review past events, and form moral or ethical judgements. A courtroom provides an ideal forum in which this can take place, while the various reactions of the characters offers a choric comment on the outcome.

The conventions of courtroom drama are well-established. The court is a stock setting in film and television fiction and with its melodramatic potential has frequently figured in soap opera. The idiom of this episode is perhaps familiar from *Crown Court*, which began on ITV at the same time as *Emmerdale Farm*. Much of the camerawork is courtroom cliché, with the routine of high and low reverse angles between the dock, the judge, the jury, and the public gallery, typically alternating while moving in from wide shots to close-ups.

Like a marriage, or a funeral, a court case involves a stereotypical sequence of events that will be familiar to the audience. The codes of courtroom procedure –



the reading of the charges, the prosecution and defence evidence and cross-examination, the judge's summing-up and advice to the jury, the verdict and sentence – all provide a highly conventional narrative framework, functioning as intertextual cues to interpretation of the action.

This episode was unusual in that it employed mixes between scenes to conventionally indicate temporal elision on four occasions. One of these was specified in the original script, the others were apparently incorporated at the editing stage by the omission of two short intervening scenes which did little to advance any plot strands. Temporal progression was also facilitated by the alternation of court scenes with those back at the village. Three brief intruded scenes featured the young baby, whose father's death was the subject of the trial. The innocence of the baby was ironically contrasted with the apparent guilt of the woman who accidentally killed his father, the mother of the young girl with whom he had an extra-marital affair, so building sympathy for the widowed mother. The meaning of these scenes, which in themselves appear superficially inconsequential, is inherent in the total situation as it is presented over a period of time. The presentation is such that the sympathy of the audience is allied with Kate to a large extent and yet morally the audience must believe that justice has been done. This is summed up by the reaction of Annie, who is troubled by her divided loyalties, but her primary concern remains with her family.

Although it provides a certain amount of provisional narrative closure, this dramatic episode is not the end, but a new beginning. It generates as many problems as it resolves. As the story develops, Joe's marriage to Kate breaks up as a result of her prison sentence, and she leaves him. The ramifications continue to reverberate, and so the continuing story goes on.

In their narrative complexity, such serials are truly 'operatic'. The well-made soap is as carefully constructed as a well-made play. At any one time, at least half a dozen storylines are active. These are often interdependent and interwoven in a complex manner, creating the illusion of a seamless surface. A single storyline cannot be entirely dissociated from its narrative context. It is the partial outcome of all that has preceded and the partial basis for all that will follow. Any single event can therefore be interpreted in relation to the memory of relevant knowledge of the past.

## Summary

*Emmerdale* has a long history as the second longest-running soap opera on British television. This period has seen considerable change in the programme, which started as a daytime drama and moved into the competitive arena of primetime. The serial has been supported by the considerable commitment of its producers, Yorkshire Television, and through gaining a prime network slot on independent television. Over the years it has changed, and now addresses concerns of relevance to a wider audience, but it remains faithful to its original conception. It is now unmistakably a soap opera, in the strongest tradition.

The storyline of the complete saga almost defies synopsis. It is impossible to define where one storyline ends and another begins. Events emerge almost organically out of the past. Characters come and go, but the relationships they form continue. In watching the serial, viewers can bring an enormous amount of knowledge about the textual world to their reading of the programme.



**Notes**

- 1 Ferguson, James (1988) *Emmerdale Farm: The official companion*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
- Hill, Bill and Heatley, Michael (1992) *Emmerdale: The first twenty years*, London: Boxtree.
- 2 Culbert, Michael 'In My View' *Yorkshire Post*, 17 October 1972, p. 2.
- 3 Yorkshire Television (1991) *Application for the Yorkshire Regional Channel 3 Licence*, Leeds: Yorkshire Television, p. 5.
- 4 Towler, Angus (1993) 'New Hand on the Farm', *The Stage and Television Today*, 19 August 1993, p. 23.

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# Formal Method

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Reception theories of narrative comprehension imply that readers are guided to an interpretation of the text by its formal structure. It would therefore appear to be important to analyse the formal structure of visual texts. Television is a time-based medium. While studies of serial drama typically deal only with the narratives themselves, it is possible to treat them as temporal texts with measurable formal features. As products of popular culture, television serials are planned with virtually numerical precision. The methods of quantitative statistical analysis adopted here attempt to measure them by such standards. This provides some objective basis for reaching qualitative comparative judgements.

## Formal analysis

If television output is to be treated as a text, a system of notation is necessary to transcribe its salient formal features. The term 'formal analysis', which is intended to refer to an examination of the formal features of a text, is adopted here in contrast to the practice of 'content analysis', which typically operates by attempting to enumerate elements of content. To the content analyst, soap operas present a pseudo-reality that can be compared quantitatively to empirical reality, as if the significance of soap opera lay in the comparison between the two. Thus it may be said that the soap opera world is more violent than the real world, but the same may equally be said about fairy tales. Content analysis rests on the assumption that it is possible to extract content from form and context. The concept of television as a text suggests that, on the contrary, content is inextricably associated with form. The system of formal analysis developed here begins from the assumption that it is possible to quantify accurately certain formal features of a text and that the relative arrangement of these features can offer a means of comparing texts and identifying common characteristics.

Irrespective of its status as a language, the television text can be considered as a temporal system composed of a series of segments that are discrete and

quantifiable. The attempt to find discrete units and determine their structural relationships can be compared to the linguistic approach to film language. However, this need not imply that there is any structural similarity to linguistic organisation. An equally valid comparison might be made with music, which has a clear syntagmatic sequential temporal organisation, and a paradigmatic organisation in pitch, yet has no direct linguistic equivalent. In a musical composition, the notes themselves are only significant in their formal arrangement. It would make little sense to say of one composer's music that it contains more A's than B's, or that it has more A's or B's than that of another composer. However, it might be meaningful to compare the keys in which two pieces were written.

Like music, the television text has a temporal extent and can be considered as a sequence of segments of known duration organised by a complex system of codes. The most fundamental division in moving picture media is that of the frame, which makes the illusion of movement possible. Individual frames are combined by low-level processes of perception into continuous moving images or shots. The shot may therefore be considered as a minimum meaningful unit. A shot can be accurately measured in terms of temporal duration and can be characterised by type and function. Sequential relationships between shots can be determined by higher-level processes of intellection according to logical and spatio-temporal continuities, by which sequences of shots cohere into segments that can be identified as internally coherent scenes. Sequences of scenes are normally understood to constitute coherent programmes.

It is the presence of markers of spatio-temporal relationships that reveal the textuality of the television transmission. These formal features constitute the 'texture' of the television text. Indeed the correct division of the text into units of internal coherence is fundamental to comprehension and is a process that is intuitively applied by the viewer. The comprehension of this form of structural organisation in the typical television text is an act of interpretation on the part of the viewer, based on general understanding of the organisation of the world it represents and previous experience of similar texts. It is through the imposition of some form of organisational structure that the sequence of changing images and sounds acquires meaning and produces pleasure.

As examples of television texts, it must be assumed that soap operas are widely understood. The large and loyal audiences they command, drawn from all social groups, suggest that soaps are widely accessible. Since it is not easy to



study empirically how the audience actually makes sense of the text, an alternative approach is to study the formal features of the text and make assumptions about how it is understood. Such measures as average shot lengths are therefore interesting as they indicate something about the speed at which it is possible to comprehend a visual text. The television viewer is not only expected to understand the television text, it must also be understood in real-time.

Changes of shot and scene provide visual interest, maintaining audience involvement by presenting new visual information. The articulation of shots and scenes is in part a function of the narrative and in part a constraint of the procedures of production practice. Segmentation is a requirement of narrative, which depends upon the manipulation of indicators of space, time and causality. It is also a practical requirement of production, which depends upon constructing a whole out of parts. Some formal features are intrinsic and provide coherence and continuity. Other features are extrinsic, imposed by practical constraints, for instance the duration of an episode or the number of available studio cameras.

A statistical analysis of structural features can reveal something about the nature of the construction of a text and allows the comparison of different texts. Such an approach ignores questions of subjective aesthetic judgement and seeks to offer an objective basis for assessments to be made about programme production style and practice.

One precedent for such an approach to soap opera was produced by Gretchen Barbatsis and Yvette Guy (1991). The authors noted that 'soap opera does not reflect the world in some direct way. Its sense of realness is a constructed illusion. The apparent naturalness of the illusion is explained, in part, by the conventions that construct its narratives and the practices that inform its production.'<sup>1</sup> They attempted to address the unique sense of reality associated with soap opera by analysing the characteristics of the form represented in its particular structuring of compositional elements. Compositional elements were coded in scene and shot structures, with respect to variables such as shot size and camera movement. In conclusion they remark: 'Like studies of audience sense-making and studies of production processes, analysis of compositional structure addresses the issue of textual context. In addition to the contexts of its making and the context of its use, the television text has a context in the medium which gives it form.'<sup>2</sup>

## Definitions

The consideration of formal features first requires the definition of a number of terms. The terms programme, episode, scene and shot, will be employed in the commonly understood sense, as elaborated below.

### Programmes

The term television programme popularly has a number of meanings. It may be used to refer to a regular broadcast, such as the transmission on Channel 3 at 7pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Alternatively it may be used to refer to a specific broadcast, such as the transmission on Channel 3 at 7pm last Tuesday. Here, the term programme will be reserved to refer to the title of a particular broadcast, which may be scheduled for transmission either on a single occasion or on a regular basis, often as part of a series or serial. In this sense, the serial *Emmerdale* is a programme.

### Episodes

The term episode is adopted here to describe a particular edition of a regularly broadcast programme. Thus the first episode of *Emmerdale* was broadcast on ITV at 1.30pm on Monday 16 October 1972. An episode may be generally assumed to include all parts of the specific transmission of a programme, including titles and credits, but excluding any commercial breaks.

On commercial television, the institutional separation of programming from advertising remains strong, to the extent that commercials are not considered to be a part of the programming but rather an intrusion into it. Commercial television is governed by strict guidelines designed to ensure the independence of programming and advertising. By contrast, advertising in printed material is often closely integrated with editorial matter and might be considered to form part of the publication. The way in which viewers are usually able to discriminate between programming and commercials or other promotional material is quite significant.

Some studies of soap opera have made much of the nature of the commercials which may surround them. Such observations are only of real significance if they take into account the general pattern of television advertising. The presence of a soap powder commercial in a programme break does not necessarily imply that a programme is targeted exclusively at women, as some writers might appear to



suggest. It may be interesting to speculate on the potential relationships between the micro-narratives of commercials and the surrounding programming, but there is little evidence to suggest that viewers see them as being strongly related. It is also rarely appreciated that viewers in different regions may see different commercials. This introduces impossible complications into any study of the television text. For this reason, commercial messages were excluded from the study.

In any hour of television, a certain proportion of the time will be taken up with commercials or promotional trailers, together with title and credits and other packaging material. The opening title sequence of *Emmerdale* was nominally 30 seconds, while the end and start of part captions in and out of the centre break were each 7 seconds and the closing credits lasted for 40 seconds, including a 5 second YTV production credit, totalling approximately 1 minute 25 seconds per episode. Similar packaging material amounted to around 1 minute 50 seconds in the case of *Brookside*, 1 minute 25 seconds for *Coronation Street*, and around 1 minute 55 seconds for *EastEnders*. Thus a scheduled half hour episode on British commercial television typically presents less than twenty-three minutes of new programme material, or around twenty-seven minutes on the BBC. The generic packaging elements are of similar lengths from episode to episode, determined by the duration of the signature music. Some variation in these nominal durations can be observed in practice, depending upon the precise point at which transitions are made and the lengths of any mixes and because of minor timing discrepancies in network presentation.

The notion of net screen time was adopted for episode durations, based on the total duration of scenes in an episode, excluding titles, commercial break captions, commercials, and end credits. This simply provides a basis for statistical comparisons. It is certainly not intended to suggest that such material does not form part of the viewer's experience of the episode.

## Scenes

The definition of what constitutes a scene is not entirely unproblematic, although it is perhaps clearer in the case of the continuing serial than with some other forms of dramatic narrative. A scene is considered here to be a continuous sequence of one or more shots within an episode.

For about the first fifty years, Hollywood customarily referred to each 'shot' as a 'scene'. The narrative unit now generally termed a 'scene' was considered to



be a 'sequence'. For many years these were typically separated by punctuating devices such as dissolves and fades, although straight cuts between scenes are more common today.

The definition of a scene applied here closely follows the well-established industrial practice which is based on conventional classic cinema. This concept of a scene derives from the continuity system of production in which a continuity script translates the treatment or narrative synopsis into individual scenes. These are distinguished as being either interior or exterior scenes. From this a shooting script is produced, specifying the coverage of each scene in terms of shots.

In essence, a scene is taken here to be a discrete segment of action exhibiting a certain coherence in terms of spatio-temporal unity and continuity. A scene is the largest continuous unit of action occurring at one time in one place.

A scene may comprise one or more shots. No fundamental distinction will be made here between a scene composed of several shots and a scene consisting of a single shot, sometimes known in cinema as the *plan-séquence*, the segment which Christian Metz termed an 'autonomous shot'.

A single scene may contain more than one 'focus' or centre of action. A typical example might be a carefully blocked bar scene in which the action may move fluidly between several groups of characters. A scene may also move between one or more rooms provided that it is presented as a continuous sequence. A typical example might be movement between a kitchen and a living room where the action forms a single dramatic unit.

The identification of a scene is an act of interpretation on the part of the viewer who must comprehend something of the visual world as it is represented. In Metz's terms it is dependent for its definition upon the diegesis. A change of scene may not be recognised immediately but may be inferred retrospectively.

However, a scene also possesses formal features that can cue the viewer to construct a correct segmentation. Within a scene, the coherence of a group of shots may be conventionally signalled by a number of principles of continuity editing, including cuts on action, eyeline match, overlapped image fields, and continuity of sound. The boundaries of a scene may be cued by conventions such as the use of an establishing shot at the beginning or held close-up shot at the end of a scene. A disruption in the continuity of atmospheric sound may also provide a strong cue of change of scene. Musical bridges may also indicate scene transitions. Music is not used in British continuous serials but forms an important part of American and Australian serials.



The strongest potential cue of a change of scene may be an abrupt transition between an interior and exterior. In standard production terminology, a scene does not span the transition from exterior to interior, or from location to studio, as a result of the traditional practice of shooting these sections separately out of story sequence. While there may be a continuity match between an exterior and an interior, the time and space in which they are recorded may be quite separate. This arbitrary practical division is not necessarily consistent with the viewer's subjective impression of the divisions of narrative action.

The industrial definition of a scene may not always correspond to the viewer's intuitive sense of what constitutes a scene. Several production scenes may be so closely associated in narrative continuity that they are perceived by the viewer as a single unit. In narrative terms, several scenes may cohere into a single sequence. Generally this will occur when there is direct spatio-temporal or causal continuity between adjacent scenes. Where the action moves between interior and exterior, exits and entrances through doorways can provide strong logical cues from which the viewer may infer a narrative continuity between scenes. Implicit temporal relations between scenes may set up an impression of simultaneity or temporal progression. A mix or dissolve transition may be conventionally employed between scenes to indicate some form of coherence and may be used to suggest the passage of time.

A scene can therefore be considered as a fundamental narrative building block, from which more complex rhetorical structures can be constructed. The most significant aspect of a scene is that it takes place at a single time and place. A change of scene can therefore indicate a change of time or place or both time and place. From this cue, the viewer is invited to infer a narrative movement. This may be confirmed through the presentation of subsequent material.

The industrial definition of a scene as a scripted unit is sufficiently well established to be worth preserving and it seems unnecessary to invent an alternative. In the case of *Emmerdale*, the scene divisions were made with reference to production records. This provided an implicit benchmark definition of a scene, which was used in the description of other serials for purposes of comparison.

## **Shots**

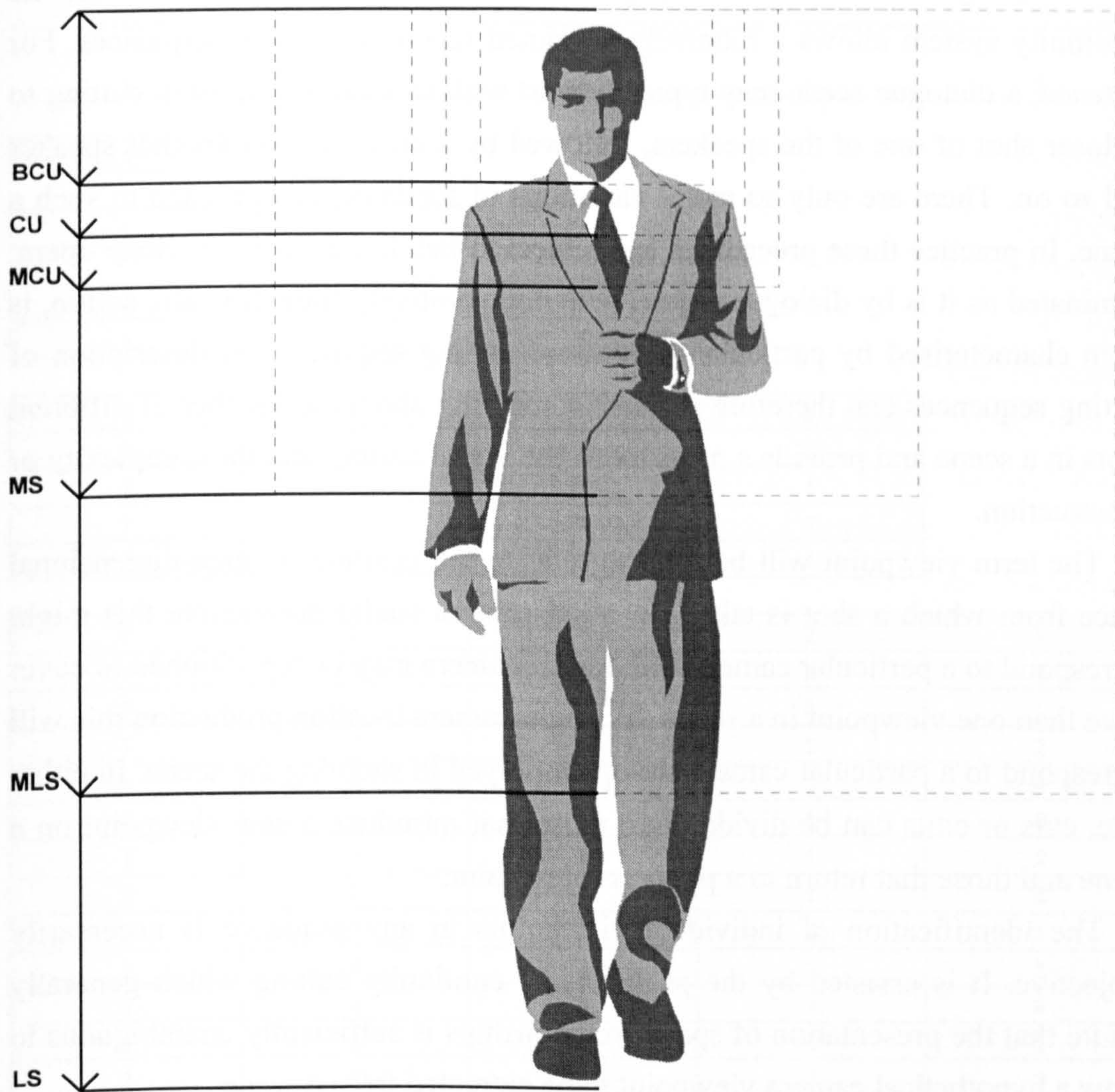
The definition of the extent of a shot is generally unproblematic in the context of the serial genre. It may be defined as the longest continuous unit from a single

camera point of view. This viewpoint may move within the course of a shot. The procedures of continuity editing imply that a change of shot is significantly signalled to avoid the impression of a 'jump cut'. As a result the boundaries of a shot are generally self-evident. An exception is in the case of special effects where any change of shot is disguised.

Shots of figures can be classified according to compositional framing. The precise definition of any particular shot is necessarily subjective, although similar definitions of shot size are now universally employed industrially. Such definitions assume that the shot contains a single character. In practice it can be extremely difficult to define a shot in this way, particularly if it features more than one character. However, since such designations form part of the language by which directors and their crew operate, it is possible to characterise shots according to these terms with a reasonable degree of confidence. *Figure 9.1* gives the definitions of shot sizes used.



**Figure 9.1**  
**Definition of shot size**



Shot	Description	Framing	Cropping Point
BCU	Big Close-Up	Head	Neck
CU	Close-Up	Head and shoulders	Shoulders
MCU	Medium Close-Up	Head and chest	Armpit
MS	Medium Shot	Head and body	Below the waist
MLS	Medium Long	head and body	Below the knee
LS	Long Shot	Figure	Full figure fills $\frac{3}{4}$ frame
VLS	Very Long Shot	Figure	Full figure small in frame



### Cutting sequences

In combining shots from different points of view within the same scene, the continuity system allows a relatively restricted repertoire of shot sequences. For instance, a dialogue scene may typically start with an establishing shot, cutting to a closer shot of one of the speakers, followed by a close shot on another speaker and so on. There are only so many variations of fundamental approach to such a scene. In practice these procedures are subject to indefinite variation. Soap opera, dominated as it is by dialogue scenes with comparatively little dramatic action, is often characterised by particular patterns of cutting sequences. A description of cutting sequences can therefore indicate something about the number of different shots in a scene and provide a measure of the visual variety and the complexity of construction.

The term viewpoint will be used to refer to the position in three-dimensional space from which a shot is taken. In multi-camera studio production, this might correspond to a particular camera, although a camera may be repositioned to cover more than one viewpoint in a scene. In single-camera location production this will correspond to a particular camera set-up employed in shooting the scene. In either case, cuts or edits can be divided into those that introduce a new viewpoint on a scene and those that return to a previous viewpoint.

The identification of individual viewpoints in any sequence is necessarily subjective. It is assisted by the protocols of continuity cutting which generally ensure that the presentation of spatial relationships is sufficiently unambiguous to allow a hypothetical camera viewpoint to be extracted from a scene.

The following simple symbolic system of notation may be employed to describe shot cutting sequences. The first shot in a scene is labelled '1'. If it is followed by another shot, this is by definition from another viewpoint and is labelled '2'. If there is a third shot, there is a choice between taking a new shot, '3', or returning to the first viewpoint, '1'. Thus '1' is the only possible structure for a scene with one shot and '12' is the only possible structure for a scene composed of two shots. A scene comprising three shots may be either '121' or '123'. As each further shot is added, it is either categorised as a return to a previous viewpoint or identified as a new viewpoint and given the next available numeric label. With four shots there are five possibilities and with five shots there is a total of fifteen possible combinations, as shown in *table 9.1*.



**Table 9.1**  
**Permutations of camera positions in shot sequences**

Shots				
1	2	3	4	5
1				
1	2			
1	2	1		
1	2	3		
1	2	1	2	
1	2	1	3	
1	2	3	1	
1	2	3	2	
1	2	3	4	
1	2	1	2	1
1	2	1	2	3
1	2	1	3	1
1	2	1	3	2
1	2	1	3	4
1	2	3	1	2
1	2	3	1	3
1	2	3	1	4
1	2	3	2	1
1	2	3	2	3
1	2	3	2	4
1	2	3	4	1
1	2	3	4	2
1	2	3	4	3
1	2	3	4	5

Clearly, with only three shots, the maximum number of viewpoints that can be presented is three. As the number of shots rises, so does the number of possible viewpoints, but the number of possible arrangements of these viewpoints rises exponentially. In practice, a single basic viewpoint may provide a number of different framings. Substantial modifications of a particular viewpoint may be indicated by adding an alphabetic suffix, so a significant modification of viewpoint '1' would be indicated as '1A', and a further modification would be indicated as '1B'. This considerably increases the number of potential permutations. Since the duration of each shot is continuously variable, there is an



almost unlimited number of temporal variations that can be played, employing comparatively limited resources.

The complexity of the shot structure is dependent upon the number of shots in a scene and the number of viewpoints available. There are certain constraints upon production that limit the freedom with which sequences can be constructed. In multi-camera studio production, there is a limitation in the number of cameras available and the time available within which they can be re-positioned to give new viewpoints. In recorded productions, this may occasionally require breaking a scene down into a number of segments that are shot separately. In single-camera location production, the main constraint upon the number of set-ups employed is the time taken to reset the camera and repeat the action. It would be theoretically possible for each new shot to be seen from an original viewpoint.

One might hypothesise that the unit of a scene is a necessary cognitive unit that provides a mental schema for assigning shots to viewpoints, contributing to coherence and context and so reducing complexity. Scenes of limited and reasonably predictable duration, as encountered in soap operas, restrict the possible number of viewpoints of which the viewer must maintain an account. If a shot cannot easily be assigned to the present scene, a new scene is assumed to have started. A memory of viewpoints is not necessarily preserved between scenes, although the regular viewer will build up a knowledge of scene spaces that may assist in the identification, orientation and comprehension.

## Statistical analysis

Variables such as shot length and type are particularly amenable to quantitative statistical analysis. Although such an approach may at first appear alien to the study of texts, there are precedents in the fields of literary and musical studies. The technique dates back to at least 1887 when T. C. Mendenhall, writing in the journal *Science*, proposed a scientific solution to disputes about authorship by using the frequency distribution of word lengths in letters to arrive at the 'word spectrum' of text. This relatively crude approach opened the way for further stylometric studies of literary texts.<sup>3</sup> Stylostatistical studies generally involve measuring the frequency of the occurrence of certain linguistic features in samples of language. Statistical linguistics therefore investigates not only the difference between samples or texts, but also the statistical regularities that the samples and ultimately whole languages and all languages have in common.



Although as has been argued, there is no direct equivalence between the operation of words in sentences and shots in scenes, a similar technique might be employed in the analysis of visual texts. By accurately timing the duration of shots, one might determine a frequency distribution of shot durations employed in a particular text. In moving pictures, the introduction of a cut or change of viewpoint involves two complementary processes, the joining of two images, and the determination of the length of a shot, both in relation to the action and to the preceding shot. Information about the distribution of shot lengths can therefore indicate something about the pace of a programme.

Barry Salt produced a pioneering attempt at an objective analysis of formal features of film in a brief article on 'Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures' (1974)<sup>4</sup> elaborated in his *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis* (1983),<sup>5</sup> a unique history of the development of film style, including an analysis of the relationship of technological innovation to cinematic forms. The analytical approach Salt adopted ran counter to the predominant methods of studying cinema, drawn largely from literary studies, and was largely ignored by the established schools of cinematic criticism.

One of the basic quantitative measures Salt introduces is that of the average shot length, that is the total duration divided by the number of shots. Other stylistic variables of filmic construction that are available for statistical analysis include features such as closeness of the shot, in terms of the composition of the figure in the frame, and the relative use of camera movement. These are the basic variables that can be quantitatively analysed. Salt concedes that 'It may be claimed that this is a rather arid approach, but considerations of how long a shot is to be, where the camera is to go, and so on, are some of the things with which the director of a film is principally concerned.'<sup>6</sup>

It is only possible to make meaningful statements about style based on such characteristics if there is a benchmark against which they can be measured. To establish the existence of an individual style in the work of a director, it is necessary to compare a sufficient number of films from that director, as well as films of similar genre in the same period.

Salt studied nearly a thousand American feature films and analysed the average shot length based on a thirty minute sample from each film. *Table 9.2* is based on his findings. In the early sound period the average shot length was around eleven seconds, dropping to nine seconds in the mid-thirties to mid-forties. The average then rose again to eleven seconds in the mid-fifties. Throughout this

period, the modal value, or the most common average shot length, remained at around nine seconds. In the sixties the average shot length dropped to between seven and eight seconds, and the mode dropped significantly to six seconds. Salt suggests that the trend towards shorter shots has subsequently continued, while longer takes are associated with high artistic ambition and continue to be the standard mode of European art movies.

**Table 9.2****Average shot length of American feature films**

(Arbitrary sample of approximately one thousand US feature films)

Period	Mean ASL secs	Mode ASL secs
1928 - 1933	11	9
1934 - 1939	9	9
1940 - 1945	9	9
1946 - 1951	10.5	9
1952 - 1957	11	9
1958 - 1963	8	6
1964 - 1969	7.5	6

Source: Salt (1983) pp. 307, 323.

David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson reached similar conclusions in their book *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film style and mode of production to 1960* (1985: 60-62). Based on an arbitrary sample of one hundred American features films, they determined that in the silent period from 1917-1928 the average shot length, including intertitles, tended to be between five and seven seconds. In the period of early sound cinema the average shot length increased to around eleven seconds in response to the inclusion of spoken dialogue. During the mid-thirties to mid-forties shot lengths dropped slightly to about nine seconds. Thereafter shot lengths increased again to around eleven to twelve seconds.

Such figures indicate a degree of comparative consistency in cutting rate in Hollywood feature films since the introduction of synchronised sound. Although shot length has been subject to historical variation, mainly in response to technological innovation, there is no clear evidence that cutting has consistently accelerated.

**Duration distributions**

Simple averages can conceal as much as they reveal. The average, or arithmetic mean, is affected by extreme values and can be misleading. The average shot duration may be affected by a small number of shots of long duration. To



represent this dispersion, the frequency distribution of shot durations, that is how many shots there are over a range of durations, can be expressed in the form of a histogram. Rather than simply counting the number of shots over a period of time, this requires accurately measuring the duration of each shot and counting the number of shots for each class interval.

In most sample texts, the number of shorter shots is found to be relatively high compared to the smaller number of longer shots. Such a distribution is said to be positively skewed towards lower values. What is required is a statistical description that represents such a distribution given a few simple parameters.

If the length of each shot in a visual text was entirely random the frequency distribution of shot durations might be expected to approximate to the Poisson distribution. An example of events that conform to a Poisson distribution might be the number of particles per minute emitted by radioactive material.

However, shot durations are not entirely random, since they are intentional, being the result of choices made by the director or editor based on the material available to him. The duration of a shot is the consequence of an indeterminate number of components. The duration of preceding shots may be a factor, but equally one might expect the composition of the shot and the amount of information it contains to play an important part in determining shot duration. The probability that a particular shot will have a particular duration is therefore the result of the product of many probabilities.

Such a situation may be described by the lognormal distribution, which typically results when the quantity under consideration is determined as a result of the probabilities associated with a large number of factors being multiplied together. In this case the natural logarithm ( $\log_e$ ) of the data values produces a frequency distribution that approximates to the normal curve. The normal curve, which occupies a central place in statistical theory, is a fundamental statistical distribution that produces a smooth symmetrical bell-shaped curve, the parameters of which are the mean and the standard deviation, a measure of dispersion around the mean.

The lognormal distribution has been found to apply in literary stylistics to the numbers of sentences of various given lengths in a prose text. A similar situation would appear to apply in the case of motion picture texts. In his studies, Salt found that within most films with an average shot length of less than twenty seconds, which includes the vast majority of commercial films, the range of shot durations conforms approximately to the lognormal distribution.<sup>7</sup>



If the shot duration distribution is known to approximate to a particular statistical distribution, given only the mean value it is possible to predict the probability of a shot being of a particular duration. For instance, if the average shot length is six seconds, and the frequency distribution of shot durations is lognormal, ninety per cent of the shots will be shorter than twelve seconds.

The study of formal features such as shot characteristics and durations requires the collection of a corpus of data. Once certain norms are known, it should be possible to test using only samples.

## **Methodology**

Data was logged for a number of episodes using both archive and off-air video recordings. The features logged included details for each shot and scene, together with details of each character as they appeared and details of the location. For each shot in a scene a viewpoint reference was recorded, enabling the number of camera set-ups in a scene to be established. Each shot was to be characterised in terms of its framing and the name of each character that appeared within it.

### **Q Track**

The logging system employed was dubbed 'Q Track' and was designed to allow cues or events within the temporal domain to be accurately transcribed. Described below is the method used for coding the data to produce a computer model of the scene and shot structure of the text. The techniques used were based in part on professional production practice.

### **Time code**

Previous analyses of film and television material have tended to ignore the temporal dimension of these media. Where shot durations have been noted this has at best been approximated to the nearest foot of film or rounded to the nearest second. In this case it was established as a fundamental requirement that all time measurements should be taken to the nearest frame, that is 1/25 second for the PAL television system.

The key to this is the use of time code, a frame-accurate clock counter that uniquely identifies each video frame. Time code provides each frame with an address in terms of hours, minutes, seconds and frames, plus optional user data. Traditionally, the start of a programme is referenced as 10:00:00:00. In professional video production, time code is used to control the editing process.



Time code is electronically encoded in the material as an audio or video signal, and it is also possible to superimpose the clock counter on the screen to provide a visual reference. This 'burnt-in' time code can be used to produce viewing copies and allows the frame address to be viewed in vision even on low cost video players. These can be used in off-line editing to produce an edit decision list for the final on-line edit.

For the purpose of analysing previously transmitted programmes, videotapes were produced with time code in vision, together with the accompanying machine readable time code, although the latter was not used for this initial study. The time code addresses of scene and shot boundaries, together with other events of interest, could then be logged with frame accuracy to produce a precise temporal description of the material. This effectively reversed the editing process, decomposing the material into its constituent shots.

The use of time code made it possible to determine the temporal location and duration of events with great accuracy. As well as offering a high degree of numerical precision, time code allowed material to be unambiguously referenced so that for any logged record it was possible to locate the precise part of the relevant tape recording retrospectively. This allowed the data to be collected and verified in more than one pass or session. The machine readable nature of time code also offered the potential to automate the acquisition of temporal data.

The management of the logged data required a computer database. Time code data for each shot, scene, part, and episode was entered into a computer system. This was used to create a structural description or model of the shot and scene structure of each episode.

### **Data Model**

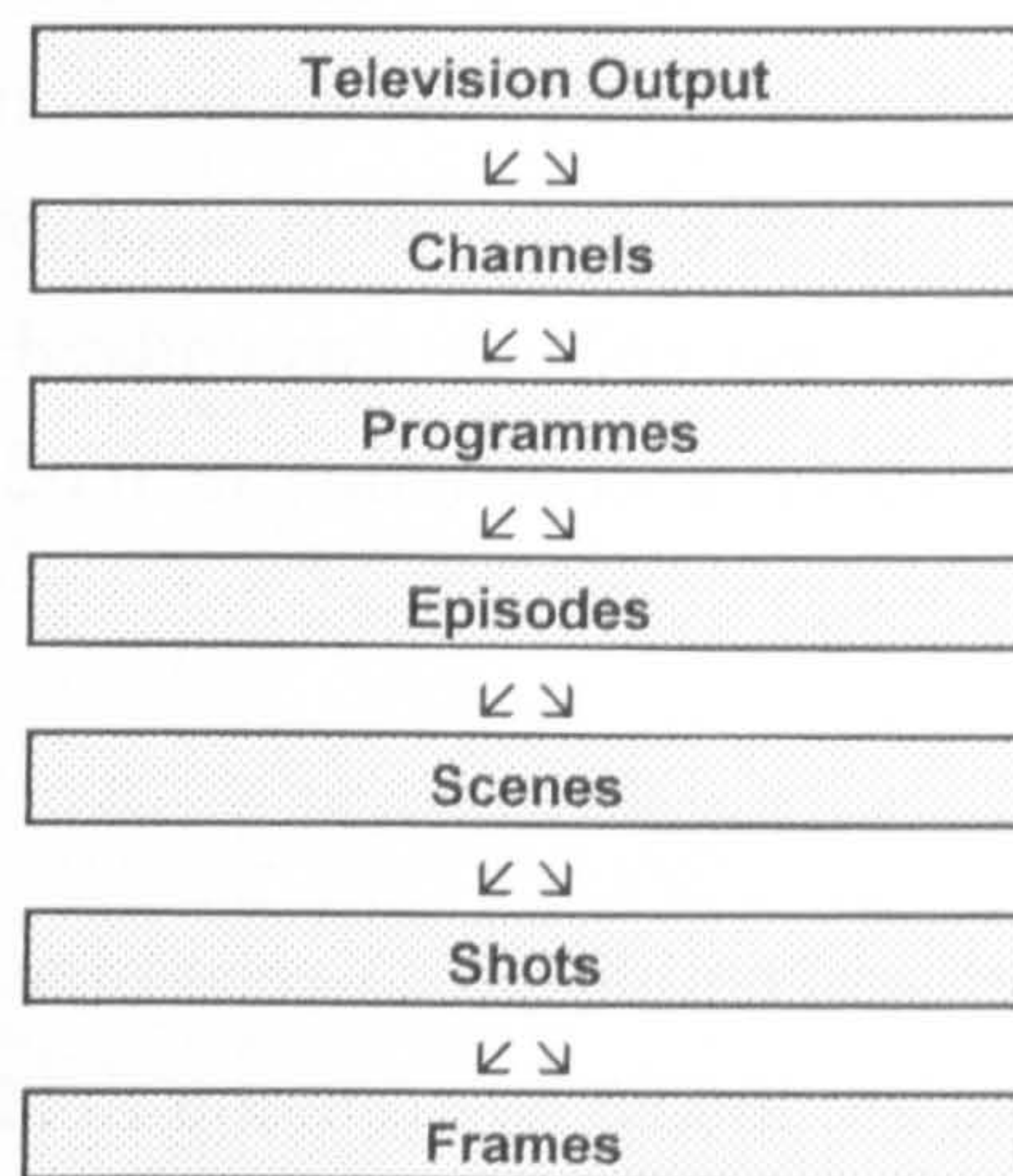
A relational database model was employed. A relational database stores data in a number of related tables that are linked by common fields, allowing complex data sets to be stored without unnecessary repetition of information. The relational database model was first proposed by Dr Edgar F. Codd of IBM in 1970.<sup>8</sup> It has since been the principle focus of database theory. The process of creating a data structure that conforms to the relational database model involves a series of formalized procedures called data normalization, the theoretical details of which are not of immediate concern here. Suffice to say that the database structure employed conforms to the third level normal form. The general structure of the database is described here to illustrate its operation.



The design of a relational database requires analysing the data that is to be represented and decomposing this data into its fundamental constituent elements. This will determine the design of the database, the tables to be stored, the fields they will contain, and the relationships between them.

In this case the database is required to represent television programmes and their structure in terms of scenes and shots. Television output can be considered to consist of a number of television channels extended over time. The schedule for each channel is typically composed of a number of programmes, that is to say programme titles. Each programme consists of one or more episodes or editions. An episode comprises one or more scenes, that is to say material that is continuous in time and place. A scene may be composed of one or more shots, that is to say material that is continuous in camera view. At the lowest level is the individual frame, the smallest discrete unit. Thus it may be said that any programme is composed of one or more episodes, that every episode may consist of one or more scenes and every scene may comprise one or more shots, each of which extends over one or more frames. This model is illustrated in *figure 9.2*.

**Figure 9.2**  
**Data model**



This fundamental model provides the structure for a relational database, allowing any individual frame to be related to the shot, scene, episode and programme in which it occurs.

### **Data Structure**

The custom designed database logging system was implemented using the Microsoft Access relational database management system, although in principle



any true relational database that supports SQL or Structured Query Language could be used.

The database structure was based on separate tables for details of Programmes, Episodes, Scenes, Shots and Frames. The data fields within each table were constructed in such a way as to allow the tables to be related in a meaningful manner.

### ***Programmes***

A *Programmes* table contained a record for each television programme to be represented in the database. This identified each programme by a Programme name and Channel, which together made up a unique primary key or index. For instance, the programme *Emmerdale* would be represented as:

PROGRAMMES		
Programme	Channel	...
Emmerdale	ITV	
...		

Details of the programme, such as the usual days and times of transmission and the production company were recorded in additional fields.

### ***Episodes***

An *Episodes* table contained a record for each episode of a programme using a reference system that uniquely identified the date and time of the start of the original transmission and the channel on which it was broadcast. This information was stored in two fields, Date/Time and Channel. Together these made up the primary key for the episode table. Another field recorded the Programme Name. This field was also indexed. For instance, the first episode of *Emmerdale* would be represented as:

EPISODES			
Date/Time	Channel	Programme	...
16/10/72 13:30:00	ITV	Emmerdale	
...			

Additional fields were used to store production details including the writer and director credits, episode number, and where applicable episode title.



### *Scenes*

Within each episode, a *Scenes* table identified the start of each scene to the exact frame. The first scene of the first episode of *Emmerdale*, which started 43 seconds and 8 frames into the programme, was identified thus:

SCENES				
Date/Time	Channel	Scene	...	
16/10/72 13:30:00	ITV	10:00:43 08		
...				

The end time of each scene was also recorded, from which the scene duration could be automatically calculated. Other details recorded included the location of the scene and whether it was interior or exterior, day or night, studio or location, together with a brief description of the scene.

### *Shots*

The start of each shot was similarly identified in a *Shots* table, together with the start time of the scene in which it occurred. So the first shot of the first episode of *Emmerdale* was recorded as:

SHOTS					
Date/Time	Channel	Shot	...		Scene
16/10/72 13:30:00	ITV	10:00:43 08			10:00:43 08
...					

The end time was also recorded for each shot, from which the shot duration could be automatically calculated. Where the transition to the shot employed an effect such as a mix, timings were taken from the approximate midpoint and the length of the transition was estimated in frames. Other details included the size of the shot and the number of characters it included. There was optional provision for a brief description of the shot.

### *Frames*

Each frame could be optionally identified in a similar manner in a *Frames* table, to allow any individual point in an episode to be uniquely addressed. The first frame of the first episode of *Emmerdale* was identified as follows:



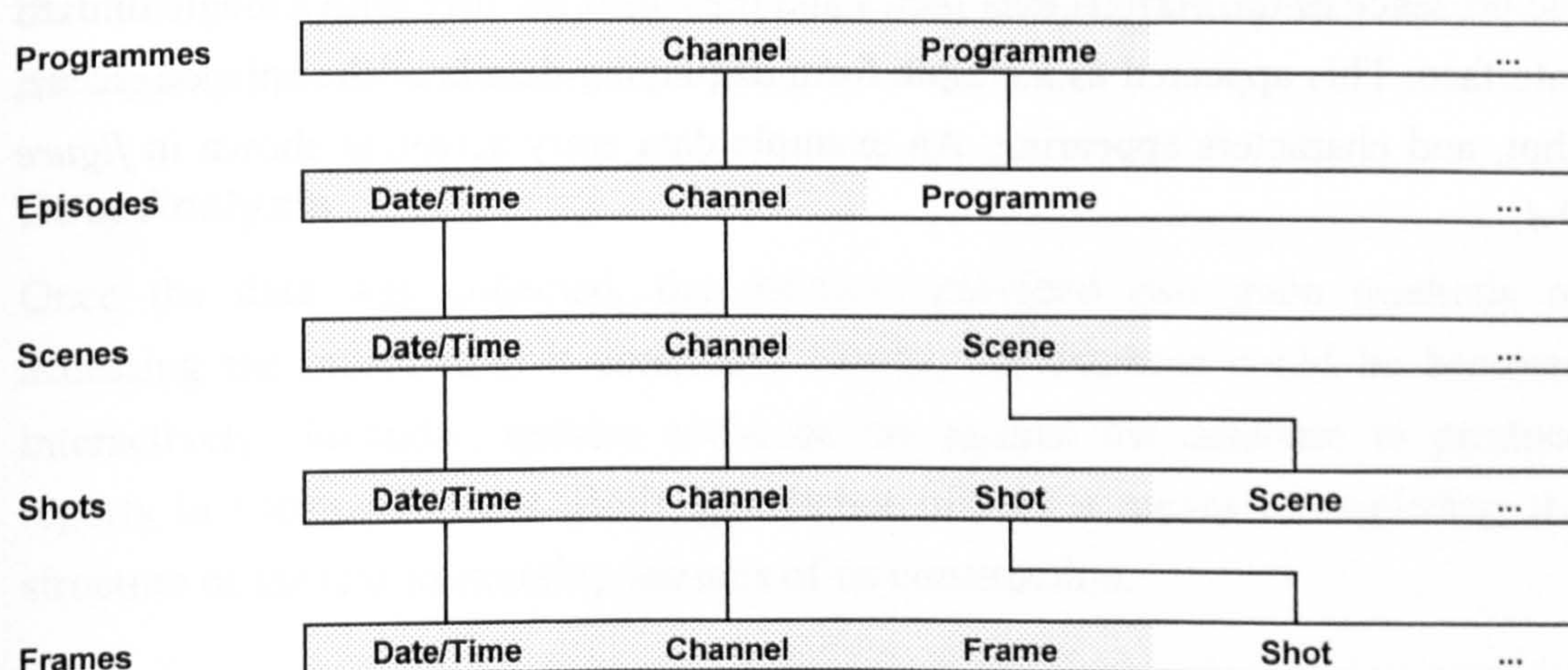
FRAMES					
Date/Time	Channel	Frame	...	Shot	...
16/10/72 13:30:00	ITV	10:00:43 08		10:00:43 08	
...					

A description field was provided and digital images could be optionally stored to identify particular frames of interest visually. These images were captured from videotape using a video capture board, although for reasons of storage space, only one sample episode was fully annotated in this way.

### Relationships

It may be seen that these tables share certain common fields such as Date/Time and Channel. This allows relationships to be established between them. In a relational database, relationships may be either one-to-one or one-to-many. A one-to-many relationship was established in the database between the *Programmes* table and the *Episodes* table, based on the common fields Programme Name and Channel. A one-to-many relationship was also established between *Episodes* and *Scenes*, based on the common fields Date/Time and Channel. Another one-to-many relationship was established between *Scenes* table and *Shots*, based on the common fields Date/Time, Channel, Scene and Frames. Finally, the *Shots* table was related to the *Frames* table. This relational structure of the database is summarised schematically in *figure 9.4*.

**Figure 9.3**  
**Database Schema**  
 (Simplified Block Diagram)



This structure formed the spine of the relational database. In addition, a number of other files were maintained. A *Characters* table was related to the



*Shots* table to allow details of the characters appearing in each shot to be recorded. This was related to an *Artistes* table containing details of characters and artistes, together with an optional identifying image and details of their relationships to other characters. A table of *Locations* was related to *Scenes* to allow details of the location to be recorded and to enable related settings to be grouped together. Finally, a *Recordings* table enabled the details of the logging tapes to be recorded, allowing each episode to be related to a physical recording.

Provision was made to record a transcript of the dialogue in an associated file that contained time code markers for each shot, so allowing synchronisation between the database log and the script.

This relational database effectively provides a model of the shot and scene surface structure of the logged material, faithfully reflecting the temporal dimension of the text. It should be noted that this structure is not intended to reflect the way in which the text is perceived by the viewer. The relationships between units as they are perceived and understood are likely to be more conceptual and multidimensional. In particular, scenes must be related to each other to form sequences of related narrative threads. Such relationships are beyond formal analysis since they form part of the deeper discourse structure by which the surface structure presentation produces meaning. Although this process is the ultimate object of an enquiry into visual literacy, it is beyond the scope of the present empirical study.

### **Data Collection**

The logging data was entered using a custom designed application. This concealed the presence of the various data tables and presented the user with a single unified interface. This appeared as a simple form displaying details of the episode, scene, shot, and characters appearing. An example data entry screen is shown in *figure 9.4*.



**Figure 9.4**  
**Data Entry Screen**

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Access window titled 'Microsoft Access' with a menu bar (File, Edit, View, Records, Window, Help). The main window is titled 'Q Track Browse' and displays data for 'Emmerdale'. The record is for 'ITV Monday 1:30 pm 16 October 1972'.

**Scene Information:**

IN	OUT	Seconds
10:00:43.08	10:02:24.24	101.64

Scene: 1 Location: Farm  
 EXT: DAY Film  
 Day: 1 Time: Continuity:

**Shot Information:**

IN	OUT	Seconds
10:00:43.08	10:00:48.04	4.84

Shot: 1 Position: 1  
 Zoom: OUT Transition: CUT  
 Size: VLS People: 1  
 Angle: Type:

**Description:** Marian on horseback cantering across hillside above the Sugden's farm.

**Characters:** MARIAN

**Description:** Zoom out to accommodate rider.

Record: 1 (Navigation buttons: Home, Previous, Next, End, Refresh, Print, Save, Cancel, OK)

Record: 240 (Navigation buttons: Home, Previous, Next, End, Refresh, Print, Save, Cancel, OK)

Form View

Relationships between the underlying data tables were automatically maintained. Relational integrity rules were enforced to ensure that orphan records could not occur. It was therefore not possible for a shot record to exist without a corresponding scene or episode record. Data entry was validated and calculated durations were displayed automatically. The data entry system greatly facilitated the logging process and ensured the integrity of the data.

## Data Analysis

Once the data was collected, the database provided two main methods of accessing the information it contained. Firstly, the database could be browsed interactively. Secondly, queries could be run against the database to produce reports in various formats. Both approaches offered a means of exploring the structure of the text to examine features of its construction.



### *Browsing*

The relational database provided a convenient means of navigating through the episode, scene and shot records to examine their construction. Where thumbnail digital images were stored, these served as an additional *aide memoire*. The ability to browse backwards and forwards through the text assists in understanding aspects of the construction that are not readily apparent in the normal linear process of viewing. Given the normal limitations of human memory, it can be very difficult to recall precisely how a sequence of images is constructed. With the ability to scroll through the records it becomes possible to see precisely where shot sizes and angles change, something that it is sometimes difficult even to the practised eye when viewing the programme in real time. This effectively offered a powerful random access index to the construction of the text in terms of its scene and shot structure.

As well as being able to browse through the records in chronological sequence, it was possible to filter any subset of records according to any of the attributes stored. For instance, the database could be used to display details for only those scenes that included exterior shots lasting longer than a minute. This ability to run *ad-hoc* queries presented an extremely powerful tool for testing hypotheses about the construction of the text.

### *Reporting*

The fundamental tables in the database can be relationally joined in numerous ways to produce queries or views of the underlying data. These might range from simple filters to extract relevant subsets, to more sophisticated summaries and cross-tabulations. For example, using what is known as a self-join, the start and end times could be linked to allow the comparison of features in adjacent shots within each scene.

A number of standard report formats were devised to present information from the database in tabular summary form. These reports allowed the convenient comparison between programmes and individual episodes. Standard breakdowns included the relative proportions of interior and exterior, or studio and location shooting. These reports could include simple descriptive statistics such as maxima, minima, means, standard deviations, and percentages. Alternatively, any two parameters could be cross tabulated to examine their interaction. For more elaborate analysis the results of queries could be output to a dedicated statistical



package. The ability to perform calculations with respect to time, an otherwise tedious task, made possible a number of enquiries that might not otherwise have been attempted.

## Summary

Reception theories suggest that formal structure plays an important part in guiding the reader to an interpretation of a text. In the time-based medium of moving pictures, the segmentation into shots and scenes provides a structure that can be accurately measured.

Previous estimates of shot durations for feature films provide a useful benchmark against which to judge the formal features of other moving picture material, such as television and video. There is a popular thesis that cutting rates have increased in recent years as a result of the improved visual literacy of the audience. However, the historical study of feature films indicates that while cutting rates have varied through the years, what is more remarkable is the relative degree of consistency over that period.

The methodology adopted here for the empirical examination of soap opera serials is unique in that it focuses on the temporal dimension of the television text. The use of a relational database provides a means of notating and annotating the shot structure of a temporal text. The advantage of storing time domain data in this way is that it becomes a comparatively simple matter to compare particular categories of shots and scenes in a statistical manner. This can offer useful insights into how the text is structured and allows both quantitative and qualitative comparisons to be drawn between different episodes and programmes.

This effectively constitutes a form of structural analysis. Although quite different to a linguistic approach to the text, it employs an equally rigorous empirical methodology that proceeds directly from the data to derive inductively conclusions about the construction of the text. It may be that such descriptions appear to be less sophisticated than complex linguistic descriptions based on binary oppositions, but they are at least rooted in the actual viewing experience of the those who consume such texts, since similar strategies of segmentation may be employed when viewing a temporal text. A statistical description of the formal features of a text may also reveal something about the pragmatics of how the text is produced, so relating theory to practice.



## Notes

- 1 Barbatsis, Gretchen and Guy, Yvette (1991) 'Analyzing Meaning in Form: Soap opera's compositional construction of "realness"', *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 35, 1: 59-74, p. 59.
- 2 Barbatsis and Guy (1991) p. 72.
- 3 Kenny, Anthony (1982) *The Computation of Style: An introduction to statistics for students of literature and humanities*, Oxford: Pergamon Press.  
Dolezel, Lubomir and Bailey, Richard W. (1969) *Statistics and Style*, New York: Elsevier.
- 4 Salt, Barry (1974) 'Statistical Style Analysis of Motion Pictures', *Film Quarterly* 28, 1: 691-703, reprinted in Bill Nichols (ed.) (1985) *Movies and Methods: An Anthology*, vol. 2, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 691-703.
- 5 Salt, Barry (1983) *Film Style and Technology: History and analysis*, 2nd edition 1993, London: Starwood.
- 6 Salt, Barry (1983) p. 35.
- 7 Salt, Barry (1983) pp. 253-254.
- 8 Codd, E. F. (1970) 'A Relational Model of Data for Large Shared Databanks', *Communications of the ACM* 13,6.



# Formal Analysis

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It may be argued that the meaning of the television text is carried through its form. The structure of the text may be analysed at many levels, but the most fundamental structure exists at the level of the shot, for it is in the articulation of such units that the specificity of the moving picture medium lies. At this level it is possible to make formal comparisons between texts in an attempt to discern patterns of similarity and difference. Certain regularities among related texts suggest that it may be possible to make certain broad generalisations about the temporal texture of programmes and genres. An awareness of these formal features may form a part of the intuitive competence in the conventional codes of the medium that is possessed by the literate viewer.

### Formal comparisons

A method of formal analysis was employed to compare the construction of four popular long-running British television soap opera serials: *Brookside*, *Coronation Street*, *EastEnders* and *Emmerdale*, based on archive and off-air recordings. The first episode of each of these serials was studied to provide an indication of its original conception. Each serial was then studied over the course of one week, arbitrarily selected in advance to provide a contemporary sample for comparison. One serial, *Emmerdale*, was analysed over the period of one full month to provide a wider sample, enabling comparisons to be made between different directors. The original annotated production scripts for these episodes were also obtained and transcribed. Time coded videotapes of each episode were analysed shot by shot. In all, 3755 shots were timed to the nearest frame and characterised according to a number of categories. This information was stored in a relational database. This corpus of data provided a basis for an objective discussion of the formal features of these serials.



## First impressions

The difficulty of defining the extent of the continuing drama serial text has already been discussed. The problem that presents itself is simply where to start. One rather obvious solution to this issue is to begin at the beginning, since all soap operas must start somewhere. The first episode, at the time of its transmission, constitutes a complete, although unfinished text. At this stage, every viewer potentially has equal access to the meaning of the text. It is therefore interesting to see how the writer introduces the characters and establishes the setting. Although the first episode can no more be considered to be representative of a continuing serial than any other episode, and may indeed be quite unrepresentative, it does provide a model against which the future development of the serial may be measured. Since the première episodes of *Coronation Street*, *Emmerdale*, *Brookside* and *EastEnders* are well separated chronologically, as shown in *table 10.1*, they also provide an opportunity to measure any historical change in production practice over that period.

**Table 10.1**  
**Selected serials: première episodes**

Episode			Creator	Writer	Director
<i>Coronation Street</i> Fri 9 Dec 1960	ITV	7.00pm	Tony Warren	Tony Warren	Derek Bennett
<i>Emmerdale</i> Mon 16 Oct 1972	ITV	1.30pm	Kevin Laffan	Kevin Laffan	Tristan de Vere Cole
<i>Brookside</i> Thurs 2 Nov 1982	CH4	8.00pm	Phil Redmond	Phil Redmond	Chris Clough
<i>EastEnders</i> Tues 19 Feb 1985	BBC1	7.00pm	Julia Smith/ Tony Holland	Gerry Huxham	Matthew Robinson



### *Coronation Street*

The début of *Coronation Street* was transmitted live in black and white. Although the technical quality may be subjectively poor, the monochrome picture, initially preserved as tele-recording on film, has an appealing documentary quality, perhaps through nostalgic association with other drama productions of the period.

There were 143 shots in total, with an average duration of 9.8 seconds. The shortest shot, at 0.8 seconds, was during a tense exchange between Ken Barlow and his father. The visual pace was if anything faster than it is today, with 36 per cent of the shots less than three seconds in duration, while 8 per cent were longer than twenty seconds. The longest shot lasted 2 minutes 27 seconds. Shot framing was predominantly medium to medium long shot. Medium shots made up 49 per cent of the episode, while medium long shots accounted for 33 per cent, with close-ups at 11 per cent and medium close-ups at 7 per cent. Around 45 per cent of the episode was spent in two-shots, with 25 per cent featuring three characters, and for 23 per cent of the time a single character was on screen. No shot featured more than four people.

There were 13 scenes, although some of these were simply establishing shots on the street. The original script contained nine discrete sequences. There were four exteriors, shot in the studio, totalling just thirty seconds or two per cent of the episode. The first scene established the street succinctly with three shots. The other three scenes each consisted of a single brief establishing shot of a street exterior showing a door number or sign. The shortest scene, at 3.44 seconds, was a single establishing shot of the exterior of the Rover's Return public house, following the commercial break. The average scene duration was 1 minute 47 seconds. There were two scenes lasting more than 4 minutes, the longest lasting 4 minutes 50 seconds. Twelve characters appeared in the episode, five of them on screen for more than five minutes. Six main settings were employed: the street itself, the corner shop, the pub, and the homes of the Tanners, the Barlows, and Albert Tatlock. The three scenes at the Barlow's house, accounted for 30 per cent of the episode, closely followed by the two scenes at the Tanners. The Rover's Return featured in a single short scene. It was of necessity a studio based production and therefore mostly restricted to interiors. Although the street established the setting, the main concern was with the lives that went on behind its doors.



### *Emmerdale*

Some twelve years later, the opening episode of *Emmerdale Farm* was very different, being produced in colour, with the emphasis on outdoor life. The narrative covered the course of two days, with the second part beginning at bedtime and going through to the following morning. A transcript of this episode is given in the appendix.

The episode consisted of 197 shots, with an average duration of just over 7 seconds, although 65 per cent of the shots were shorter than this, the most common duration being 2-3 seconds. The shortest shot, at 0.92 seconds, came at the end of a film insert before a studio scene. The longest shot, at 37.4 seconds, began a studio scene at the start of part two. Medium shots accounted for 28 per cent of the episode, with the rest roughly equally divided among other shot sizes. A very high proportion of the episode, 54 per cent, featured a single character in shot, while 29 per cent was in two-shots. There were three point of view shots, all on film, one of which was marked by Mr Wilks remarking: 'Ay... grand view that'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the sequences shot on film were particularly filmic in their construction, with temporal compression within the scene.

Particularly notable throughout was the frequent and conspicuous use of the zoom lens, both on location and in the studio, approximately equally weighted between zooming in and zooming out. In all there were twenty zoom shots, eight of which were very marked. The most dramatic zooms were on location, where there was the potential to introduce striking changes of scale. These included a fast zoom out from a telephoto shot of mourners in a churchyard to an over the shoulder shot of Jack on a nearby bridge. This was followed by another dramatic zoom out from the top of the church tower from Jack back to the funeral group, the intention presumably being to indicate Jack's distance from the family and his voyeuristic curiosity. In the studio, the use of the zoom was typified by a matched pair of shots slowly moving in on the faces of Jack and his mother in a melodramatic manner.

There were 20 scenes in this opening episode. The first scene, shot on film, comprised 17 shots and 16 set-ups. The average scene duration was 1 minute 9 seconds. The shortest scene, at 6.36 seconds, was a single over the shoulder shot inside the Woolpack public house looking out through the window, although this was a discrete scene only in production terms, since it was continuous with the previous film exterior. The only interior on film, it cut rather unconvincingly



direct to the studio interior of the pub, the first video shot of the episode. The longest scene, at 3 minutes 50 seconds, was an extended sequence in which Jack Sugden returned to Emmerdale Farm and inspected the farm buildings. This series of 37 shots from 20 set-ups was scripted as a single exterior scene, although the action moved both inside and outside with matched continuity. The most notable feature of the scene was that it contained a sequence of 13 shots lasting 2 minutes and 20 seconds without any dialogue.

In general, the film sequences had a high proportion of distinct set-ups, contributing to the filmic flavour. Nine scenes were shot on film, constituting 38 per cent of screen time. The outside broadcast unit with multiple video cameras accounted for 15 per cent of the episode, while the remaining 47 per cent comprised 8 scenes shot in the studio. The majority of the film was towards the beginning, establishing the scenic location, with only one 30 second silent sequence in the second part. Approximately half the episode was interior and half exterior. Predictably, 68 per cent of the episode revolved around Emmerdale Farm itself. The Woolpack represented 19 per cent of screen time, establishing it from the outset as a central location, with its complex composite studio set reflecting this importance. There were ten main characters in the episode, which was dominated by Jack, on screen for over 11 minutes, and his mother Annie Sugden.

In general terms, there was a strong contrast between the filmic location sequences, outside broadcast video sequences, and the somewhat stagey studio interiors, both in terms of the pace of the action, the variation in shots, and in the technical quality of the picture.

The dialogue was notable for its soft Yorkshire dialect. The last line of part one addressed to the returning prodigal son: 'Get thissen a chair... tea's on table' was almost stereotypical in this respect. Twenty years later, in episode 1500, Annie is still saying 'There's tea in the pot, fresh made'. Any trace of a Northern accent may have disappeared, but the sentiment remains the same.

### *Brookside*

The opening episode of Brookside consisted of 39 scenes, as they are defined here, 22 of them consisting of a single shot. This very large number of scenes reflected the filmic structure of the episode. It began with a series of short scenes linked by mixes of about 18 frames, starting on a housing estate cul-de-sac with a milkman doing his rounds and alternating between the exteriors and interiors of a number of homes, featuring no less than three different bedside clocks to establish



the time and simultaneity of the action, intercut with the interior and exterior of a comfortable suburban middle class home with a for sale sign outside. Since the first dialogue did not appear until 1 minute 36 seconds into the episode, a certain amount of inferencing was required on the part of the viewer to establish the relationships between the scenes, to produce the probable hypothesis that before long these two worlds would meet. Although almost a cinematographic cliché, this sequence illustrates the difficulty of applying a classification to such constructions. Although it was somewhat filmic in its structure, none of the categories in Christian Metz's *grande syntagmatique* seems appropriate to adequately describe such a sequence.

The episode consisted of 103 shots, with the shortest being just 16 frames, while the mean duration was 12.82 seconds, with the highest frequency duration between 2 and 4 seconds. There was a marked preference for wider shots, with medium long shots making up 38 per cent of the episode, with long shots at 23 per cent and very long shots at 19 per cent. Two-shots made up 27 per cent of the episode, followed by three-shots at 20 per cent. There was a relatively high number of cutaway shots which did not include a character, making up 14 per cent of the total time. Four of these could be described as point of view shots.

The scenes ranged from a single 2.72 second exterior second shot, sandwiched between two different interiors, to a 1 minute 35 second interior scene consisting of a single shot. The mean scene duration of 33 seconds was skewed by the high number of short scenes, in many cases consisting of a single shot. There was an approximately equal split between exterior and interior scenes, with 20 interior scenes accounting for 52 per cent of the episode and 19 scenes accounting for the remaining 48 per cent. The vast proportion of the episode was shot on the permanent set of Brookside Close, 45 per cent of it either in or outside the Grants House. Around 8 per cent was shot on location elsewhere, showing the Collins family leaving their comfortable suburban home to move onto the estate. There was extensive use of bedrooms and the bathroom as settings, as if to establish the realistic credentials of the serial. Interior and exterior scenes were closely integrated. In the second part there was a regular alternation of interior and exterior scenes, emphasising the existence of the housing estate as a real location. Ten main characters appeared in the episode, with the focus on Bobby, Shiela and Barry Grant, the established working class residents, followed by Annabelle and Paul Collins, the incoming middle class family.



In other respects, the episode was notable for the use of vernacular language, a feature that attracted considerable press attention when it was first broadcast, although it seems scarcely objectionable for an 8pm transmission time today.

### *EastEnders*

If *Brookside* began like a television film, *EastEnders* started more like a television play. The first scene opened with a shot of a foot kicking down the door of a room in which a lifeless body was found, immediately establishing a dramatic situation. The scenes were carefully interwoven with considerable craftsmanship.

The first episode lasted exactly 23 minutes 30 seconds excluding titles and credits and consisted of 23 scenes, giving an average of just over a minute per scene. The shortest scene was just under 15 seconds. The two longest scenes were over 2 minutes long. Nearly three-quarters of the episode was interior, corresponding exactly to the proportion of studio production. The most prominent location was the Queen Vic public house, on screen for over a fifth of the time, closely followed by the Albert Square set itself, and then the café and the launderette.

There were 161 shots, ranging from the first dramatic shot lasting 13 frames, to the longest shot, which lasted 1 minute 44 seconds, with an average of 8.76 seconds. Medium shots made up a very high proportion of the shots, 62.8 per cent, followed by medium long shots, which made up 20.1 per cent of the episode. Some 30 per cent of the episode comprised two-shots, followed by groups of three characters at 23 per cent and singles at 19 per cent.

This first episode introduced no fewer than 18 characters. Perhaps surprisingly the character on screen the most was Ali Osman, a Turkish immigrant, establishing the ethnic tone of the episode, which also featured an Asian family and a Jewish Doctor and did not shrink from dealing with racial attitudes. Arthur Fowler was the next most prominent character, representing the traditional East End working class, together with the matriarchal Lou Beale. The first episode established a tension between a nostalgic view of the past and a realist presentation of the present, as one of the older generation remarked: 'Not the bad old days, them days is coming back. No, I'm talking about the *good* old days, when everybody cared for one another.'



## Comparisons

The first episodes of these four serials together demonstrate some of the technological advances in television production technology over the period they span. *Coronation Street* was a product of a time when television was dominated by live studio production. The confines of the studio contributed to the sense of oppressive introversion. *Emmerdale Farm* began in the early years of colour television, but while it made use of the freedom of location filming, it was hampered by the inflexibility of outside broadcast video equipment. *Brookside* broke new ground with its use of new lightweight cameras that allowed the programme to be produced on a real location. *EastEnders* appeared to be significantly more sophisticated in terms of its production values, making the most of the investment in a large permanent exterior set. Although mostly shot multi-camera in the studio, exterior sequences were well integrated and the treatment was very naturalistic. Apart from *Brookside*, which deliberately avoided the device, the serials established the public house as a meeting place from the outset. It played a minor role in the first episode of *Coronation Street*, a larger role in *Emmerdale Farm*, and became a key location in *EastEnders*. It is notable that the first three serials began by introducing less than a dozen characters, giving prominence to the central roles, whereas *EastEnders* established a larger number of characters from a diverse range of backgrounds.

With each opening episode displaying particular peculiarities, there were no striking structural similarities between the serials with respect to shots or scenes. Over this twenty-five year period, there was no clear trend towards an increase in the number of shots per episode, although the later serials contained more scenes than the first episode of *Coronation Street*. It is useful to compare these première episodes with the serials as they are today to see to what extent they have changed and to what extent they have maintained their distinct identities.



## Comparative analysis

To compare the contemporary construction of the same four serials, the total output over one week was selected for special study. This sample included three episodes of *Brookside*, three of *Coronation Street*, two of *EastEnders*, and two of *Emmerdale*. The sample week was chosen arbitrarily. There were no particular seasonal factors and the audience figures were around the annual average. None of the episodes was exceptionally remarkable in storyline, and the sample can be considered to be reasonably representative of the respective serials. However, given the limited size of this sample compared to the prolific overall output, no claim can be made that the findings are entirely representative of the respective serials over a wider period, although certain characteristic traits can be determined. In each case the week's episodes were the output of a single director and represented a single complete production block, with the exception of *Emmerdale*, where the block began on a Thursday. It is worth remarking that, by complete coincidence, the director of one of the *Emmerdale* episodes, Derek Bennett, was also the director of the very first edition of *Coronation Street*. Table 10.2 gives details of the sample episodes studied.

**Table 10.2**  
**Selected serials: episodes analysed**

Episode			Writer	Director
<b>Week 40, 1990</b>				
<b><i>Brookside</i></b>			<b>CH4</b>	<b>8.00pm</b>
Mon	1 Oct	(840)	Joe Ainsworth	Chris Johnston
Wed	3 Oct	(841)	"	"
Fri	5 Oct	(842)	"	"
<b><i>Coronation Street</i></b>			<b>ITV</b>	<b>7.30pm</b>
Mon	1 Oct	(3128)	Phil Woods	Richard Signy
Wed	3 Oct	(3129)	John Stevenson	"
Fri	5 Oct	(3130)	Leslie Duxbury	"
<b><i>EastEnders</i></b>			<b>BBC1</b>	<b>7.30pm</b>
Tues	2 Oct	(585)	Linda Dearsley/ Steve Waye	Paul Harrison
Fri	4 Oct	(586)	"	"
<b><i>Emmerdale</i></b>			<b>ITV</b>	<b>7.00pm</b>
Tues	2 Oct	(1493)	Barrie Shore	Derek Bennett
Thurs	4 Oct	(1494)	Rob Gittins	Catherine Morshead



## Shots

In terms of shot duration, *Brookside*, *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale* each had an average of around 130 shots in an episode of about 22.5 minutes, giving an average shot length of around 10 seconds. *EastEnders* was markedly different, with an average shot length of around 5 seconds, giving about 300 shots in a 27 minute episode.

However, the average shot length, which could be calculated simply from a tally of the number of shots and the duration of the episode, is a somewhat misleading statistic, since it says nothing about the dispersion of shot durations around the mean. It is therefore important to examine the cumulative frequency distribution of shot durations, as shown in *table 10.3*. The area under the curve represents the percentage of shots for a given duration from 0-20 seconds.

Only 3 per cent of the shots in *EastEnders* lasted more than twenty seconds, compared with around 10 per cent for the other serials. For this reason, *EastEnders* has a significantly lower average shot duration. In other respects, similarities can be seen between the frequency distributions for *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale*, which are both more traditional serials with large numbers of older viewers, and between those for *Brookside* and *EastEnders*, which attract a larger proportion of younger viewers.

*Coronation Street* had three shots over a minute long, in each case a complete scene, shot on location. The longest and most impressive of these, lasting 1 minute 18 seconds, was a single complex shot in a wine bar, in which the camera tracked back as the characters entered and then jibbed down to a two-shot conversation at their table. The carefully choreographed shot was marred slightly by the sight of the boom shadow creeping into the top of the frame during the move.

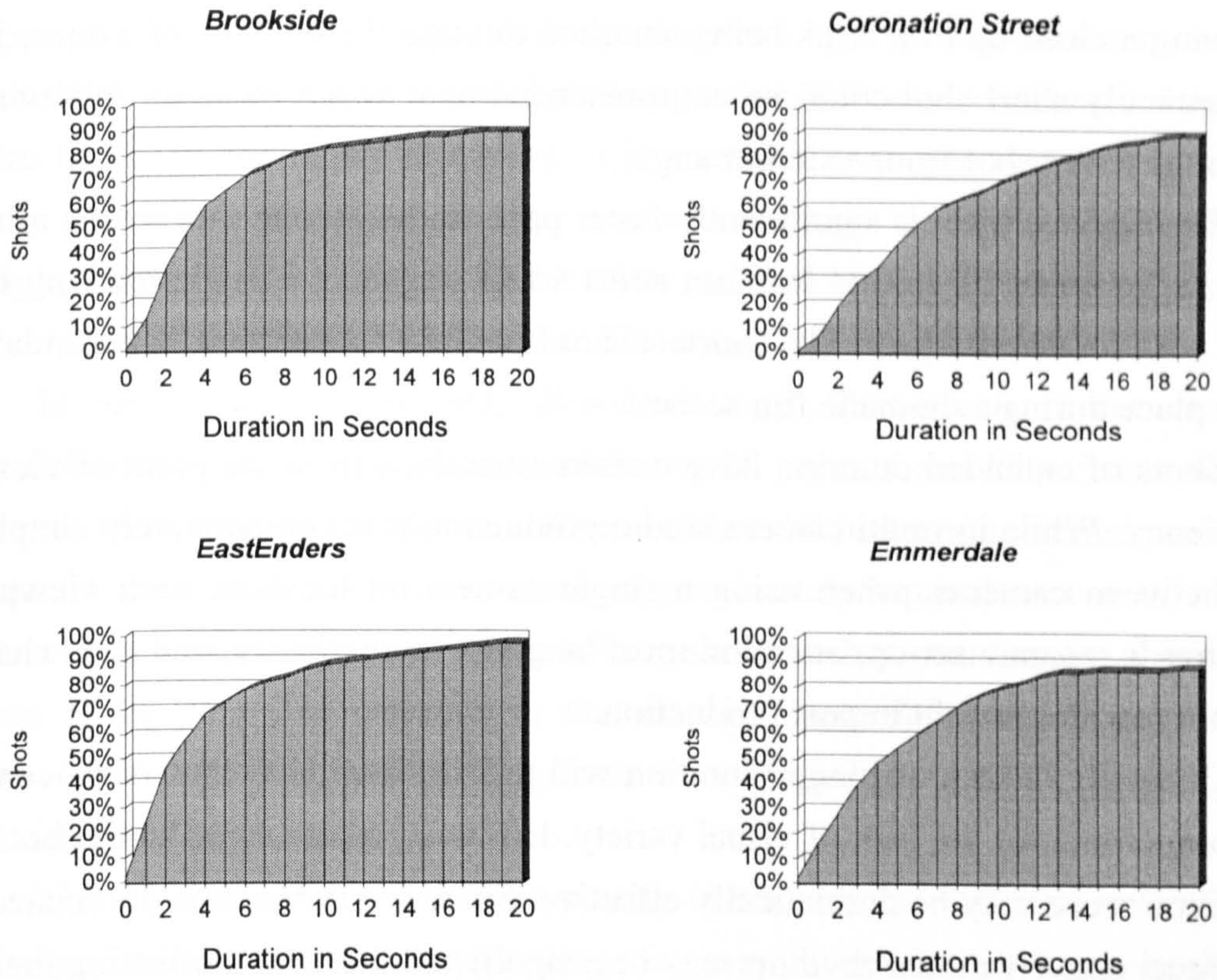
*Emmerdale* had six shots longer than one minute, four of which were in exterior scenes. In all but one case these shots made up an entire scene. Perhaps the most impressive was a 1 minute 6 second shot, which began at first floor level and craned down to eavesdrop metaphorically on a couple on the veranda below, ending on a close two-shot of their embrace. The smooth camera movement connoted high production values, while the duration of the shot justified the time and expense of obtaining it. However, shots featuring significant camera movement were comparatively rare in all the serials.



**Table 10.3**

**Selected serials: shot durations**

Cumulative frequency distribution of shot durations in seconds (percentage of shots)



Episode		Duration	Shots	Shot Duration (seconds)			
Week 40, 1990		h:mm:ss	<i>n</i>	Std Dev	Min	Max	Mean
<b>Brookside</b>							
Mon	1 Oct	0:22:26	110	18.83	1.24	113.24	12.24
Wed	3 Oct	0:22:33	141	20.41	0.72	147.04	9.59
Fri	5 Oct	0:22:43	138	17.43	0.36	132.80	9.88
		<b>1:07:42</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>18.93</b>	<b>0.36</b>	<b>147.04</b>	<b>10.44</b>
<b>Coronation Street</b>							
Mon	1 Oct	0:21:41	118	13.04	0.72	76.68	11.02
Wed	3 Oct	0:22:57	127	11.54	0.80	78.04	10.84
Fri	5 Oct	0:23:05	146	9.00	0.80	57.08	9.49
		<b>1:07:43</b>	<b>391</b>	<b>11.16</b>	<b>0.72</b>	<b>78.04</b>	<b>10.39</b>
<b>EastEnders</b>							
Tues	2 Oct	0:26:58	309	6.52	0.56	78.16	5.24
Fri	4 Oct	0:27:24	297	5.85	0.76	42.28	5.54
		<b>0:54:22</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>6.20</b>	<b>0.56</b>	<b>78.16</b>	<b>5.38</b>
<b>Emmerdale</b>							
Tues	2 Oct	0:23:08	136	12.44	0.88	64.80	10.21
Thurs	4 Oct	0:23:07	133	15.77	0.96	88.76	10.43
		<b>0:46:15</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>14.16</b>	<b>0.88</b>	<b>88.76</b>	<b>10.32</b>



*Brookside*, with thirteen shots over one minute long, five of which were complete scenes, featured the longest shot in the survey, a very static interior scene composed of a single two-shot lasting 2 minutes 27 seconds. *Brookside* also contained the shortest shot encountered, lasting 9 frames, or just 0.36 seconds, showing a close-up of a brick being smashed through the window of a door. This dramatically short shot could be comprehended as it was a close-up following a previous wider shot from a similar angle.

*EastEnders*, with its significantly faster pace, had only one shot over a minute long, a 1 minute 17 second location street scene staged in a single tracking two-shot with four hesitations. The shortest shot lasted 14 frames or 0.56 seconds and took place during a dramatic fire scene.

Shots of extended duration have certain attractions from the point of view of efficiency. While in multi-camera studio production it is comparatively simple to cut between cameras, when using a single camera on location, each viewpoint requires a separate set-up, attention must be given to continuity, and each change of shot requires an edit in post production.

Generally, a shot of longer duration will tend to introduce camera movement to compensate for the lack of visual variety. However, an extended static shot in a dialogue scene may be dramatically effective. Since serial drama is dominated by dialogue, conversational rhythms may be a significant factor in motivating the rate of cutting. Although there is frequent use of the two-shot to cover conversations, the demands of the small screen create a reliance upon shot and counter-shot structures. At their most banal, these simply alternate with speaker, covering a few lines of dialogue. Very brief shots, of around half a second, are typically found only in action sequences.

In general terms, it may be said that each episode typically consists of a large number of shorter shots, together with a smaller number of much longer shots. That is to say that the modal, or most commonly occurring shot duration, is significantly shorter than the arithmetic mean shot duration. The frequency distribution is positively skewed towards shorter shots. If the duration data is logarithmically transformed it approximates to a normal distribution. That is to say that the shot durations approximate to a lognormal distribution. The same distribution of shot durations has been found to apply in feature films, suggesting that it is typical of moving picture narration.



## Shot size

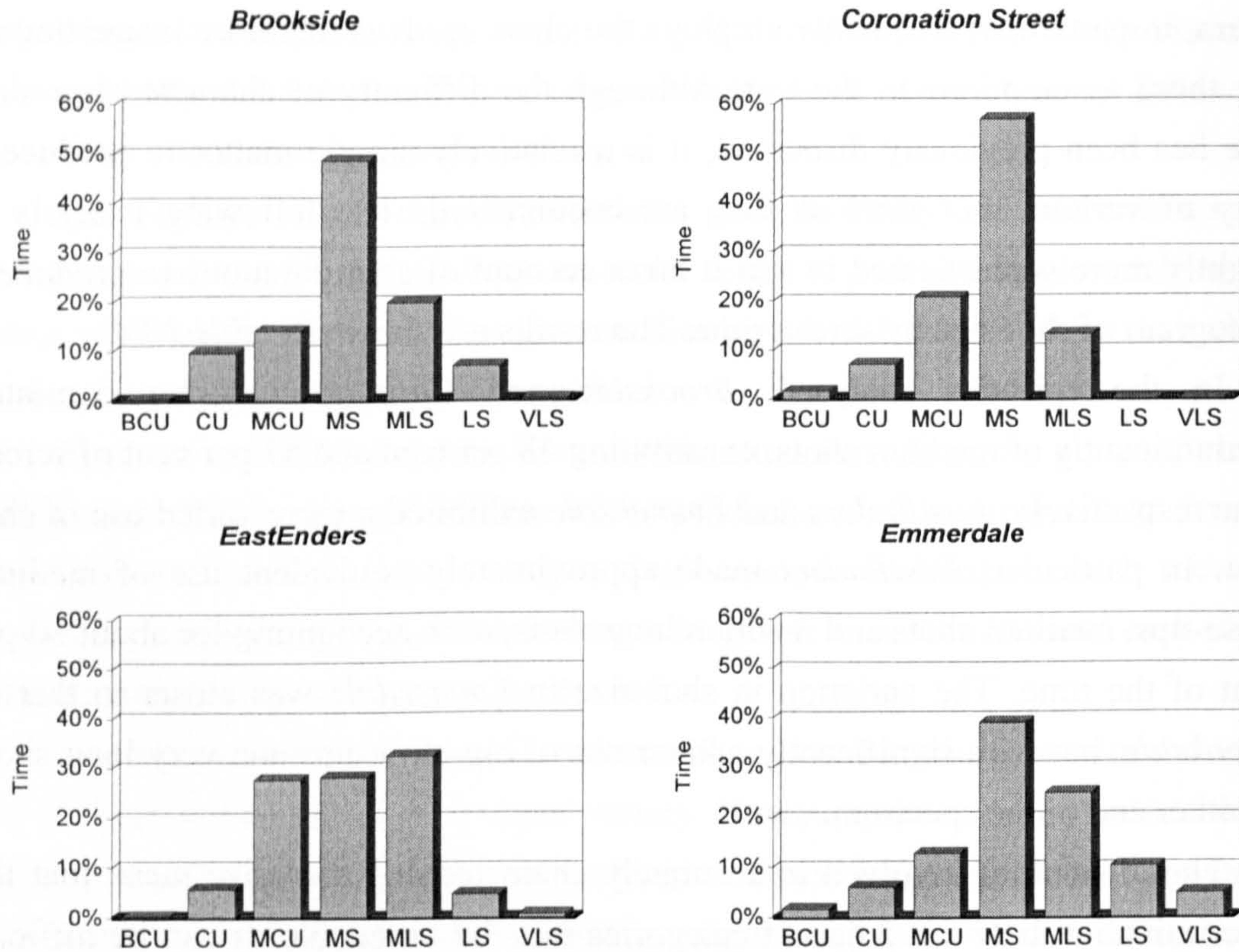
It is often remarked that television is a close-up medium. The size and aspect ratio of the television screen do not favour wide shots. It is also often held that soap opera, in particular, frequently employs the close up. It is therefore interesting to put these assumptions to the test. Although the difficulty of characterising shot size has been previously discussed, it is a relatively simple matter to produce a tally of various shot sizes as they are encountered. The following analysis is slightly more sophisticated in that it takes account of shot durations to produce a histogram of shot size by screen time. The results are shown in *table 10.4*.

In the episodes analysed, *Brookside* and *Coronation Street* consisted predominantly of medium shots, constituting 48 per cent and 57 per cent of screen time respectively. *EastEnders* and *Emmerdale* exhibited a more varied use of shot size. In particular, *EastEnders* made approximately equivalent use of medium close-ups, medium shots and medium long shots, each accounting for about 30 per cent of the time. The variation in shot size in *Emmerdale* was closer to that of *Brookside*, but with significantly greater use of big close-ups and very long shots at either end of the spectrum.

The difficulties involved in accurately characterising shot size mean that the discrimination between adjacent categories may be unreliable. It can be difficult in practice to distinguish the difference between a close-up and a medium close-up in a moving image in which the subject and possibly the viewpoint may be mobile. However, the differences detected between serials are sufficient to be significant. It is more difficult to attribute the reasons for these differences. In the case of *Brookside*, it may be that the single camera production techniques tend to result in greater use of the medium shot. The significantly high use of the medium shot in *Coronation Street* would appear to endorse the subjective view of some observers that it tends to use a limited range of shots in a very predictable way, although it is no less commercially successful for that. The equivalent use of a range of shot sizes in *EastEnders* might suggest a greater concern to vary the visual treatment. The increased use of big close-ups and very long shots on *Emmerdale* might be explained by its tendency to concentrate upon attractive women on the one hand and attractive settings on the other.



**Table 10.4**  
**Selected serials: shot size**  
 Frequency distribution of shot size by shot (percentage of screen time)



Episode		Shots <i>n</i>	Shot Size						
			BCU	CU	MCU	MS	MLS	LS	VLS
<b>Brookside</b>									
Mon	1 Oct	110	-	8.3%	12.1%	46.1%	23.4%	9.5%	0.7%
Wed	3 Oct	141	0.3%	13.3%	9.7%	60.2%	13.1%	3.0%	0.3%
Fri	5 Oct	138	0.6%	7.6%	20.7%	39.9%	22.7%	8.5%	-
		<b>389</b>	<b>0.3%</b>	<b>9.7%</b>	<b>14.2%</b>	<b>48.7%</b>	<b>19.7%</b>	<b>7.0%</b>	<b>0.3%</b>
<b>Coronation Street</b>									
Mon	1 Oct	118	0.5%	2.4%	17.0%	55.8%	24.3%	-	-
Wed	3 Oct	127	0.9%	5.3%	19.8%	61.3%	12.6%	-	-
Fri	5 Oct	146	3.5%	13.7%	24.9%	53.7%	3.8%	-	0.4%
		<b>391</b>	<b>1.7%</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>20.7%</b>	<b>57.0%</b>	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>0.1%</b>
<b>EastEnders</b>									
Tues	2 Oct	309	0.3%	1.9%	31.4%	31.0%	27.0%	7.1%	1.3%
Fri	4 Oct	297	0.4%	9.7%	23.9%	25.3%	37.8%	2.5%	0.5%
		<b>606</b>	<b>0.3%</b>	<b>5.8%</b>	<b>27.6%</b>	<b>28.1%</b>	<b>32.4%</b>	<b>4.8%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>
<b>Emmerdale</b>									
Tues	2 Oct	136	1.3%	8.7%	13.1%	28.4%	35.6%	12.1%	0.7%
Thurs	4 Oct	133	2.4%	3.5%	12.8%	49.5%	13.9%	8.7%	9.2%
		<b>269</b>	<b>1.8%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>39.1%</b>	<b>24.8%</b>	<b>10.4%</b>	<b>5.0%</b>



It is evident that the soap operas studied take place predominantly in medium shot. Close-up and medium close-up shots were less common among all four serials than most critics might lead one to believe, while the big close-up, in which a human head nearly fills the screen, was statistically exceptional. It may well be that the impression of television in general, and soap opera in particular, as a close-up medium, is exaggerated by psychological aspects of the viewing experience. The attention of the viewer is normally concentrated upon the faces of subjects and is commonly less conscious of the framing of the shot. True close-ups tend to be used for special emphasis at moments of dramatic interest and may therefore be more memorable as a result.

There were no particular patterns of shot size within the scene, other than might be explicable by the relative frequency of a particular shot size. Among the closer framings, from medium long shot to big close-up, which made up the majority of the shots, a shot of a given size was more likely to be followed by a shot of a similar size. Long shots and very long shots were more likely to be followed by closer shots and less likely to be followed by another long shot. This might be expected given the usual function of a wider view as an establishing or re-establishing shot.

Point of view shots, which provide a temporary identification with the viewpoint of a character, were comparatively rare. In the sample week, there were five examples in *Brookside*, which is shot entirely single camera. There were no instances in *Coronation Street*. This suggests that the psychology of watching a television soap opera may be different to that involved in viewing a film, where the voyeuristic involvement, as it is incorporated in the direction and editing, may be much greater.

In the sample week, *Brookside*, *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale* each included around 24 main characters, while *EastEnders* featured 19 regular characters, excluding small speaking parts, walk-ons and extras. Such an ensemble cast is necessitated by the requirements of continuous production. In each case, the most prominent character appeared in between 20 and 22 per cent of the output that week. However, although they appeared regularly from week to week, none of them could be described as a central 'tent-pole' character around whom the serial revolved.



### Characters in shot

Comparison among the four serials over the period of a week reveals a significant similarity in the number of characters appearing in shot. In each case approximately 40 per cent of the time was spent in two-shots, shots composed to include two characters, with approximately 30 per cent of the time spent in singles, shots featuring a single character. Groups of three were less common, accounting for around 15 to 20 per cent of the time. Larger groups were rare. The high figure for *Emmerdale* was skewed by an unusual episode in which a fifth of the shots included five or more characters, since it included the entire cast in an extended ensemble scene. However, *Emmerdale* still had an average of around 6.5 per cent of such shots that month. Shots in which no person appeared, for instance cutaways, point of view shots and close-ups of inanimate objects, were not unexpectedly quite rare, accounting for around 1 per cent of screen time. *Table 10.5* gives details of the number of characters appearing in shot.

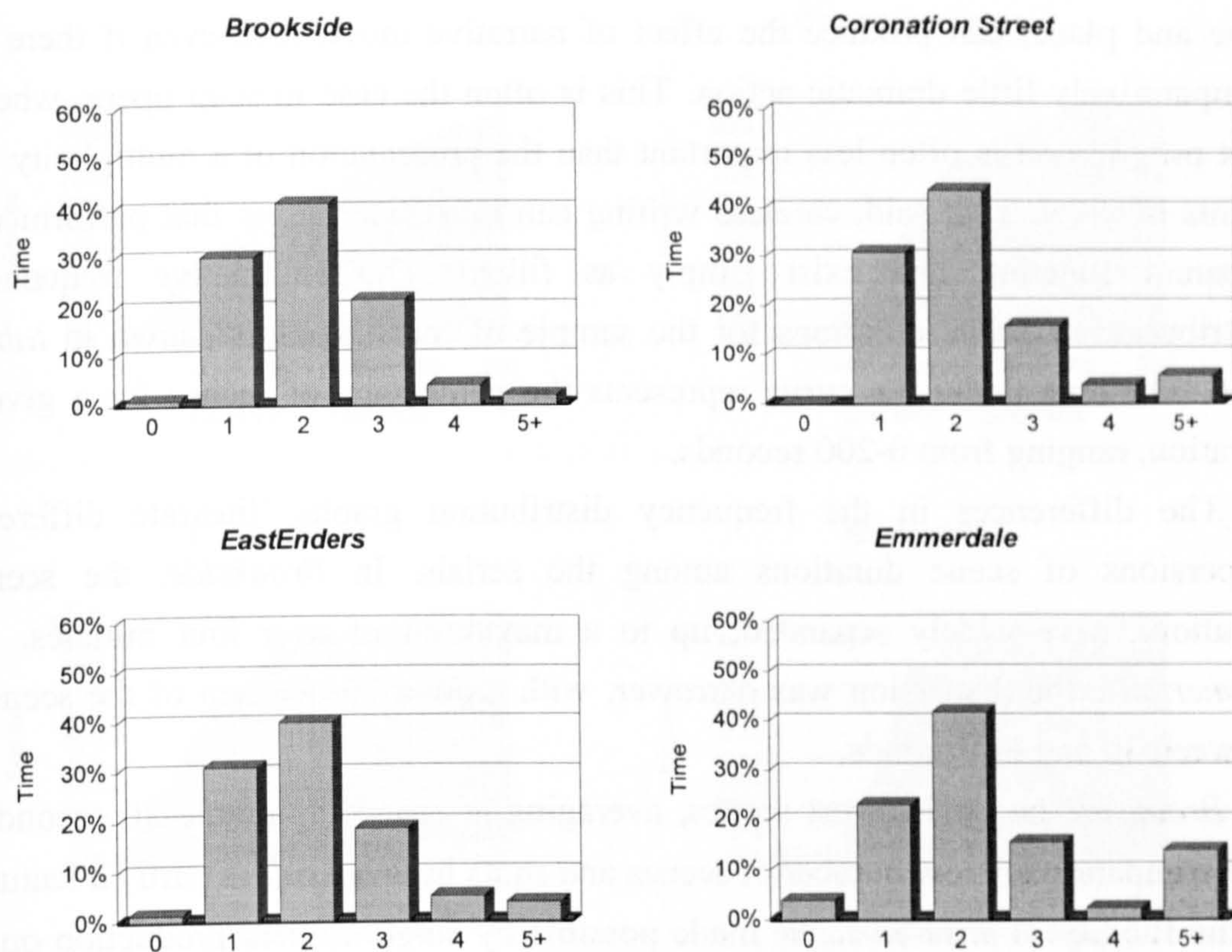
Again, although the durations of shots are calculated to the nearest frame, the accuracy of these figures is limited by the difficulty in characterising the number of people appearing in a shot. For the sake of simplicity, a shot in which two characters appeared was classified as a two-shot. Background extras were not included unless they formed a significant part of the composition. These figures are therefore only estimates, but nevertheless, the degree of agreement between serials suggests that there is some consistency in the manner in which they are shot.

The analysis confirms the subjective impression that soap opera is typically covered in two-shots. This is largely a function of the reliance of soap opera upon dialogue, typically between two speakers. A pattern of two-shots from alternate angles provides an economical, if rather uninventive, system of coverage. Two-shots allow the viewer to maintain a sense of orientation where repeated cutting back and forth between single shots might be distracting and disorienting. It has been said among editors that 'the best shot of all is a two-shot that works.'



**Table 10.5****Selected serials: characters in shot**

Frequency distribution of number of characters in shot (percentage of screen time)



Episode		Shots <i>n</i>	Number of Characters in Shot (% time)						
			0	1	2	3	4	5+	
<b>Brookside</b>									
Mon	1 Oct	110	1.5%	26.4%	37.7%	23.5%	6.9%	3.9%	
Wed	3 Oct	141	1.2%	32.2%	43.8%	17.2%	4.5%	1.2%	
Fri	5 Oct	138	0.2%	31.8%	42.2%	23.9%	0.9%	0.9%	
		<b>389</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>30.1%</b>	<b>41.2%</b>	<b>21.6%</b>	<b>4.1%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	
<b>Coronation Street</b>									
Mon	1 Oct	118	-	16.6%	42.1%	29.5%	5.2%	6.6%	
Wed	3 Oct	127	0.2%	28.0%	50.0%	14.5%	4.2%	3.2%	
Fri	5 Oct	146	-	47.1%	38.6%	4.8%	2.2%	7.4%	
		<b>391</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>30.9%</b>	<b>43.6%</b>	<b>16.0%</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>5.7%</b>	
<b>EastEnders</b>									
Tues	2 Oct	309	0.8%	35.2%	40.1%	17.8%	3.9%	2.2%	
Fri	4 Oct	297	1.9%	26.7%	39.9%	19.7%	6.2%	5.6%	
		<b>606</b>	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>30.9%</b>	<b>40.0%</b>	<b>18.7%</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>3.9%</b>	
<b>Emmerdale</b>									
Tues	2 Oct	136	1.7%	28.4%	46.8%	14.4%	0.4%	8.3%	
Thurs	4 Oct	133	5.9%	17.6%	36.7%	16.4%	4.2%	19.2%	
		<b>269</b>	<b>3.8%</b>	<b>23.0%</b>	<b>41.8%</b>	<b>15.4%</b>	<b>2.2%</b>	<b>13.8%</b>	



## Scenes

The number of scenes per episode gives a crude indication of narrative pace. Increasing the number of scenes, and hence the number of potential changes in time and place, can produce the effect of narrative movement, even if there is comparatively little dramatic action. This is often the case in soap opera, where plot progression is often less important than the presentation of a multiplicity of points of view. That said, careless writing can introduce scenes that perform no apparent function and exist simply as fillers. The cumulative frequency distribution of scene durations for the sample of four serials is shown in *table 10.6*. The area under the curve represents the percentage of scenes for a given duration, ranging from 0-200 seconds.

The differences in the frequency distribution graphs illustrate different dispersions of scene durations among the serials. In *Brookside*, the scene durations were widely separated, up to a maximum of over four minutes. In *Emmerdale*, the dispersion was narrower, with around 70 per cent of the scenes between 30 and 80 seconds.

*Brookside* had the fewest scenes, averaging at around 1 minute 30 seconds. The comparatively low number of scenes and shots in *Brookside* is partly a feature of the fluidity of *mise-en-scène* made possible by single camera production on a permanent set. It is also partly due to the limited number of settings available and the apparent reluctance of the serial to leave the confines of Brookside Close at that time.

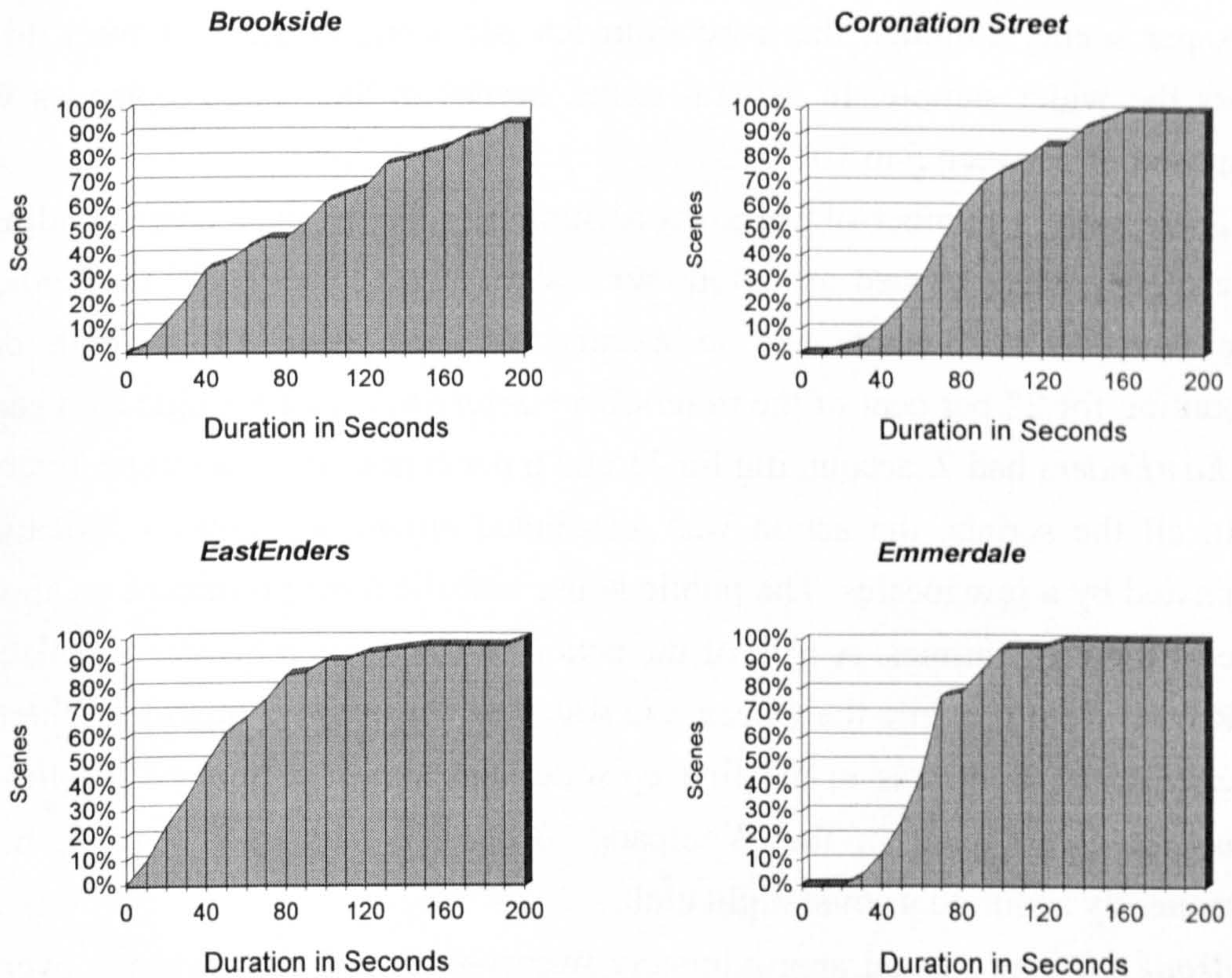
*Coronation Street* had more scenes, averaging at 1 minute 16 seconds. *Emmerdale*, with scenes averaging at just over a minute, appeared to be significantly faster moving than *Brookside* or *Coronation Street* in the number of scenes, but had a similar number of shots. *EastEnders* had the highest number of scenes, averaging 49 seconds and was the fastest moving of the serials in this respect.

The shortest scene encountered was in *EastEnders*, during a dramatic fire sequence. At just 3.72 seconds, this functioned as a cutaway to the scene of the fire. The longest scene, lasting 4 minutes and 9 seconds was in *Brookside*, with a 49 shot scene in the Corkhills' Living Room.



**Table 10.6****Selected serials: scene durations**

Cumulative frequency distribution of scene durations in seconds (percentage of scenes)



Episode		Duration	Scenes	Shots/	Scene Duration (seconds)			
Week 40, 1990		h:mm:ss	<i>n</i>	Scenes	Std Dev	Min	Max	Mean
<b>Brookside</b>								
Mon	1 Oct	0:22:26	17	6.47	59.88	8.12	182.04	79.17
Wed	3 Oct	0:22:33	13	10.85	73.17	18.04	249.40	104.04
Fri	5 Oct	0:22:43	15	9.20	65.14	10.44	215.92	90.89
		<b>1:07:42</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>8.64</b>	<b>64.95</b>	<b>8.12</b>	<b>249.40</b>	<b>90.26</b>
<b>Coronation Street</b>								
Mon	1 Oct	0:21:41	21	5.62	20.57	13.04	98.36	61.93
Wed	3 Oct	0:22:57	19	6.68	28.61	28.92	130.96	72.49
Fri	5 Oct	0:23:05	13	11.23	37.10	56.88	152.32	106.54
		<b>1:07:43</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>7.38</b>	<b>32.88</b>	<b>13.04</b>	<b>152.32</b>	<b>76.66</b>
<b>EastEnders</b>								
Tues	2 Oct	0:26:58	30	10.30	39.21	6.88	197.52	53.95
Fri	4 Oct	0:27:24	36	8.25	38.19	3.72	149.76	45.68
		<b>0:54:23</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>9.18</b>	<b>38.58</b>	<b>3.72</b>	<b>197.52</b>	<b>49.44</b>
<b>Emmerdale</b>								
Tues	2 Oct	0:23:08	23	5.91	22.78	27.00	126.88	60.35
Thurs	4 Oct	0:23:07	22	6.05	19.26	24.92	99.16	63.04
		<b>0:46:15</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>5.98</b>	<b>20.93</b>	<b>24.92</b>	<b>126.88</b>	<b>61.66</b>



A scene in *EastEnders* had the highest number of shots, including 51 shots during a long dialogue scene in the Queen Vic Bar which lasted 3 minutes 17 seconds. *EastEnders* had the highest ratio of shots to scenes, with a cutting rate almost twice that of the other serials. *Emmerdale* exhibited a lower number of shots per scene, although this rose from 5.8 per scene in the first week to 8.3 across the wider sample. In general terms, scenes in the sample episodes were composed of between 5 to 10 shots.

There were a number of scenes consisting of a single shot, corresponding to the category Metz termed an autonomous shot. Across the week, in *Brookside* there were 19 such shots and in *Emmerdale* there were 12, in both cases accounting for 22 per cent of the time. *Coronation Street* had 9 single shot scenes and *EastEnders* had 7, accounting for 11 and 6 per cent of the time respectively.

In all the serials, the action was distributed among a number of locations, dominated by a few locales. The public house was the most prominent location in three of the programmes. A fifth of the action in *Coronation Street* took place in the Rovers Return, while the Queen Vic was seen for nearly a quarter of the time in *EastEnders*, as it was in the first episode, and almost a third of the time in *Emmerdale* was spent in the Woolpack. *Brookside* was then teetotal, but it subsequently acquired a small night club.

*Brookside* represented approximately twenty-three different settings over the course of a week, compared to twenty-six in *Coronation Street* and twenty-nine in *EastEnders*. *Emmerdale* presented only nineteen different settings. In each serial, many of the settings were seen on more than one occasion and in many cases were closely related to other settings, for instance as different parts of the same household.



## Studio scenes

The demands of producing a continuous serial require a streamlined system of production. A television studio can provide an efficient and relatively economic production environment for shooting interior scenes, while a permanent studio lot can offer similar economies of scale for exteriors. Location shooting can provide authenticity, but is comparatively expensive.

*Brookside* is unique in that it is shot almost entirely on the purpose-built permanent set, with the remainder shot at real locations. *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* both employ a studio lot featuring the façades of the main habitual locations. *Emmerdale* does not have an exterior set as such, instead using real locations for all exteriors. *Table 10.7* shows the proportion of each programme shot in the studio environment.

Of the three serials which employed studio-style production, this accounted for approximately sixty to seventy per cent of output over a week. The use of the studio was quite consistent between episodes, particularly in the case of *EastEnders*.

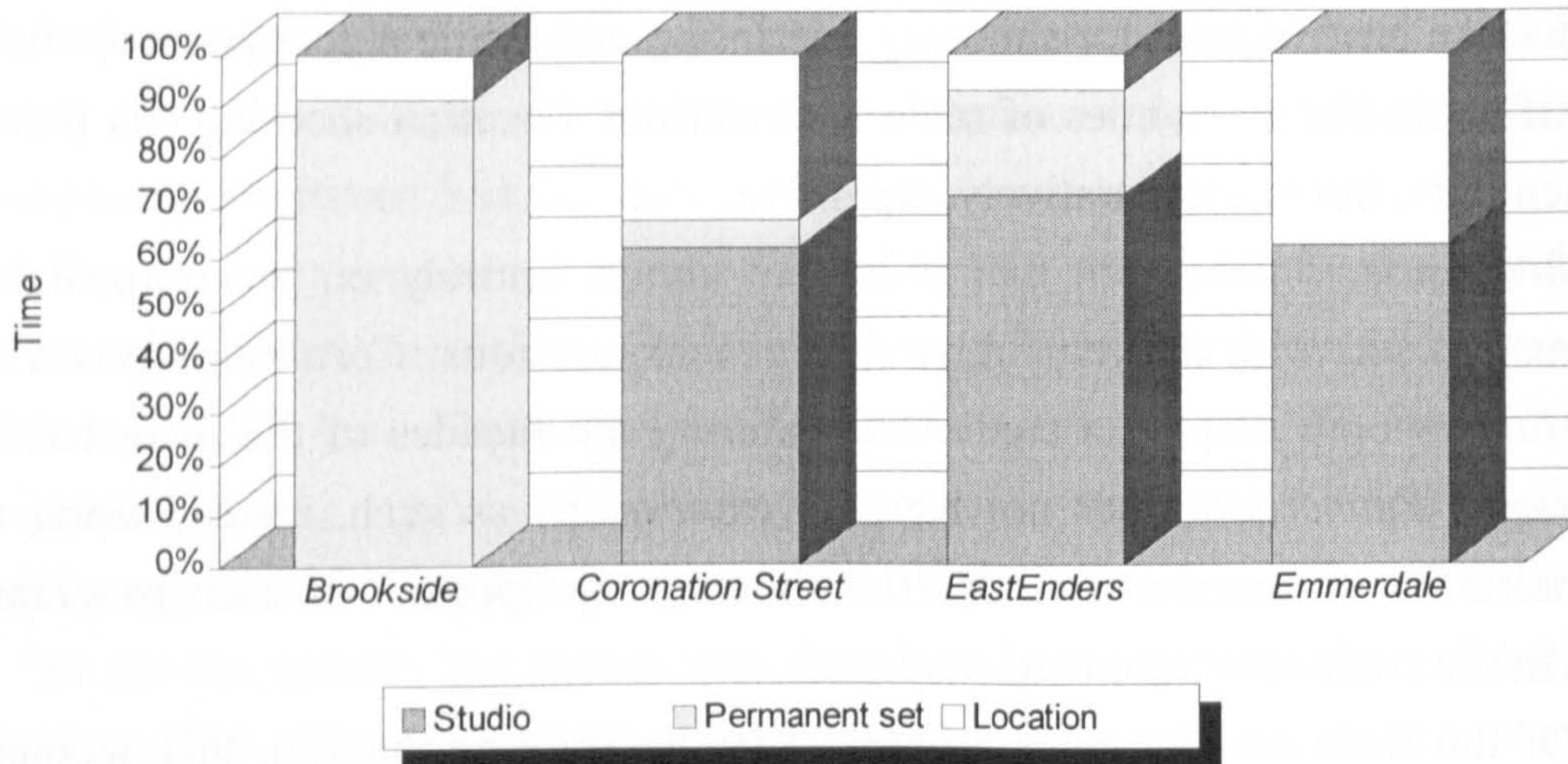
*Brookside*'s permanent set of real houses accounted for around 90 per cent of each episode. The number of settings was later increased by the addition of a second site featuring a parade of shops. *Coronation Street* appeared to take little advantage of the street itself, which forms its permanent exterior set. In contrast, the use of the *EastEnders* permanent set formed a higher proportion of its output.

*Emmerdale* can justifiably claim to have the highest proportion of location shooting, providing just under 40 per cent of output. However, in the sample episodes, *Coronation Street* was not far behind, with a relatively high proportion of location shooting partly accounted for by the time spent at a factory location featured in the storyline.

The reliance upon studio interior sets and permanent production lots necessarily restricts the repertoire of available locations in which the action can be presented. The design of these settings, and the logistics of camera placement may further limit the number of different viewpoints that are available. As a result, many of the spaces seen may be very familiar to viewers. This level of recognition implies that in many cases a scene requires little visual introduction.



**Table 10.7**  
**Selected serials: studio scenes**  
 Proportion of studio scenes (percentage of screen time)



Episode	Episode	Studio Scenes								
		Duration	Duration	Scenes	Shots/	Scene Duration (seconds)				
Week 40, 1990		h:mm:ss	h:mm:ss	% time	n	Scenes	Std Dev	Min	Max	Mean
<b>Brookside</b>										
Mon	1 Oct	0:22:26								
Wed	3 Oct	0:22:33								
Fri	5 Oct	0:22:43								
		<b>1:07:42</b>								
<b>Coronation Street</b>										
Mon	1 Oct	0:21:41	0:14:08	65.3%	14	5.86	24.01	12.04	98.36	60.62
Wed	3 Oct	0:22:57	0:13:11	57.4%	10	7.60	29.45	39.36	130.96	79.09
Fri	5 Oct	0:23:05	0:14:50	64.3%	8	12.25	38.63	56.88	153.32	111.27
		<b>1:07:43</b>	<b>0:42:09</b>	<b>62.3%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>8.00</b>	<b>35.40</b>	<b>12.04</b>	<b>152.32</b>	<b>79.02</b>
<b>EastEnders</b>										
Tues	2 Oct	0:26:58	0:19:37	72.7%	18	13.50	44.60	6.88	197.52	65.41
Fri	4 Oct	0:27:24	0:19:38	71.6%	20	12.00	45.36	5.52	149.76	58.90
		<b>0:54:23</b>	<b>0:39:15</b>	<b>72.1%</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>12.71</b>	<b>44.51</b>	<b>5.52</b>	<b>197.52</b>	<b>61.98</b>
<b>Emmerdale</b>										
Tues	2 Oct	0:23:08	0:16:19	70.5%	16	5.38	25.95	33.24	126.88	61.21
Thurs	4 Oct	0:23:07	0:12:33	54.3%	12	7.92	19.42	31.56	96.20	62.72
		<b>0:46:15</b>	<b>0:28:51</b>	<b>62.4%</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>6.46</b>	<b>23.01</b>	<b>31.56</b>	<b>126.88</b>	<b>61.82</b>



## Exteriors

While the distinction between studio and location scenes is one of production practice, the difference between interior and exterior shots is more immediately apparent to the viewer. The fact that a studio interior or a permanent set is fake is intended to be invisible to the audience. It is part of the illusion. However, the difference between the inside and outside of a building is a defining property in the empirical world. It may therefore have narrative importance. A direct cut between an interior and an exterior, with no continuity of action or soundtrack, can provide a very strong visual cue for a change of scene, and therefore the possibility of a change of time or place. Conversely, if direct narrative continuity between an interior and an exterior scene is intended, the movement through a doorway or the view through a window is often shown to link the two.

Exteriors can be particularly important in establishing a sense of location and orientation. They can also establish authenticity and credibility. An exterior is probably harder to fake than an interior. The distinction between interiors and exteriors has also always been one of industrial importance, since they may be shot separately. *Table 10.8* shows the proportion of each programme featuring exterior scenes.

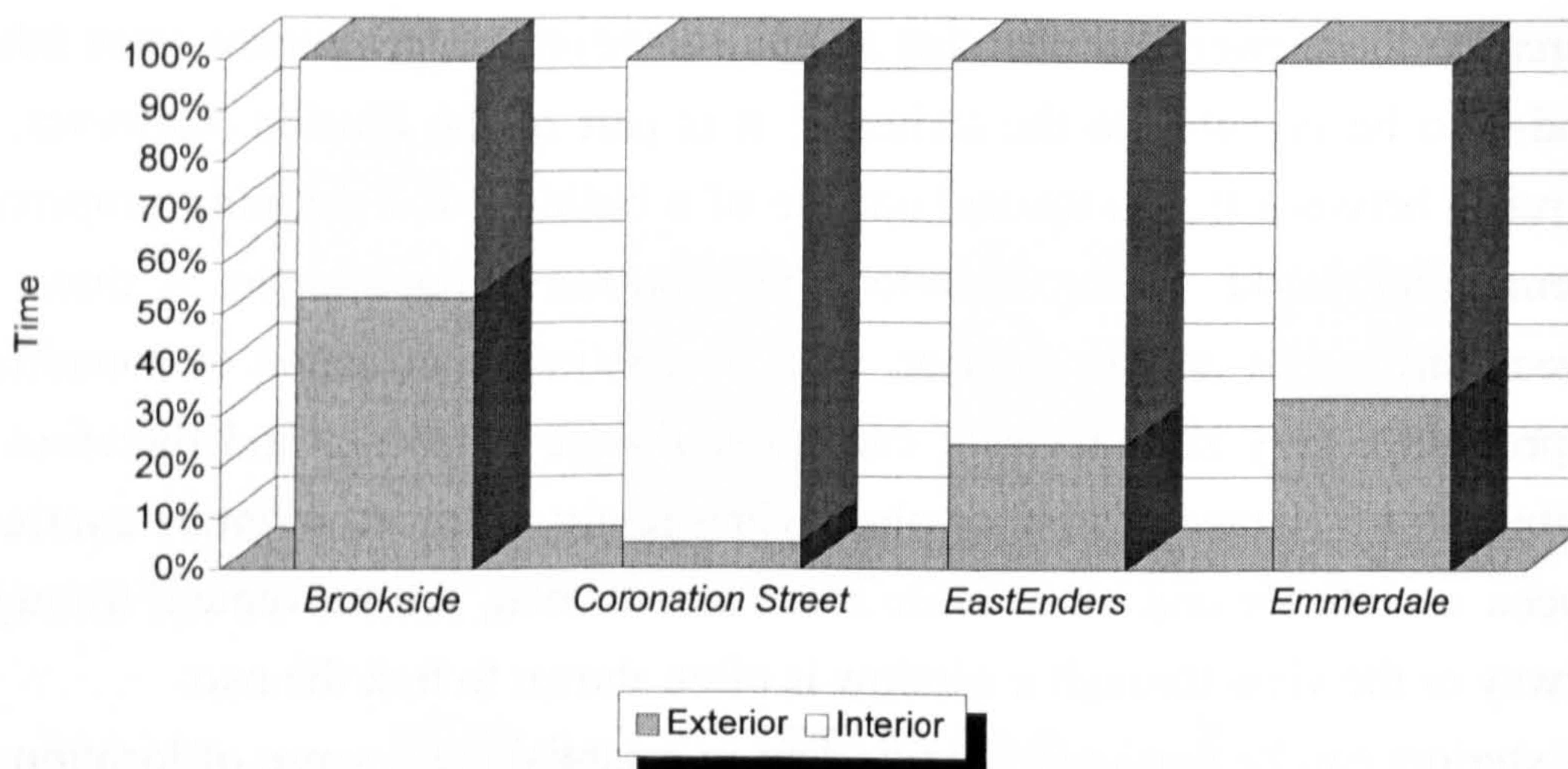
*Brookside's* production context enabled a high proportion of exteriors to be included while employing the production efficiency of a permanent set. Despite the availability of a studio lot of street exteriors, *Coronation Street* predominantly featured interior settings, while in comparison, *EastEnders* made substantially greater use of exteriors. *Emmerdale*, despite being a rural serial, was still substantially set indoors.

Although in production, interior and exterior scenes may be shot entirely separately, out of sequence, the narrative may require interaction between the two. The manner in which they are integrated on screen may have implications for the impression of a coherent credible environment.

*Brookside* afforded approximately equal prominence to interiors and exteriors, which were well integrated, since the interiors and exteriors of the houses on the Close form one continuous real space, allowing fluid movement between inside and outside. The use of real houses allowed shots through doors and windows to provide continuity between interior and exterior scenes. As a result, the continuity of space was emphasised, considerably enhancing the impression of a realistic diegetic world.



**Table 10.8**  
**Selected serials: exterior scenes**  
 Proportion of exterior scenes (percentage of screen time)



Episode	Episode	Exterior Scenes								
		Duration	Duration	% time	Scenes	Shots/ Scenes	Scene Duration (seconds)			
Week 40, 1990		h:mm:ss	h:mm:ss		n	Std Dev	Min	Max	Mean	
<b>Brookside</b>										
Mon	1 Oct	0:22:26	0:09:58	44.4%	7	5.71	59.56	15.72	182.04	85.44
Wed	3 Oct	0:22:33	0:10:30	46.6%	6	12.50	69.56	32.16	221.32	105.02
Fri	5 Oct	0:22:43	0:15:48	69.5%	10	9.20	67.23	18.28	215.92	94.78
		<b>1:07:42</b>	<b>0:36:16</b>	<b>53.5%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>9.00</b>	<b>63.03</b>	<b>15.72</b>	<b>221.32</b>	<b>94.61</b>
<b>Coronation Street</b>										
Mon	1 Oct	0:21:41	0:01:49	8.4%	2	7.00	6.76	49.92	59.48	54.70
Wed	3 Oct	0:22:57	0:01:45	7.6%	2	4.50	12.16	43.76	60.96	52.36
Fri	5 Oct	0:23:05	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		<b>1:07:43</b>	<b>0:03:34</b>	<b>5.3%</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>8.15</b>	<b>43.76</b>	<b>60.96</b>	<b>53.53</b>
<b>EastEnders</b>										
Tues	2 Oct	0:26:58	0:07:02	26.1%	11	5.91	21.27	10.08	76.32	38.36
Fri	4 Oct	0:27:24	0:06:20	23.1%	14	3.29	14.45	3.72	46.16	27.11
		<b>0:54:23</b>	<b>0:13:20</b>	<b>24.6%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>4.44</b>	<b>18.18</b>	<b>3.72</b>	<b>76.32</b>	<b>32.02</b>
<b>Emmerdale</b>										
Tues	2 Oct	0:23:08	0:05:47	25.0%	6	7.00	15.88	27.00	68.88	57.85
Thurs	4 Oct	0:23:07	0:09:48	42.4%	9	4.11	20.35	24.92	99.16	65.31
		<b>0:46:15</b>	<b>0:15:35</b>	<b>33.7%</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5.27</b>	<b>18.47</b>	<b>24.92</b>	<b>99.16</b>	<b>62.32</b>



*Coronation Street* twice employed an exterior establishing shot at the head of a location interior scene. Such shots were considered to be included within the following scene. In one case, a 10 second shot at the front door of a location house was followed by further dialogue in the interior. In another location sequence, a 6 second mute exterior establishing shot on the high street panned along on a group of three schoolchildren entering an amusement arcade. This 6 second shot was the only exterior material in that episode. At less than 6 per cent, *Coronation Street* generally exhibited the lowest level of exterior screen time among the four serials.

In the case of *EastEnders*, it appeared that particular care was taken to give the impression that the interior and exterior spaces were continuous, by stitching them together into a single diegetic space. This was achieved in post-production by taking brief reverse-angle shots through door apertures on the studio lot and editing them into studio sequences. Where a single shot was intruded in this way it was considered to be included within the surrounding scene since this could only be interpreted as being spatially and temporally continuous. Although very brief, being between 1 and 2 seconds in duration, such shots contributed considerably to the impression of realism. This treatment of combined interior and exterior scenes appeared to be unique to *EastEnders* and is an example of the relatively high production values of the programme.

On *Emmerdale*, poor spatial continuity between the real locations employed and their corresponding studio interiors meant that the two were rarely juxtaposed. An exception was in the case of more recently added settings shot entirely on location. For instance, the glass-fronted foyer of the haulage company was used to present action that moved from the forecourt exterior to the reception interior.

The handling of temporal and spatial relationships between scenes in soap opera is characteristically abrupt, although scenes may be closely related in time and place. The overall time frame of an episode is generally constrained by the frequency with which episodes are transmitted and is typically confined to a single day. The spatial sphere is also generally restricted to a particular neighbourhood. As a result, any change of scene is likely to be relatively local. Unlike a feature film, where the cuts between scenes may involve travelling considerable distances in time and space, a new scene in soap opera is more likely to be to another room in elsewhere in the neighbourhood. Since that space is likely to be familiar already, very little formal introduction is necessary.



## Comparisons

There were more similarities than differences between the serials in the contemporary sample. *Coronation Street*, *Emmerdale* and *Brookside* each averaged around 130 shots with an average duration of approximately 10 seconds. *EastEnders* had a significantly higher shot rate with over 300 per episode, averaging around 5 seconds, significantly shorter than for the first episode. Medium shots were most common, apart from in *EastEnders*, which had a wider range of shots, while two-shots predominated throughout.

There were also certain consistencies between the first episodes and their contemporary counterparts. One episode of *Coronation Street* had 146 shots in 13 scenes, very similar to the first episode thirty years previously which had 148 shots and 13 scenes. It is significant that unlike all the other episodes studied, the first edition of *Coronation Street* was transmitted live, a factor that imposed considerable constraints on its presentation. The number of different scenes and shots was limited to large extent by the number of sets and cameras available in the studio. However, the structure of most contemporary episodes could also have been accommodated to live production if required, since they did not generally include characters appearing in adjacent scenes at different times or places. In contrast, the opening episodes of *Emmerdale* and *Brookside* were both more filmic in their construction. This was evidenced in their use of point of view shots and the compression of time within sequences. In the intervening years, however, these formal features appear to have disappeared, although *Brookside*, being shot entirely single camera, may still make some use of point of view shots.

While the initial episodes introduced around half a dozen main settings, the more recent ones generally featured a wider variety of previously established locations, in many cases including those introduced at the beginning. The physical world of the serial is rather restricted by the size of the set, leading to some ironic and presumably unintentional parallels. The arrival of the Collins family with their removal van in episode one of *Brookside* was echoed in the arrival of the Dixons in one of the sample episodes. The arrival of the ambulance in episode one of *EastEnders* was paralleled by the arrival of fire engines at the same house in one of the sample episodes. Such similarities are of course co-incidental and perhaps inevitable, given that a comparatively limited routine of activity is endlessly repeated with variation within each serial. However they do suggest



how powerful ironic meanings can be derived by viewers that are familiar with the complex backstory of a serial.

The particular realistic aesthetic of the British serial is partly cultural and institutional, but it is also strongly influenced by the practical constraints associated with continuous production. Its apparent realism is in fact highly conventional. The way in which a serial is produced has considerable implications for its form. This form also plays a significant part in the way in which the programme generates meaning.

Given the small sample size, small differences between serials may not be particularly conclusive, and in the absence of other control data, it may be unwise to ascribe similarities to generic factors, although these would appear to be present. To examine the possible degree of variation within a serial, one of the programmes was selected for study over a longer period.



## Emmerdale

The selection of the extended sample period of one calendar month was arbitrary. While accepting the impossibility of extracting representative examples from a potentially open set of episodes, the sampling window adopted was considered sufficiently wide to be representative of the particular programme and allowed the episodes to be set in a limited narrative context. The nine episodes studied included two full production blocks of four episodes. The inclusion of these two production blocks, here designated A and B, enabled an examination of the influence of directorial style. *Table 10.9* gives details of the episodes studied, which included the eighteenth anniversary and the fifteen-hundredth edition of *Emmerdale*.

**Table 10.9**  
**Emmerdale: episodes analysed**

Episode		Writer		Director
October 1990				
<i>Emmerdale</i>		ITV	7.00pm	
Tues	2 Oct	(1493)	Barrie Shore	Derek Bennett
Thurs	4 Oct	Block A (1494)	Rob Gittins	Catherine Morshead
Tues	9 Oct	" (1495)	Rob Gittins	"
Thurs	11 Oct	" (1496)	David Lane	"
Tues	16 Oct	" (1497)	David Lane	"
Thurs	18 Oct	Block B (1498)	Jimmie Chinn	Cavan Greenwood
Tues	23 Oct	" (1499)	"	"
Thurs	25 Oct	" (1500)	David Joss Buckley	"
Tues	30 Oct	" (1501)	"	"



## Shots

The extended sample of *Emmerdale* episodes over one month contained a total of 1764 shots. *Table 10.10* gives details of the cumulative frequency distribution of shot durations for the two production blocks.

There was an average of 196 shots per episode of *Emmerdale*, giving a mean shot length of around 7 seconds, significantly shorter than that for the first two episodes alone. This average figure was very similar to that for the first episode of *Emmerdale*, twenty years previously. The variation between episodes within the sample was apparently attributable to directorial influence. The episodes by the director of block A had an average of 163 shots with a mean duration of 8.48 seconds, while those in block B averaged at 236 shots with a mean of 5.89 seconds. The two distribution histograms clearly show that block A had a significantly higher number of shots longer than 20 seconds in comparison to block B, which had slightly more shots in the range of 2-3 seconds in duration. These differences are evident in the standard deviation of shot durations. In the first block the standard deviation was around 12, while in the second block the standard deviation was around 5.5. That is to say that with the significantly higher number of shots in the second block of episodes, shot durations tended more towards the mean. The second block included the eighteenth anniversary and 1500th episodes, but these did not differ markedly with respect to shot lengths from the other episodes by the same director.

Both blocks exhibited the characteristic curve corresponding approximately to a lognormal distribution of shot durations. The mean average shot duration of 7.2 seconds across the sample episodes was skewed by a relatively high proportion of shorter shots, with a peak at around 2 to 3 seconds. Of a total of 1764 shots, only 105 were over 20 seconds in duration, although these constituted over 31 per cent of screen time. There were only 9 shots over one minute, the longest running 1 minute 28 seconds, seven of which were complete scenes, and six of which were on location.

The highest number of shots in a single scene occurred in the court trial episode, during the cross-examination by the defence and prosecution counsel in an extended scene of 2 minutes 38 seconds comprising of 27 shots.

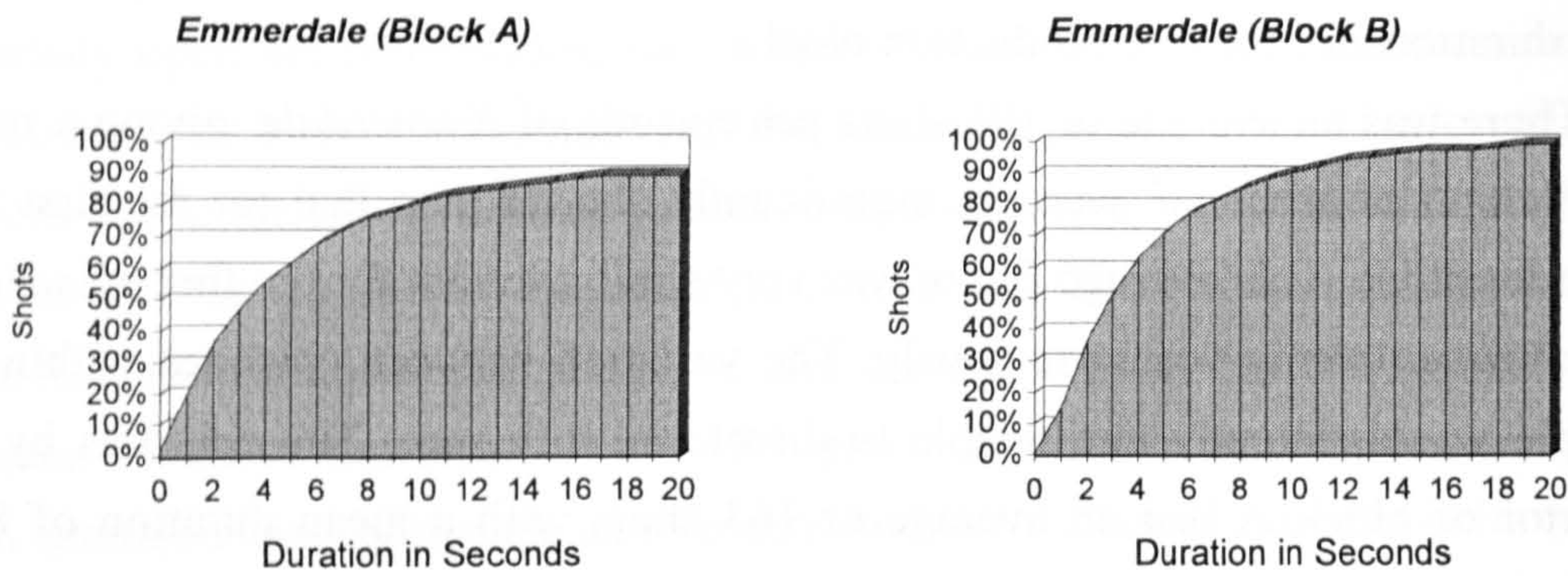
The shortest shot encountered in *Emmerdale* was 12 frames or just under half a second in duration. This was the opening shot in a studio scene and showed a newspaper being slammed down on the kitchen table.



**Table 10.10**

**Emmerdale: shot durations**

Cumulative frequency distribution of shot durations in seconds (percentage of shots)



Episode	Duration h:mm:ss	Shots <i>n</i>	Shot Duration (seconds)			
			Std Dev	Min	Max	Mean
<b>Emmerdale</b>						
Tues 2 Oct	0:23:08	136	12.44	0.88	64.80	10.21
Thurs 4 Oct	0:23:07	133	15.77	0.96	88.76	10.43
Tues 9 Oct	0:22:41	182	10.34	0.76	62.24	7.48
Thurs 11 Oct	0:23:14	168	11.50	0.68	82.68	8.30
Tues 16 Oct	0:23:00	172	10.14	0.48	61.96	8.02
<b>Block A</b>	<b>1:32:01</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>11.90</b>	<b>0.48</b>	<b>88.76</b>	<b>8.43</b>
Thurs 18 Oct	0:23:31	245	5.79	1.04	41.08	5.76
Tues 23 Oct	0:23:25	247	4.91	1.16	39.04	5.69
Thurs 25 Oct	0:22:39	261	4.67	0.80	30.16	5.21
Tues 30 Oct	0:23:14	220	6.86	0.92	56.28	6.34
<b>Block B</b>	<b>1:32:49</b>	<b>973</b>	<b>5.58</b>	<b>0.80</b>	<b>56.28</b>	<b>5.72</b>
	<b>3:27:58</b>	<b>1764</b>	<b>9.17</b>	<b>0.48</b>	<b>88.76</b>	<b>7.07</b>



## Shot size

With respect to shot framing, there was a distinct difference in the use of the medium shot between the two production blocks sampled. The director of the four episodes in block A used medium shots for nearly 60 per cent of the time, while medium shots comprised just over 40 per cent of the episodes in block B. *Table 10.11* gives a breakdown of shot sizes used in the two blocks. Although the use of the medium shot appeared to vary to a significant extent between the two directors, it is clear that the medium shot was the predominant framing across the sample.

One shot construction worthy of note was the use of a particular point of view shot motif. On four occasions in two episodes of block A, the simulated view through a single lens reflex camera was presented, complete with aperture and shutter speed settings, together with a series of freeze frames accompanied by the sound of a motor drive. This effect was used to portray an invasion of privacy by the popular press, which formed part of the central storyline. In a later episode in block B, a similar technique was used when one character posed for a portrait photograph, although on this occasion the viewfinder framing was not employed. This use of a camera metaphor, occasionally also employed in feature films, and rarely corresponding accurately to actual visual perception, is comparable to the earliest uses of point of view structures in primitive cinema, where vignettes were used to suggest keyholes and telescopes.

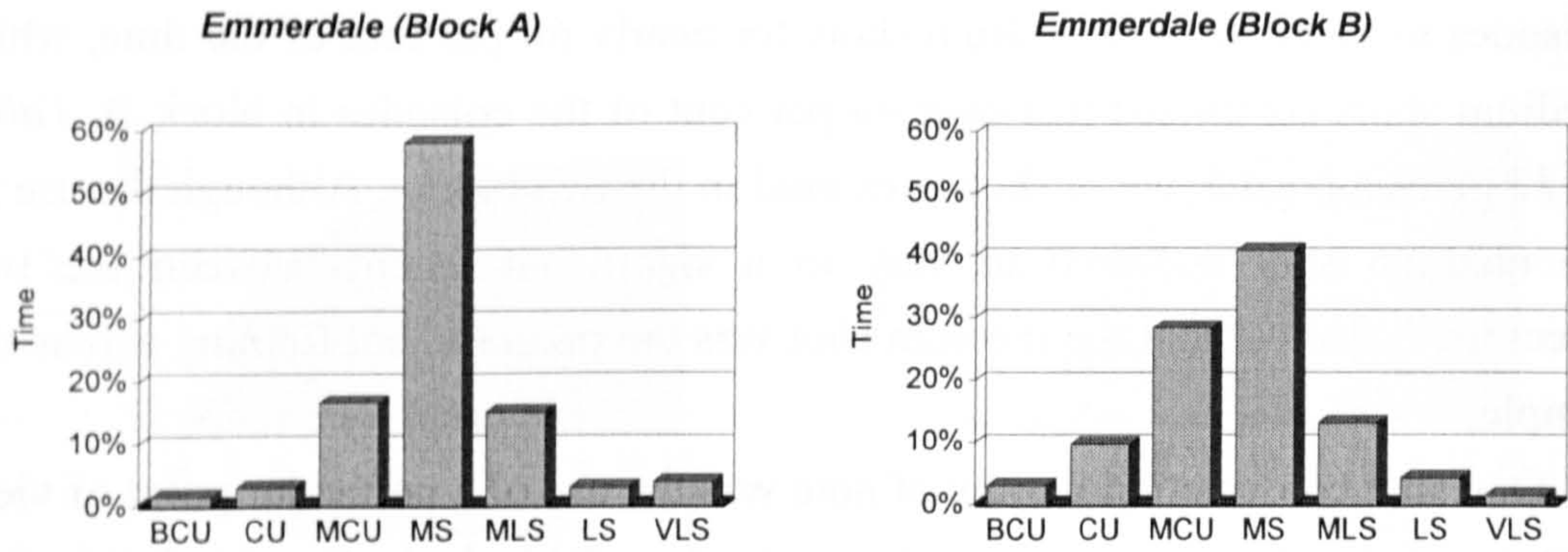
Other instances of point of view shots appear to be relatively rare in soap opera, since they involve the viewer participating in the viewpoint of a particular character. More often associated with the classic cinema feature film, this level of subjective identification is inconsistent with the ensemble cast and the apparently omnipresent objective narrative presentation. It may also be observed that true optical point of view shots from the actual position of a character are perhaps less common in television production because they are incompatible with multi-camera techniques. The introduction of single camera production and videotape post-production does not appear to have substantially changed the shot construction of the British continuing drama serial.



**Table 10.11**

**Emmerdale: shot size**

Frequency distribution of shot size by shot (percentage of screen time)



Episode		Shots <i>n</i>	Shot Size (% time)						
			BCU	CU	MCU	MS	MLS	LS	VLS
<b>Emmerdale</b>									
Tues	2 Oct	136	1.3%	8.7%	13.1%	28.4%	35.6%	12.1%	0.7%
Thurs	4 Oct	133	2.4%	3.5%	12.8%	49.5%	13.9%	8.7%	9.2%
Tues	9 Oct	182	-	0.5%	17.1%	69.4%	12.1%	0.9%	-
Thurs	11 Oct	168	1.2%	3.0%	14.3%	51.0%	25.0%	1.2%	1.2%
Tues	16 Oct	172	0.8%	4.1%	21.9%	63.6%	8.4%	0.5%	0.7%
<b>Block A</b>		<b>655</b>	<b>1.5%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>16.5%</b>	<b>58.4%</b>	<b>14.9%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>3.7%</b>
Thurs	18 Oct	245	1.5%	5.4%	31.1%	44.1%	14.0%	2.9%	1.0%
Tues	23 Oct	247	0.5%	11.0%	35.5%	31.3%	12.7%	8.8%	0.2%
Thurs	25 Oct	261	1.7%	11.7%	24.4%	43.1%	13.1%	2.8%	3.3%
Tues	30 Oct	220	8.4%	10.7%	21.8%	44.6%	12.2%	2.2%	-
<b>Block B</b>		<b>937</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>9.7%</b>	<b>28.2%</b>	<b>40.8%</b>	<b>13.0%</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>
		<b>1764</b>	<b>2.0%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>	<b>21.4%</b>	<b>47.2%</b>	<b>16.4%</b>	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>2.1%</b>



## Cutting sequences

Within each scene, a comparison was made between the size of a shot and the size of the following shot. The final shot in a scene and scenes consisting of a single shot were excluded. By and large, the probability of one shot being followed by a shot of approximately the same size varied according to the frequency with which that shot size occurred. From mid-shot to big close-up, a shot was most likely to be followed by a shot of similar size. However, among the wider shots, a shot was most likely to be followed by a slightly closer shot. This is indicative of the establishing function of wider shots. Extreme changes in shot size were rare. There were no instances of a big close-up being followed by a long shot or a very long shot, or of any long shot being followed by a big close-up. Within a scene, any such dramatic change of scale might appear visually disturbing. However, such cuts may provide cues to a change of place at scene boundaries. *Table 10.12* gives a cross-tabulation of shot size by the size of following shot for *Emmerdale* over the period of a month.

**Table 10.12**

***Emmerdale*: shot size of following shot**

Cross-tabulation of shot size by size of following shot within scenes  
(number of shots per category, excluding single shot scenes)

Shot Size	Shots <i>n</i>	Size of Following Shot						
		BCU	CU	MCU	MS	MLS	LS	VLS
October 1990								
<i>Emmerdale</i>								
BCU	60	24	8	11	10	7		
CU	197	16	78	41	44	14	3	1
MCU	608	14	51	344	143	36	16	4
MS	653	8	48	173	341	57	15	11
MLS	160		12	30	77	31	6	4
LS	45		1	13	20	9	2	
VLS	24			3	17	2	1	1

An examination of sequences of shots within scenes suggests that the camerawork tends to be quite predictable. This is not in itself a criticism, since it is generally true of soap opera and may even form part of its appeal. It stems in part from the pressures of production and in part from the need to conform to a consistent style of direction. Studio style multi-camera operation tends to be more routine than single-camera location production.

On average, a studio scene consists of less than ten shots, in many cases taken from a very limited number of viewpoints. Multi-camera production typically



involves three cameras, although exceptionally more may be employed. This places a practical limit on the number of available viewpoints that may be presented within a single take. Part of the art of studio direction, it would appear, is to attempt to present the most visually varied range of viewpoints using the limited resources available. However, the time taken for one camera to re-position or re-frame must be filled by the coverage of the other cameras. As a result, it is typical to find sequences of alternating matched shots, with occasional cuts to an alternative viewpoint, either for emphasis or for variation. Cutting is invariably motivated by dialogue, generally tending to show the speaker, although occasionally cutting away for a reaction.

At its simplest, a stereotypical cutting sequence might run '1,2,3,2,3,2,3,2,1'. An establishing shot is generally provided early in the scene, normally as the first shot. This is frequently followed by an alternating sequence of shot and counter-shot, within which there may be some variation in framing, typically moving in through a routine of medium long shots, mid-shots, and medium close ups. In many cases a scene ends on one or more mute reaction shots, typically in medium close-up. This basic routine is subject to innumerable variations.

Such shot structures tend to be predictable in the sense that in viewing it possible to make a reasonable guess at the next shot, based upon those that have gone before. Given the sequence '1,2,1,2', the next shot must be either '1' or '3'. It is always the case that the next shot must be either a return to a previous view, possibly modified in some way, or the presentation of a new viewpoint. In either case, some viewing satisfaction may be derived from anticipating the result. This would quickly become tiresome if it were always possible to be correct. Thus minor modifications in the visual rhythm, such as cutting against dialogue to show a reaction, can be effective.

Such stereotypical shot structures form a part of the accepted visual rhetoric of television soap opera, largely inherited from an era before videotape post-production. A high proportion of all the studio scenes studied conformed to some degree to these conventions. In some cases, the blocking, or choreography, of the action, combined with limited camera movement successfully disguises the comparatively static nature of many of the scenes. The single-camera location scenes exhibited slightly more visual variety. Some episodes were notable for the inclusion of a stylistic 'beauty shot', perhaps involving the use of camera track or a crane arm, which briefly asserted more filmic production values.



### Characters in shot

*Table 10.13* gives details of the number of characters appearing in shot across the two production blocks of *Emmerdale*. It may be seen that while block B contains a slightly higher proportion of shots of only one character than block A, there is a consistent distribution of shots, with the highest proportion of shots being two-shots. This was found to be the case across all the episodes of the serials sampled. It would appear that this form of soap opera is substantially covered in medium shots and two-shots.

Over the course of one month, around forty characters appeared, excluding walk-ons and extras. Within any particular episode, there were around twenty characters. Only Joe and Amos appeared in all nine episodes, but nineteen characters appeared in more than six episodes. The main character tended to vary from week to week. The average number of characters appearing in each scene was just over three, with scenes featuring just two characters being the most common. This was also found to be the case in the other serials sampled and is unsurprising given the reliance upon dialogue rather than action.

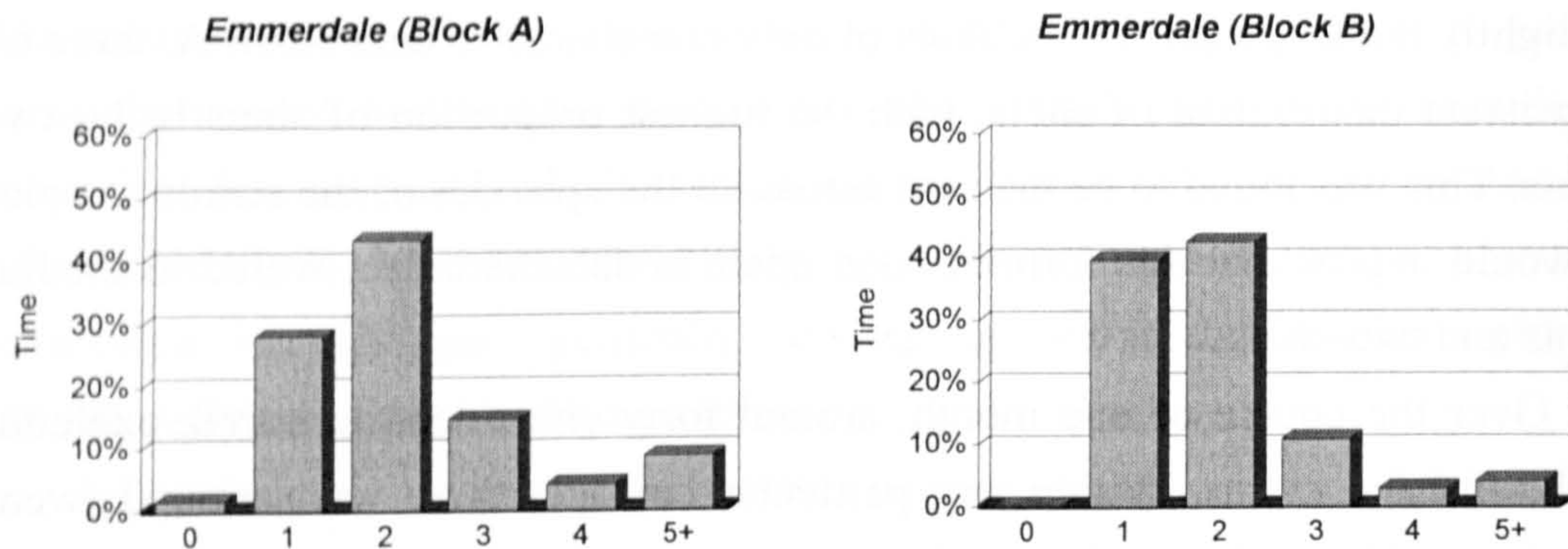
The ensemble cast is a requirement of continuous production, spreading the acting load across a broad base. This allows individual members of the cast a certain amount of time on leave. It also prevents any single actor from becoming indispensable to the programme.



**Table 10.13**

**Emmerdale: characters in shot**

Frequency distribution of number of characters in shot (percentage of screen time)



Episode	Shots	Number of Characters in Shot (% time)					
		0	1	2	3	4	5+
October 1990	<i>n</i>						
<b>Emmerdale</b>							
Tues 2 Oct	136	1.7%	28.4%	46.8%	14.4%	0.4%	8.3%
Thurs 4 Oct	133	5.9%	17.6%	36.7%	16.4%	4.2%	19.2%
Tues 9 Oct	182	-	40.9%	46.0%	9.9%	0.3%	3.0%
Thurs 11 Oct	168	0.2%	23.9%	46.9%	13.0%	5.6%	10.4%
Tues 16 Oct	172	0.1%	29.4%	44.0%	18.8%	5.8%	1.9%
<b>Block A</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>27.9%</b>	<b>43.4%</b>	<b>14.5%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>	<b>8.7%</b>
Thurs 18 Oct	245	0.4%	25.8%	58.0%	9.9%	0.8%	5.2%
Tues 23 Oct	247	0.2%	41.8%	45.4%	11.1%	0.4%	1.1%
Thurs 25 Oct	261	-	55.9%	22.2%	11.0%	1.5%	9.5%
Tues 30 Oct	220	0.2%	34.9%	44.5%	11.5%	8.4%	0.4%
<b>Block B</b>	<b>973</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>39.4%</b>	<b>42.7%</b>	<b>10.9%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>
	<b>1764</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>33.1%</b>	<b>43.5%</b>	<b>12.9%</b>	<b>3.0%</b>	<b>6.5%</b>



## Scenes

The nine sample episodes of *Emmerdale* contained a total of 210 scenes. The number and duration of scenes in each episode and the distribution of scene durations in the two production blocks are given in *table 10.14*.

The consistency of the distribution curves suggests that the dispersion of scene durations is typical of the serial at this time, not simply a characteristic of a particular episode. Each episode of *Emmerdale* had an average of 23 scenes, each lasting on average around a minute, although there was considerable variation around the mean. This appeared to amount to a formulaic working practice. The number of scenes scripted per episode ranged from 21 to 27. In some cases, scenes were cut, presumably for reasons of timing, either before shooting or during editing.

The shortest scene, running for just 8 seconds and 13 frames, was an exterior comprising 3 brief shots without dialogue. In all there were six scenes under fifteen seconds in length. Five were in two separate episodes by a single writer. Three of these comprised a single shot. Four were silent scenes without dialogue, possibly suggesting a stylistic tendency on part of that writer. Only one such scene was shot in the studio.

There were six scenes extending over 2 minutes. The longest scene ran for 2 minutes and 40 seconds, taking in 45 shots. This was the final scene of an episode that featured the entire ensemble cast assembled in a tableau scene in tacit tribute to the programme's eighteenth birthday, celebrated that week. This exterior scene was spatio-temporally continuous with the preceding two studio scenes, marked by movement through doorways, combining to produce a single sequence of over 4 minutes.

There were 35 scenes consisting of a single shot. Twenty of these were on location, shot with a single camera. The first block of episodes contained 24 one-shot scenes, in comparison to only 6 scenes in the second block.

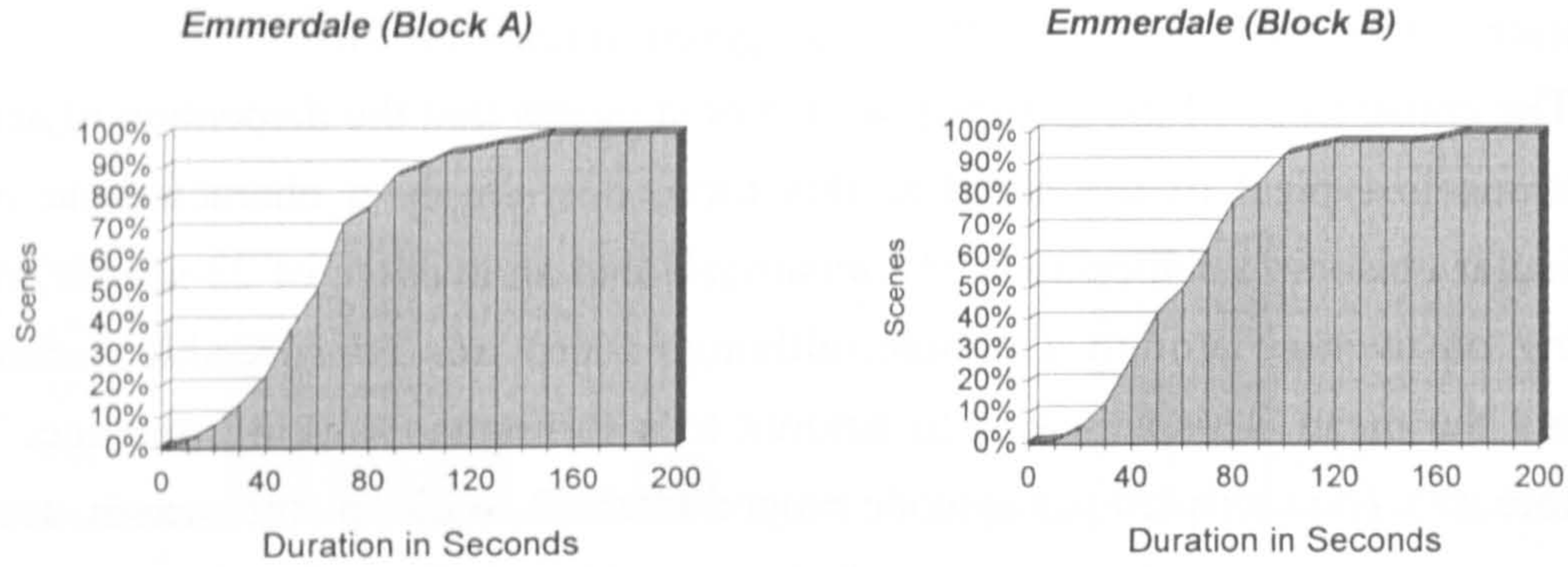
While the number of scenes in an episode is determined by the script, the number of shots within each scene and hence each episode is a result of the style of direction. There was a significant variation between an average of 7.0 shots per scene in block A and 10.5 shots per scene in block B. A style that tends towards *mise-en-scène* will produce fewer cuts than one that tends towards montage. This confirms the suggestion that the director of the latter had a tendency to break scenes down into a greater number of shots.



**Table 10.14**

**Emmerdale: scene durations**

Cumulative frequency distribution of scene durations in seconds (percentage of scenes)



Episode	Duration	Scenes	Shots/ Scenes	Scene Duration (seconds)			
				Std Dev	Min	Max	Mean
October 1990	h:mm:ss	<i>n</i>					
<b>Emmerdale</b>							
Tues 2 Oct	0:23:08	23	5.91	22.78	27.00	126.88	60.35
Thurs 4 Oct	0:23:07	22	6.05	19.26	24.92	99.16	63.04
Tues 9 Oct	0:22:41	23	7.91	27.95	25.28	138.48	59.16
Thurs 11 Oct	0:23:14	26	6.46	23.02	11.64	103.28	53.62
Tues 16 Oct	0:23:00	23	7.48	36.73	8.52	129.08	59.99
<b>Block A</b>	<b>1:32:00</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>6.97</b>	<b>27.25</b>	<b>8.52</b>	<b>138.48</b>	<b>58.73</b>
Thurs 18 Oct	0:23:31	24	10.21	33.32	14.00	160.04	58.78
Tues 23 Oct	0:23:25	23	10.74	25.05	9.64	119.36	61.08
Thurs 25 Oct	0:22:39	25	10.44	30.83	15.80	155.76	54.36
Tues 30 Oct	0:23:14	21	10.48	25.98	19.76	116.48	66.38
<b>Block B</b>	<b>1:32:47</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>10.46</b>	<b>29.01</b>	<b>9.64</b>	<b>160.04</b>	<b>59.86</b>
	<b>3:27:58</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>8.40</b>	<b>27.49</b>	<b>8.52</b>	<b>160.04</b>	<b>59.42</b>



## Studio scenes

*Emmerdale*'s popular appeal partly rests upon its reference to a rural setting. It is therefore interesting to examine the extent to which rural exteriors are seen on screen.

On average, 40 per cent of scenes by screen time were shot on location. There was considerable variation in this proportion across the sample episodes. This tended to equalise within a production block, at 38 per cent in block A and 43 per cent in block B. Ironically, the episode transmitted on 16 October, which marked the eighteenth anniversary of the programme, was particularly studio bound, dominated by Home Farm, with only 14 per cent shot on location. It appears that no particular attempt was taken on this occasion to take advantage of what is perhaps the programme's prime asset. The 1500th episode, which focused on a courtroom trial, had the highest ratio of location screen time at 77 per cent, although 72 per cent was accounted for by fourteen location court scenes totalling 16 minutes 28 seconds. The remaining location scenes in that episode comprised two short scenes at Emmerdale and Home Farm, totalling 1 minute and 4 seconds.

All location scenes for these episodes were shot using a single camera with repeated action. This was verified against production records. On occasions, however, directors may employ two separate cameras on location.

A programme's production schedule may require that a balance be struck between the proportion of shooting in the more authentic surroundings offered on location and the controlled environment of the studio sound stage back at base. Given that the technology and techniques for location and studio production differ considerably, significant statistical variation may provide a measure of the degree to which different shooting styles harmonise within a programme. *Table 10.15* shows the proportion of each episode that was shot in studio.

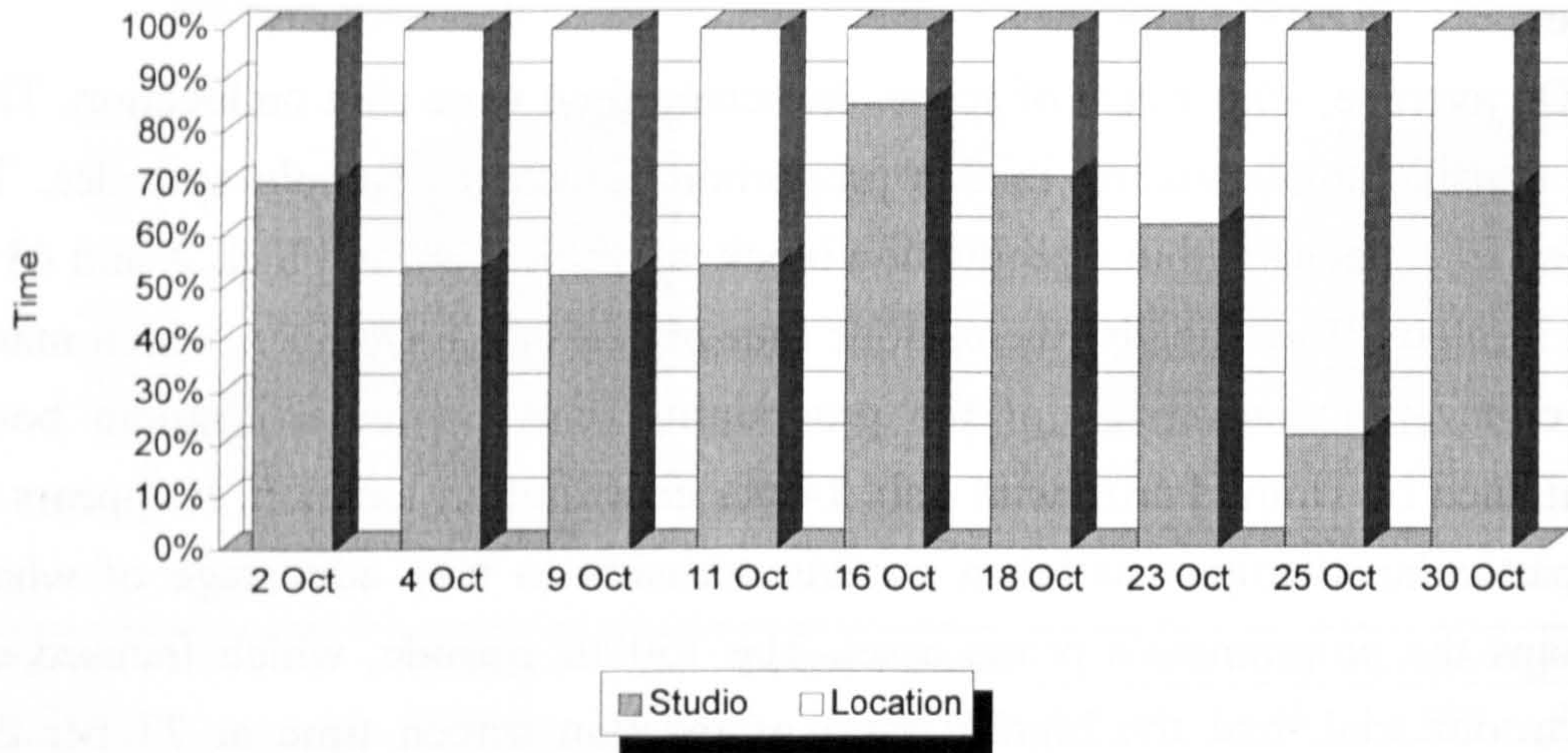
No significant difference in average scene length was found between location and studio scenes. The mean duration for location scenes was 57 seconds, only slightly less than the overall average. This suggests a good degree of harmonisation between the two production practices. It appears that production considerations do not in themselves dictate the length of a scene as it is written.



**Table 10.15**

**Emmerdale: studio scenes**

Proportion of studio scenes (percentage of screen time)



Episode	Episode		Studio Scenes							
	Duration	Duration	Scenes	Shots/	Scene Duration (seconds)					
October 1990	h:mm:ss	h:mm:ss	% time	n	Scenes	Std Dev	Min	Max	Mean	
<b>Emmerdale</b>										
Tues 2 Oct	0:23:08	16:19	70.5%	16	5.38	25.95	33.24	126.88	61.21	
Thurs 4 Oct	0:23:07	12:33	54.3%	12	7.92	19.42	31.56	96.20	62.72	
Tues 9 Oct	0:22:41	11:57	52.7%	12	8.08	23.49	39.00	114.32	59.74	
Thurs 11 Oct	0:23:14	12:41	54.6%	14	8.21	23.73	21.84	103.28	54.37	
Tues 16 Oct	0:23:00	19:40	85.5%	17	8.94	33.13	14.84	129.08	69.42	
<b>Block A</b>	<b>1:32:00</b>	<b>56:50</b>	<b>61.8%</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>8.35</b>	<b>26.15</b>	<b>14.84</b>	<b>129.08</b>	<b>61.99</b>	
Thurs 18 Oct	0:23:31	16:52	71.8%	18	9.11	26.20	14.00	100.04	56.24	
Tues 23 Oct	0:23:25	14:35	62.3%	13	12.77	22.69	34.24	119.36	67.27	
Thurs 25 Oct	0:22:39	04:56	21.8%	9	4.56	9.81	15.80	45.48	32.84	
Tues 30 Oct	0:23:14	16:01	68.9%	14	12.00	27.91	19.76	116.48	68.63	
<b>Block B</b>	<b>1:32:47</b>	<b>52:23</b>	<b>56.5%</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>9.98</b>	<b>26.49</b>	<b>14.00</b>	<b>119.36</b>	<b>58.21</b>	
	<b>3:27:58</b>	<b>2:05:32</b>	<b>62.9%</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>8.67</b>	<b>26.13</b>	<b>14.00</b>	<b>129.08</b>	<b>60.26</b>	



## Exteriors

While all *Emmerdale* exteriors were shot on location, interiors were shot either on location or in the studio, depending upon economic and logistic considerations. Interiors for some habitual settings were shot in real locations, for example the converted nursery at Home Farm and the interior of Feldmann's Farm. On occasions, the distinction between single camera location and multi-camera studio production is not immediately apparent on screen. Indeed, this degree of integration should be a production goal. This is increasingly made possible by the use of modern electronic equipment. In the past, the abrupt transition between filmed exteriors and videotaped studio interiors signalled discontinuity and interrupted the impression of naturalism. The contrast in technical quality between film and video was more immediately apparent to the viewer than that between single and multi-camera production. Modern video cameras now allow studio interiors and location exteriors to be seamlessly integrated.

Looking at the proportion of exterior versus interior scenes can give a good indication of a programme's 'outdoor' feel. Exterior shots are also subject to real-world production constraints imposed by external conditions such as the weather and can therefore be considered as being more 'expensive' to produce. Nevertheless, such scenes contribute significantly to the appearance of realism and are part of this particular programme's appeal. *Table 10.16* shows the proportion of each episode that was shot as exterior.

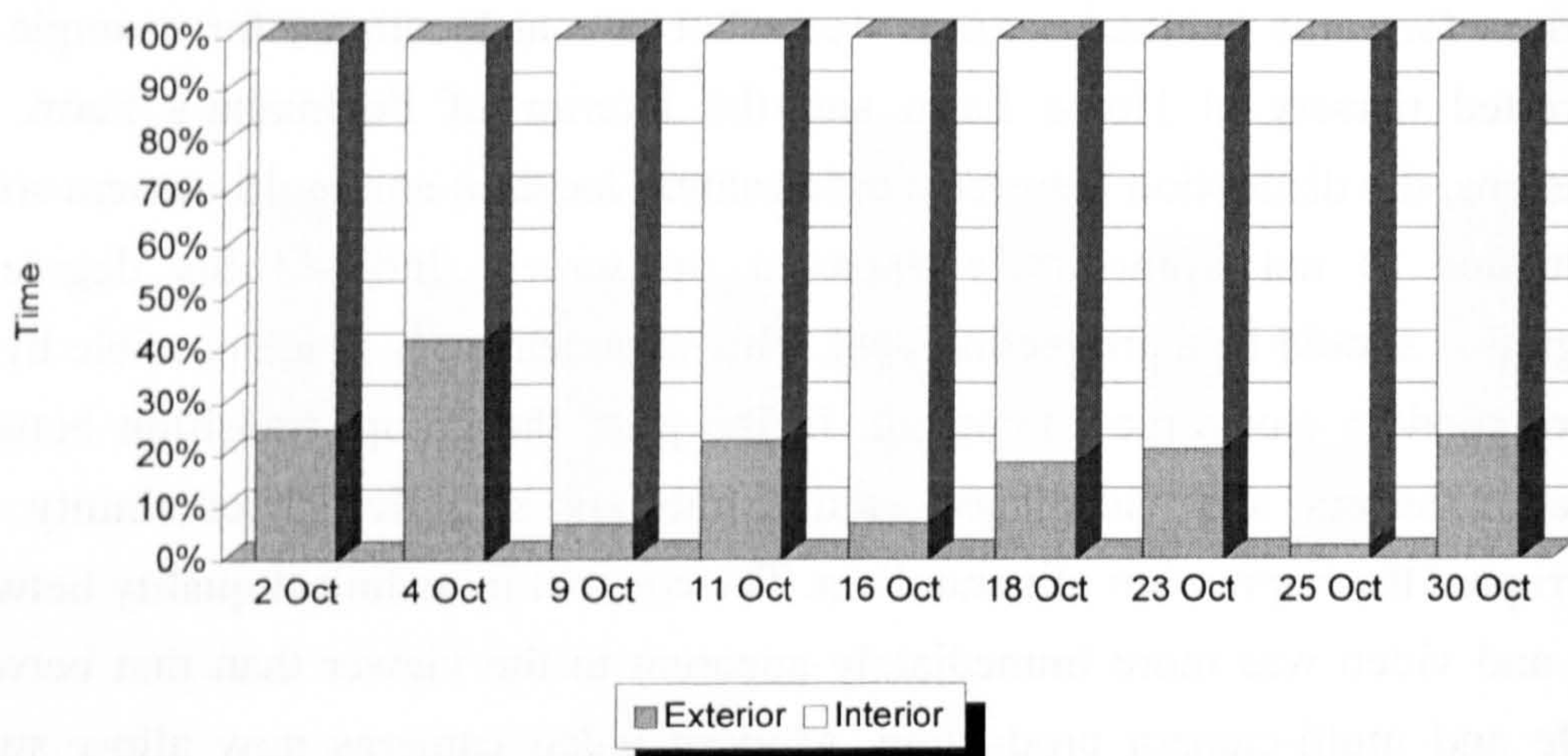
The average proportion of exterior scenes was 19 per cent, that is just under half of that for all location scenes. With the exception of a scene at the office of the road haulage company featured in the serial, all location exteriors could be described as 'rural' in that they portrayed some aspect of Emmerdale Farm, Home Farm, Beckindale village or its environs. The variation between episodes in the use of exteriors tended to equalise across production blocks, representing 20 per cent of the total in the first and 17 per cent in the second. The lowest level of exteriors, at 3 per cent, occurred in the previously mentioned courtroom episode, which contained only one exterior scene, a brief 35 second scene set in the Home Farm paddock. Two other episodes had only 7 per cent exteriors, one of these having only two scenes shot outside. The highest proportion of exterior scenes at 42 per cent was accounted for by an episode featuring a number of scenes set in the village field.



**Table 10.16**

**Emmerdale: exterior scenes**

Proportion of exterior scenes (percentage of screen time)



Episode	Episode		Exterior Scenes							
	Duration	Duration	Scenes	Shots/	Scene Duration (seconds)					
October 1990	h:mm:ss	h:mm:ss	% time	n	Scenes	Std Dev	Min	Max	Mean	
<b>Emmerdale</b>										
Tues 2 Oct	0:23:08	05:47	25.0%	6	7.00	15.88	27.00	68.88	57.85	
Thurs 4 Oct	0:23:07	09:48	42.4%	9	4.11	20.35	24.92	99.16	65.31	
Tues 9 Oct	0:22:41	01:35	7.0%	2	1.00	20.99	32.56	62.24	47.40	
Thurs 11 Oct	0:23:14	05:17	22.7%	6	3.67	28.04	11.64	82.68	52.75	
Tues 16 Oct	0:23:00	01:38	7.1%	5	1.80	12.88	8.52	40.60	19.53	
<b>Block A</b>	<b>1:32:00</b>	<b>18:17</b>	<b>19.9%</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>3.18</b>	<b>26.87</b>	<b>8.52</b>	<b>99.16</b>	<b>49.85</b>	
Thurs 18 Oct	0:23:31	04:20	18.5%	4	16.00	64.01	20.00	160.04	65.09	
Tues 23 Oct	0:23:25	04:57	21.1%	6	8.50	29.89	9.64	93.40	49.42	
Thurs 25 Oct	0:22:39	00:36	2.6%	1	7.00	-	35.56	35.56	35.56	
Tues 30 Oct	0:23:14	05:32	23.8%	5	9.60	26.13	30.20	97.60	66.36	
<b>Block B</b>	<b>1:32:47</b>	<b>15:23</b>	<b>16.6%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>10.63</b>	<b>37.43</b>	<b>9.64</b>	<b>160.04</b>	<b>53.80</b>	
	<b>3:27:58</b>	<b>0:39:27</b>	<b>20.5%</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>6.41</b>	<b>29.77</b>	<b>8.52</b>	<b>160.04</b>	<b>53.80</b>	



## Place

In the survey period, *Emmerdale* was centred on three main settings, although the chief centre of interest changed from episode to episode. *Table 10.17* gives the breakdown of scene settings by screen time.

On average, the Woolpack inn featured for a quarter of the episodes, closely followed by Home Farm, and the eponymous Emmerdale Farm, which was seen for a fifth of the time. The next most prevalent place was at the court, appearing in 14 scenes, totalling 8 per cent of the sample although it only featured in the single episode that it dominated.

In addition to exterior locations, each of these locales is furnished by a composite studio set of several rooms. Of the 52 scenes at the Woolpack, only 2 were exteriors, the remainder being shot on the Woolpack set comprising three rooms. The Woolpack bar, featuring in 23 scenes, was the only place to occur at least once in each sample episode.

Home Farm, seen on 49 occasions, offered the widest variety of settings, including numerous attractive exteriors. A composite studio set provided a kitchen, dining room, and living room, while the converted nursery bedroom and living room interiors were shot on location. Some aspect of Home Farm was seen in every episode in the sample. The Home Farm kitchen featured in 15 scenes, followed by the living room, which was seen 14 times. Emmerdale Farm, the setting for 43 scenes, provides a number of exterior locations, while the farm kitchen provides the main interior set, featuring in 21 scenes and was seen in all but one episode.

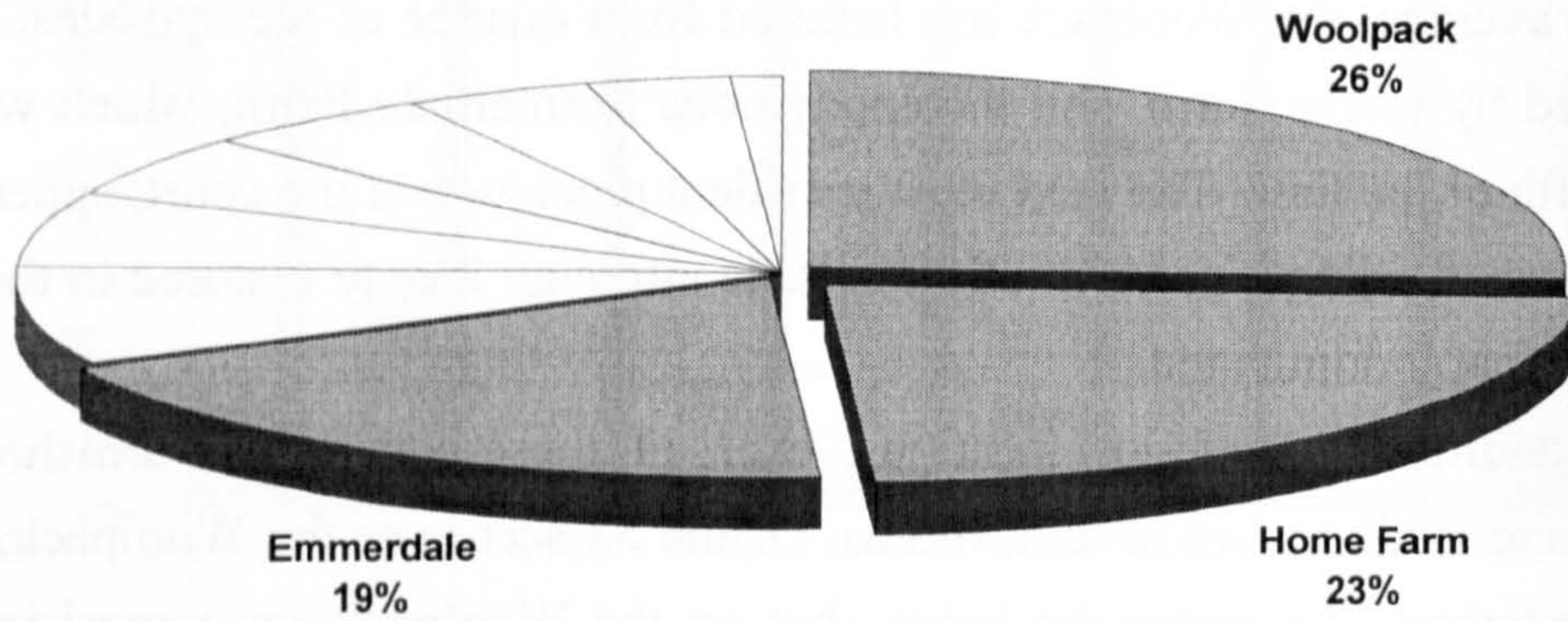
The Emmerdale and Home Farm kitchens provided focal points for this domestic drama. Together with kitchen scenes at Bates' Cottage, Demdyke, and Feldmann's Farm, kitchens featured in 45 scenes or nearly 22 per cent of screen time. By comparison, over a sample week, *Brookside* had 20 per cent of scenes including the kitchen, *Coronation Street* 11 per cent, and *EastEnders* 28 per cent.

Living rooms featured in 21 per cent of *Emmerdale*, compared to 20 per cent in *Brookside* and 18 per cent in *EastEnders*. Living rooms featured heavily in *Coronation Street*, taking up 30 per cent of the programme. In all the serials, the kitchen and the living room frequently appear together in the same scene, with movement between the two.



**Table 10.17****Emmerdale: settings**

Distribution of scene settings (percentage of screen time)



Episode	Duration h:mm:ss	Scenes % time	Scenes <i>n</i>	Scene Duration (seconds)			
				Std Dev	Min	Max	Mean
October 1990							
<b>Emmerdale</b>							
Woolpack	0:53:50	26%	52	28.86	19.20	160.04	62.12
Home Farm	0:48:06	23%	49	27.20	14.00	129.08	58.89
Emmerdale Farm	0:40:32	19%	43	24.97	9.64	119.36	56.56
Court	0:16:39	8%	14	31.44	38.32	155.76	71.34
Village	0:11:31	6%	16	27.07	8.52	99.16	43.18
Various Workplaces	0:11:21	5%	12	31.78	25.28	138.48	56.72
Bates' Cottage	0:09:26	5%	10	24.09	19.76	97.84	56.59
Demdyke	0:08:11	4%	8	17.59	39.52	92.72	61.35
Feldmann's Farm	0:05:23	3%	4	16.36	67.60	101.96	80.64
Various Rural	0:02:56	1%	2	7.58	82.68	93.40	88.04



Soap opera serial drama owes its genesis to domestic scenes in which the kitchen sink assumes a central importance. Even in more progressive British serials, such as *Brookside* and *EastEnders*, this heritage is still evident. Equally apparent, in stark contrast to American daytime serials, is the coy reticence to enter the bedroom. *Emmerdale* featured four scenes in the bedroom, less than two per cent of screen time, all in Kathy and Chris's room at the converted Home Farm Nursery, and none of which could be described as a 'bedroom scene'. *Brookside* had six scenes set in a bedroom, 8 per cent of screen time, all at the Johnsons' house, although three of these were in the second bedroom, which was at the time still without its bunk beds. British serials rarely visit the bathroom, although *Brookside* occasionally takes advantage of being set in real houses to venture upstairs. Bedroom and bathroom sets are notable by their absence in the studios of British serials and therefore scenes that might include them are not written. As a result a significant part of the day is simply elided.

The extent to which the Woolpack inn dominated *Emmerdale* was somewhat surprising. The public house has become a traditional element of the British soap opera. The importance of the soap bar is that it provides a convenient social space within which characters mix and exchange the gossip that is so central to soap opera narration. *Brookside*, originally lacked the benefit of such a public meeting place, although this has subsequently been compensated for by the construction of a parade of shops that performs a similar function. *Coronation Street* first established the Rovers Return public house as a social focus in serial drama. In the sample week the Rovers Return featured for 20 per cent of screen time. *EastEnders* emulated the model of the pub as parish pump, and the Queen Vic has remained a pivotal location, appearing for 23 per cent of screen time. *Emmerdale's* Woolpack featured for 32 per cent of the time in two episodes over the same period. In *EastEnders* and *Emmerdale*, the public house was represented by a variety of interior settings plus the exterior, whereas in *Coronation Street* it is limited to the bar area, with a restricted number of potential viewpoints.

The comparatively limited range of settings employed is largely a result of the economics of continuous serial production. It is not simply that fewer sets are required. When shooting out of story sequence, it is possible for several scenes to be shot in quick succession on the same set, enabling the efficiency of production that is required to produce anything up to seventy minutes of drama every week.



## Time

The norm in British soap operas is that an episode observes the classical temporal unity, by typically confining its action to the period of a single day. This probably owes less to Aristotle's prescription in *Poetics*, that tragedy should confine its action to the limits of a single revolution of the sun, than to the heritage of the serial as a daily transmission. Even British serials, which are not shown daily, appear to tend to conform to this tradition. The diegetic diurnal rhythm that underlies British serials tends to start in the morning and end in the evening, often approximately reflecting the time of transmission. Nocturnal periods are rarely covered, and exterior night sequences are exceptional owing to the cost of production. Precise time of day is often ambiguous on screen although it is accurately specified in the script to ensure continuity. Through reference to production records, which specify the exact time of day for each scene, the diegetic time span for each episode was established and is plotted in *table 10.18*.

**Table 10.18**

***Emmerdale*: time of day**

Scripted time span of episodes

Episode	Time of Day															
	am								pm							
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
October 1990																
Tues 2 Oct																
Thurs 4 Oct																
Tues 9 Oct																
Thurs 11 Oct																
Tues 16 Oct																
Thurs 18 Oct																
Tues 23 Oct																
Thurs 25 Oct																
Tues 30 Oct																

As with most soap operas, narrative time is assumed to relate to the day or days prior to transmission, although the exact chronology is often somewhat vague. The episode transmitted on Thursday 4 October was scripted as being set on a Saturday and featured a fund-raising village fête. The episode shown on Tuesday 16 October was set on a Sunday. This was indicated by the publication of a tabloid newspaper which featured in the storyline and was specifically referenced in the dialogue.

In the case of *Emmerdale*, the farming day often begins at dawn, in one case with the 6am milking. The time period covered ranged from about four hours to



about fourteen. None of the episodes extended beyond a single day. Each scene was either concurrent, continuous, or chronologically later than the scene it succeeded. The realist British serial tends not to play tricks with time, since such devices draw attention to the construction of the narrative. There was no instance of temporal re-organisation, although in some cases the order of scenes was re-arranged during production, suggesting that some variation in the precise chronology is possible. With the exception of the title sequence, which includes a series of generic views of rural village life, every shot stood in a linear chronological sequence. The simplicity of the temporal structure suggests that any attempt at analysis employing a Metzian model such as the *grande syntagmatique* is likely to yield rather uninteresting results.

It is a significant formal feature of *Emmerdale*, which is generally true of the British continuing drama serial, that normally no two successive scenes or sequences show the same character at discontinuous times or places. That is to say a character will not normally appear in the pub in one shot and at home in the next, logically indicating a change of time. This form of temporal elision is characteristic of cinematic narration but is relatively restricted in television genres, perhaps owing to the heritage of live multi-camera production in which such a cut would be impossible. Such temporal anomalies are still avoided at the scripting stage. The result is that temporal elision tends to be implicit rather than explicit. This has significance for the naturalistic aesthetic of the British serial, which suppresses indications of narration.

### **Episode structure**

The typical soap opera text may be seen as a complex network of interrelated scenes. The way in which the storyline strands are woven together may be best seen by examining an example episode. The episode transmitted on 16 October 1990, eighteen years to the day since the programme began, provides a suitable illustration. A transcript of this episode is given in the appendix. This episode is typical in most respects, although it was unusually low in location exteriors, which were confined to four short scenes in the first part. *Table 10.19* gives a scene breakdown, with the story times and slug-line descriptions taken from the production script. Two scripted scenes were dropped in production, giving a total of 23 scenes, while the order of one scene was changed, although this did not substantially affect the narrative chronology.



**Table 10.19**  
**Emmerdale: episode structure**  
**Episode 1497**

Location	Time	Description	Plot
<i>Emmerdale</i>			
Tues 16 Oct			
<b>Part 1</b>			
1 Village	09:15	Joe bumps into Seth and Bill at the village shop.	A
2 Home Farm Kitchen	09:17	Chris shows Dolly and Kim the paper.	A
3 Village	09:19	Joe is horrified at what he reads in the paper.	A
4 Bates' Kitchen/Living Room	09:20	Seth asks Turner for Rosemary's phone number.	C
5 Village	09:25	Joe leaves shop with all the papers.	A
6 Home Farm Kitchen	09:45	Zoë, Kim and Christopher read the papers.	A
7 Farm Kitchen	09:50	Rachel can't believe what's been written about her.	A
8 Feldmann's Farm	09:55	Elizabeth and Elsa discuss Nick.	D
9 Farm	10:00	Joe and Mark burn the newspapers.	A
10 Home Farm	10:02	Frank has a secret drink whilst out for a run.	B
11 Farm Kitchen	10:10	Charlton suggests they all go to church that morning.	A
12 Feldmann's Farm	10:15	<del>Elsa tells Nick she wants to spend some time with him alone.</del>	D
14 Home Farm Sitting Room		Kim almost catches Frank drinking.	B
13 Farm Kitchen	10:20	Joe thinks Dolly's having an affair with Frank.	B
<b>Part 2</b>			
15 Woolpack Bar	12:00	Joe and Dolly discover everyone reading about Rachel in the paper.	A
16 Woolpack Tap Room	12:05	Dolly tells Joe about Frank's drinking.	B
17 Home Farm Dining Room	13:30	Zoë and Frank discuss him being a father again. She nearly catches him drinking.	B
18 Farm Kitchen	13:45	Mark doesn't want to face his friends at school.	A
19 Home Farm Dining Room	13:50	Frank finds there's no more wine left.	B
21 Woolpack Bar	13:55	Seth asks Elsa if she'll find the number of the dating agency.	C
22 Home Farm Sitting Room	13:57	Kim catches Frank drinking.	B
23 Home Farm Kitchen	14:05	Dolly tells Kim she's been covering up for Frank.	B
24 Bates' Kitchen/Living Room	14:10	Elsa finds Turner's application form for the dating agency.	C
25 Home Farm Sitting Room	14:15	Frank tells Kim she doesn't care about him.	B



This episode has two main continuing storylines running through it. The first, A, is the discovery of a scandalous story concerning Rachel Sugden in a Sunday tabloid newspaper. The second, B, is the discovery that Frank Tate has returned to his secret drinking, partly induced by pressure from his wife Kim to start a family. The comic subplot, C, concerns the attempt of the toothless Seth Armstrong to get Rosemary, a naturist friend of Alan Turner, to accompany him to an annual dinner-dance. A further minor strand, D, the continuing romance of young Nick and Elsa, is cut to a single scene.

The first main strand dominates the first part of the episode. Joe discovers the story in the newspaper, purchases the shop's entire stock, and burns it. Intercut with this sequence of events are various reactions of the Tate's and the Sugden's to the story, together with other characters in the village and finally the regulars of the Woolpack. The viewer is effectively read the contents of the article by different characters, who all react slightly differently. This form of presentation is something of a soap opera cliché.

In the second main strand, which dominates part two, Frank is shown secretly drinking and becoming progressively drunk. To complicate matters, Joe Sugden mistakenly assumes that Frank's housekeeper, Dolly, who has been covering up for his alcoholism, has been having an affair in a *ménage à trois*. Having narrowly escaped detection on several occasions, Frank is finally found out by Kim, who learns the truth from Dolly.

The episode is characterised by significant repetition, notably in the various reactions to reading the newspaper story and in the drinking sequences that lead to inevitable eventual discovery. The speculation and gossip that is characteristic of the genre, provide much of the glue that connects the scenes. Very little actually happens. Each scene says very little in isolation. In order to understand the sequence of scenes, it is necessary for the viewer to make connections between them. This offers opportunities for considerable dramatic irony. Although each scene is relatively discrete and superficially separate from adjacent scenes, there is a very tight integration of the narrative threads. Despite the apparent simplicity, the construction of this episode, which is entirely typical, is actually highly complex. It is in forming the relationships between the discrete scenes to recover sequences of related events that the viewer finds meaning, and presumably pleasure. There is sufficient narrative closure to give the episode some internal cohesion and coherence, but the episode is incomplete in itself, with much of its meaning depending upon the continuation of storylines across episodes.



## Summary

In serial drama, one of the most popular television genres, cutting rates can be shown to be broadly consistent with those found in commercial cinema for most of its history. Although fashions change, partly motivated by the introduction of new technologies, it would appear that at least for dramatic narratives based on dialogue there are certain parameters within which shot durations typically fall.

Many of the formal features of soap opera are not simply stylistic, but are closely related to the practical pressures of production. The restricted setting and the return to habitual locations fulfil a requirement for production economy. A permanent set requires considerable investment but can make for more efficient production. The balance of studio and location, interior and exterior shooting, is largely determined by the particular shooting schedule by which the programme is produced. The ensemble cast is also a feature of soap opera. A relatively large cast allows for continuous production. The number of central characters and the regularity of their appearance is constrained by contractual commitments to the actors. Although each show may have its leading roles, the organisation of the narrative is around the group and the interactions between them. This is quite different to the feature film structure as produced by the star system, which is generally organised around one or more central characters. The comparatively large number of characters offers the opportunity to identify with a range of roles and provides for a plurality of interpretations.

An episode of soap opera lasting less than half an hour may comprise anything from 10 to 30 scenes and anything from 100 to 300 shots. There is a continual return to habitual locations. The number of characters and settings in which they can appear is rather restricted. The majority of the scenes feature two or three characters and the most common shot includes two characters. Many of the scenes and shots are similar to previous scenes and shots. As a result, soap opera involves a high degree of predictability, almost to the point of being self-parodic. The pattern is one of repetition with elegant variation. This is particularly true of the shot structures within the scene, which tend to be built out of simple patterns of alternation with occasional alteration. For the viewer, the comparatively simple visual structures in support of the dialogue no doubt contribute to the transparency of the narration. The predictability of these patterns, and the anticipation of the inevitable reaction shot, may also contribute to the pleasure derived from watching.



Although there can be no expectation that any particular member of the audience has seen either all or part of any particular previous episode, the structure of the narration, and the redundancy, repetition and recapitulation, are such that at any given moment the viewer is likely to know more than a particular character in the scene or a character referred to in that scene. Rather than presenting the viewer with an enigma and the expectation that it will be solved in the succeeding narration, the suspense of a scene derives from the anticipation that a character will find out something that the viewer already knows. Thus irony and gossip play a very important part in the narration. This in turn requires interpretation on the part of the viewer, since despite the reliance upon dialogue to carry the narrative, much of the importance of a scene is implied rather than explicitly stated.

A formal analysis of *Emmerdale* reveals some of the relevant aspects of its construction, both as a narrative and as a product. In many ways, *Emmerdale* had changed the most among the serials since its inception, in some respects beyond recognition. While it had begun by incorporating many techniques typical of film drama it has since adopted the formal characteristics of the British realistic continuing serial, as established by *Coronation Street* and since emulated by *Brookside* and *EastEnders*.

Of the contemporary *Emmerdale* episodes studied, it may be said that each tends to represent a single daytime span, and is composed of on average about 23 scenes of about a minute. There are on average about 8 shots per scene, and the average shot duration is around 7 seconds, although the cutting rate may vary according to director. The distribution of shot durations is positively skewed towards shots of shorter duration. In statistical terms it is approximately lognormal. The majority of shots are less than 5 seconds although the minority of shots over 20 seconds constitutes nearly a third of screen time. There is variation in the proportion of location shooting in each episode but this tends to balance out across production blocks, amounting to 40 per cent location on average. Just under half of this location production is shot outside, generally in rural locations. A quarter of all screen time is spent at the Woolpack pub, one of three principal locales that dominate the serial. Kitchens and living rooms are generally leading locations, bedrooms and bathrooms are not. As a result of a lack of spatial continuity between studio and location settings, there is comparatively poor integration between the interior and exterior spaces.



Subsequent to this survey, there have been a number of changes in the production of *Emmerdale*. The number of scenes per episode has risen to something closer to that of *EastEnders*. The move to a new location for the farm itself has allowed more interiors to be shot on location, considerably enhancing the impression of realism. As a result, *Emmerdale* has been positioned to face the new era of increased competition in television.

While it is often remarked that television is a close-up medium, under analysis it appears to be more of a medium-shot medium. True close-ups, presenting only the head and shoulders, form a minority of shots in terms of time. Although it is a relatively simple matter to count shots and scenes and calculate average durations, such figures can be misleading. Only by calculating the exact duration of each shot in a sample is it possible to produce a frequency distribution of shot durations. This demonstrates that the majority of shots are significantly shorter than the mean average duration. Insofar as the shot duration distribution appears to conform to a lognormal curve it may be possible to predict probable shot duration distributions for similar material without timing each and every shot.

Shots represent essential structural divisions in moving picture narratives. The division of visual material into shots and scenes constitutes much of the specificity of moving image media. A shot is a fundamental unit of visual information. While shot lengths can be varied to some extent, they are necessarily dependent upon factors of human perception.

The television text unfolds at a predetermined rate, 25 or 30 frames per second, according to the television standard. Each frame potentially contains an enormous amount of information. Unlike the printed text, the television text is typically available for only a single reading. This constrains the rate at which new information can be assimilated. In order to be comprehensible, the television text typically relies upon a highly conventional coded structure.

A shot is not generally understood in isolation. It is comprehended in a context. Part of that context is established by previous exposure to similar material. The interpretation of a shot is in part guided by that which immediately preceded it and by prior experience of the genre. The competent viewer therefore possesses an intuitive understanding of the sorts of statistical probabilities presented here.

The ability to arrive at an appropriate interpretation is partly governed by the duration of presentation. If a shot is too short it may not be comprehended correctly. If a shot is held too long there is the risk that the viewer will become



bored. Directors and editors implicitly employ the notion of a natural shot duration, which is the period required for any given shot to be 'read' by the viewer. This will depend upon the context of the shot and the amount of information it contains. Information is related to novelty. A return shot to a previous viewpoint can be comprehended more quickly than a shot that presents new information. Once it has been understood, a static shot contains no new visual information. It is possible for dramatic dialogue to sustain a shot. In soap opera it is equally possible for shot changes to sustain the dialogue.

Many of the very short shots encountered here were during action sequences, on two separate occasions when a character was breaking down a door. In such circumstances, the fast cut contributes to the visual excitement. Many of the longest shots were in location scenes. There may be production advantages in covering location scenes in a single shot, which does not involve continuity problems and can be more efficient than breaking them down into a number of set-ups. A shot is therefore also a unit of production, a unit of construction. In the past, video editing has been an expensive and comparatively cumbersome process. Increasingly it is becoming as flexible as film, allowing a more precise approach to production.

Perhaps the most significant factor in contributing to an impression of a fast pace is not the simply the shot cutting rate, but the number of shots per scene and the number of scenes per episode. However, the number of shots and scenes in each episode does not appear to have changed dramatically over the years. A contemporary episode of *Coronation Street* had a very similar number of shots and scenes to the first episode over thirty previously and the same can be said for an episode of *Emmerdale* twenty years after its début. This does not mean that such formal features are immutable, or that they are necessarily related to genre, but it does suggest that there is a certain consistency and that there are practical parameters that limit the scope for variation.

The realistic mode of presentation that is characteristic of the British soap opera is not simply a result of the themes and characters that it represents. It is also a product of formal features that suppress the impression of narration. Although this is an extension of the continuity procedures of classic cinema, the soap opera conceals its own story-telling activity even further. Most notable is the lack of temporal manipulation. There are none of the flashbacks or premonitions of a more melodramatic mode of narrative. Temporal elision is generally implicit, rather than explicit. Cinematic compression of time is avoided. There are no



subjective sequences, such as dreams, and even point of view shots are comparatively rare. Incidental music is entirely absent. In these respects, the British serial is significantly different to the Australian or American equivalent. It is also quite different to the classic cinema narrative. Many of the conventions may have their origin in the requirements of live television production. The mode tends to be more theatrical than filmic.

While the text superficially appears to be fragmented into short scenes, which are apparently unrelated and often contain little action, the coherence of the text resides in its presentation of a limited number of characters within a restricted setting. The relationships between the characters produce storylines that are often tightly integrated. An analogy might be made with musical structures which weave together variations on individual themes. The connections that result are highly complex and allow for multiple levels of interpretation.

However difficult it may be to define, the soap opera style is readily recognisable. This generic style takes the place of the individual style of a particular writer or director. The aim is for consistency of style. This is achieved by following formulaic systems. Soaps are generally intended to be seen as unauthored. This makes serial drama resistant to the prevailing auteurism that continues to dominate film criticism. The tendency towards a generic style offers an approach to the study of soap opera. Certain formal features may be statistically described, allowing more precise comparisons to be made between programmes of a particular genre.

Some of the fundamental formal tendencies of the soap opera texts studied show a certain consistency between episodes of a programme, even over a considerable period, and certain similarities with episodes of other programmes of the same genre. This would seem to suggest that it may be possible, by describing a sufficient number of episodes in sufficient detail, to produce a generic description of a serial, which may be seen as a model from which further hypothetical episodes may be produced.

However, over the wider sample of one serial, there was some evidence that even in the formulaic medium of the soap opera, which is considerably constrained by production practice, there is some opportunity for differences in style of direction, with one director apparently preferring significantly shorter shots. Such differences between directors have implications for the validity of conclusions about other serials based on the work of a single director.



In the final analysis, it may be said that soap opera may not be produced according to a fixed formula, but there is certainly a particular format upon which a serial is based. Effectively, it is such a model that the producers and regular viewers of a serial have in their minds. The meaning of a serial such as *Emmerdale* does not simply subsist in the text of a single episode. It is produced by the complex textual network of the arrangement of fictional locations and characters that it creates over an extended period.



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## Chapter 11

# Epilogue

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Television is in transition. In recent years, profound changes have taken place in the industry, and perhaps even greater changes are yet to come. The longest-running soap operas have been running for over twenty and thirty years respectively. During this period the very nature of television has changed, and inevitably so have such serials. Soaps are a product, a product of the particular circumstances of their production. Theories are simply speculation unless they can be related to practice. While many television practitioners are frequently suspicious of theory, many theorists are actually equally ignorant of television practice. It is therefore important to take account of the production context in studying the television text.

This has not been a production study, but by way of an epilogue it is nevertheless appropriate to consider the professional perspectives of those involved in production. They are a dedicated team of highly professional people, keenly aware of their profession. Yet in many ways they are naïve about their product. They have a professional pride in that which they produce, often under considerable pressure, but no-one appears to be under any illusion that they are producing high culture. A frequent claim is that they are simply telling stories. Their ultimate justification is an appeal to the audiences that watch their programmes in their millions.

### Creator

KEVIN LAFFAN, the creator of *Emmerdale Farm*, wrote scripts for several hundred episodes of the serial until he became disillusioned by the direction it was taking, which he saw as a departure from his original intentions.

Born of a working class background, one of twelve children, evicted to the Walsall workhouse when he was fourteen, he saw the true stuff of drama in his childhood. He went on to work in repertory theatre before writing for the stage, achieving a modest success with *It's A Two-Foot-Six-Inches-Above-The-Ground*



*World* which opened in London in 1970. As well as writing a number of television plays, he was the creator of Yorkshire Television's first soap opera serial, *Castle Haven*. He went on to create *Emmerdale Farm*, and he was also responsible for the successful prime time series *Beryl's Lot* which ran for several seasons from 1973.

*Emmerdale Farm* was not originally intended as an open-ended drama. It was written as a self-contained serial. Nobody imagined that it might still be running more than two decades later.

'I only did it because I thought it was going to be three months. I was never terribly interested in twice-weekly serials. In fact I didn't want to do it originally, to be quite honest, and I said no when I was first asked. Anyway I had some free time and I needed the money at the time, so I did it. I wrote it as a complete twenty-six episode play. I knew it was going to go out as a twice weekly serial. The only way I could see to write it properly was to think of it as a play, an entity. But by the time I'd finished it, there'd been hints that it might go on, so I left it so that I could do another series. And I did in fact do another twenty six, I got somebody else to work with me then, because I was on to other things. Eventually it became six months, then it became a year. And of course it just went on and on and on.'

As it was written, straight off, without benefit of a treatment or synopsis, the serial opened with a family funeral. Programme executives saw this as a potential turn-off, and wanted to make changes, but Kevin Laffan has always been adamant that he would never change a television script. In fact he was given considerable control.

'I must say that Yorkshire Television gave me great freedom. I had almost total control. In my original contract I had the right to say who writes the scripts. But then of course if they weren't any good I had to re-write them. I had I suppose more control than anyone, as a writer. They were very good to me in that respect. I had no problems at all, except you see I wasn't there. I'd no intention of spending all my time in Leeds and so gradually it all got eroded.'

From the beginning, *Emmerdale Farm* was intended to portray an accurate picture of life on a working farm. However, Laffan describes an apparent tendency for television to move upmarket, what might be called an inbuilt bourgeois bias:

'I was determined that it would not be middle-class, which it is now. You see my whole idea was that it should not be middle class. But they cheat you see, eventually, you always lose, because, you see, the actors want to get middle class. The producers want to be flashy. I wanted the dirt on their boots and the muck of the farm. At the first dress rehearsal, Amos was actually wearing a bow tie. Finally after a great deal of argument I got them to take it off. It was like that for a long time, but you see gradually they began to change the clothes. With me, if somebody had a new dress, people remarked on it. Now they turn up in a new car and nobody knows where they got it from.'



Although it was launched in the afternoon and that determined the available audience, *Emmerdale Farm* was not written with any particular audience in mind. The<sup>re</sup> was a positive refusal on the part of the writer to pander to a particular public.

‘I don’t, and I don’t think you should, because fundamentally you can only do something well if you do it honestly. If you’re thinking of that audience you’re talking down to them or you’re talking up to them. You should address them as your equals. If you don’t entertain yourself you’re not going to entertain your audience. So I didn’t think of the audience, I thought of the story, which is what I think you should think of. I don’t start saying I’m going to do this to appeal to the AB classes. That’s what they’re doing now. I don’t do that. I would think that it was very presumptuous of me to think that I could entertain a particular kind of audience. All I can do is be honest. I write honestly, as honestly as I can.’

In the early days, *Emmerdale* had a reputation for concentrating on dialogue centred around the kitchen table. Conflict was often implicit between characters, bubbling beneath the surface rather than boiling over. Minor changes in domestic routine signalled dramatic tensions.

‘If you really understand the drama of houses and of people, they spend their time trying to avoid quarrelling. It’s all unspoken. If you get them to try and avoid it, it’s just as much drama as it is if you actually show it. In fact it’s better. It’s more subtle and it’s more real. So when you do have a row or you have a quarrel it is like blowing the lid off a pressure cooker.’

‘You see I wouldn’t let anybody swear. I didn’t have any sex either. But it all worked. This business of showing heaving bodies, it’s the law of diminishing returns. Where do you go then? Whereas if you don’t do it, there’s always the possibility. And that’s what drama is about. The Greeks had the best way. You never saw the Greeks killing anybody on stage. There is no drama in doing it. The drama is in the threat that it may occur.’

‘Television is neither the cinema nor the theatre, because not only do you not get the group, because it’s very difficult to get a good group in front of the camera, but neither can you get the terrific action that you get in cinema. Whatever they say about television, it’s still verbal.’

When the ratings were at their height, under pressure to compete with *EastEnders*, *Emmerdale Farm*’s storylines became increasingly dramatic. Kevin Laffan became increasingly concerned that the character of the original conception was being changed.

‘You see at that time, *Emmerdale* had a higher audience rating than it had ever had, so what was the point in trying to change my style, that was my argument. I did have my hand on the tiller. I wrote characters, but the actors made them into marvellous characters, and the directors did very well. I had the bigger say in it than anybody else, there’s no question about that, and they changed it. The reason that I had a row about the scripts was that they believed that they should appeal to a younger audience. I don’t go in for that business of saying I’m going to appeal to this



audience. I think of my audience in the sense that they're watching this. You're aware of your audience but not of the composition of your audience.'

Laffan has been quoted as complaining at the increasing levels of sex, sin and sensation in the storylines, but he emphasises that this has nothing to do with prudery. While accepting that television companies are under pressure to appeal to audiences, he believes that in tending towards the common denominator they are selling themselves cheap and they would succeed better by being distinctive.

'You see they don't trust the writer. That's the problem. I've never written a synopsis. I don't write them. I don't believe in knowing what the character's going to do before he does it. When I write, I have a general idea of what I'm going to write about. Whereas if you structure the thing so that you've got a detailed storyline, all you're doing, all they do, is supply information. Drama isn't supplying information, drama is withholding information.'

'If you think of it as a play then it is more literary, I suppose. It was constructed in actual scenes, in which actual things happened, and where actual progress was made in the development of the story. Whereas in most cases its snippets of information, you don't get parts of a storyline. You don't get a progressive storyline with stations from here to there you usually get a snippet of information. You don't get a narrative sequence, you jump from one story to another.'

As a case in question, he cites *Eldorado*, which was criticised for attempting to introduce too many characters in the initial episode. He is critical of attempts to write to a soap opera formula.

'The most sensible thing anybody can do when they start to write a soap opera is to give it to one writer, for the first period, instead of sitting round a table. It's like a camel designed by committee, more like a dromedary. I believe you should give the writer freedom. And they don't give writers freedom. What they do is they get writers who just have to write lines of dialogue. The writer is then giving information. He's nothing to do with the characters.'

With the concerns of a playwright as an authorial voice, Kevin Laffan no longer feels comfortable with the world of television which is increasingly concerned with maximising audience appeal.

'Unless you're a big name, which I am not, you don't have creative freedom. I *had* creative freedom. When I was working in television regularly I did have creative freedom. I've never altered a script I've written for television. I wouldn't do it. Anyway, I decided I wouldn't do any more, so I don't.'

*Emmerdale*, he feels, is less distinctive than it once was.

'Now it's just like any other one now. Whereas it was different, I thought, anyway. I thought it made its way because it was distinctive. It still has, I suppose, a slight difference. I mean you notice that it is never mentioned when they talk about soap operas, in the papers. I suppose it's the most respectable of them, or it was.'

'It's the only soap that's made the grade. There's no other programme that started at lunch time and has survived for twenty years to reach peak time. So there must be something going for it, or was.'



In many ways, Kevin Laffan represents an older generation of television playwrights who could maintain authorial control over their material. Now living in comfortable rural West Sussex, he himself has moved on.

There has always been a tension between the authorial presence and the demands of mass production in soap opera. There were two types of production in the early American radio serials: those that were largely the product of a single writer, and those that were the result of an industrial system of production. Generally, the demands of the television serial are such that it requires the division of labour of an industrialised production system. Once the format is formalised, the authorial influence is no longer necessary. The demands of day to day writing can be more effectively farmed out to freelances.

The task of realising the script on screen is that of the director. While in film or prestigious television drama the director may play an instrumental creative role in this process, the continuous serial, which may have as many as a dozen directors working on it over the course of a year, demands a rather inconspicuous style of direction.

## Director

DEREK BENNETT, one of the freelance directors on *Emmerdale*, is a veteran producer and director of television drama, having directed the first episode of *Coronation Street* back in 1960. He went on to become an executive producer in drama at Granada Television. Like many coming from a tradition of one-off dramas, he expresses an anxiety over the decline of the single play. Latterly he worked at Yorkshire Television running an experimental drama group, a grandiloquent title he points out, in which experimental equates with cheap. He went on to produce and direct a number of films for the company, before retiring to the relative routine of *Emmerdale*.

As a respected drama director, he candidly concedes to being a bit shy of the term soap opera and admits that it's not a form of entertainment that he particularly likes, but he points out that all television programmes, in particular serials, are products made to be sold and should therefore be made in the best way to sell them. An admirer of *EastEnders*, partly because of its subject matter and its working class roots in reality, and an aficionado of *Coronation Street* at its best, although disliking its tendency to descend into comedy, he believes that *Emmerdale* suffers visually by comparison with other serials and could be improved by shooting more on location.



The director's task is primarily to tell the story and there is a feeling that the direction should not necessarily be distinctive.

'People do not try to be very distinctive when they are directing soaps. I don't think that it's fair to do so. But not everyone would agree with that. I personally can recognise some people's style, not necessarily on soap. I can sit at home and know who's directing that *Coronation Street*, because he does it rather badly. There are other people who's style I know throughout television, as I might in the film world.'

Idiosyncratic direction becomes most obvious when it breaks convention. Occasionally this occurs when inexperienced directors create continuity problems.

'There is a grammar in the visual arts. You can break it now and again if you want to, but I believe that you should know what you're doing and why. There are people directing now who don't know the grammar. They can set things up very nicely scene by scene, but they cannot join those scenes together. They get into terrible trouble in editing, because they haven't thought about it enough. They have seen enough movies, surely, to see that somebody is putting these things together. You don't only make pretty pictures. You're telling a story, and you tell the story visually, as well as with words. I would say there is bad or weak direction when the story is not being told well visually.

Soaps are very likely the programmes that will get the young or inexperienced directors who haven't learnt this grammar and are not being taught it. There is little or no training in television direction. There was a little training in the past, and you could observe other people. A very good training that people don't get now is in live television because there it becomes obvious immediately. Time after time these days you can see things which would not happen in a dramatically composed film or television play.'

Many of the visual conventions of soap opera have been inherited from live television drama and continue in multi-camera studio production.

'Television is very repetitive. It goes back to the live days, and it often uses a series of close-ups simply because they're there and there doesn't seem to be anything else to do. A lot of the soap operas accept that as their grammar, and I think that is okay for them because they've said that's the way we do it and the audience likes it and that's the way it is. If you were doing it as a one-off play you wouldn't do that. You'd vary it more.

I think that television went into this close-up phase around thirty-five years ago, when there were a few American and Canadian directors working here and they started introducing the large close up and it took everybody by surprise and became a television convention.'

Some of the conventions of the television soap opera, such as ending scenes on a reaction shot, he suggests can be traced back to practical constraints, which have subsequently become conventionalised.

'You have to go back to the days of live television. You were shooting with let's say three cameras with one or maybe two of them rushing down the studio to get ready for the next scene, so you might have stayed on one. No end of time scenes are written that way. One doesn't necessarily have to take that much notice, but it is a writers' convention. I wouldn't say no I'm not doing it just because it says so but I



find that I do it on *Emmerdale* much more than I would I was doing say a one-off drama. As it is a sort of convention, I think it would be wrong to spoil the convention.'

In accordance with changes in working practices, the pace of the programme has been considerably increased. Many older members of the audience have complained that it now jumps around too much. The producers admit that this is an increasing trend in television, partly driven by American programmes which are now designed to counter the 'zap mentality' cultivated by remote-control channel changers. At the same time, the audience is increasingly sophisticated and able to absorb information faster, with fewer explicit cues.

'Because an audience is educated by what it sees I think that it can, over a period of time, take in more and more information. Whereas at one time we may have thought we ought to be clear about this, nowadays I think you can take in an awful lot, if it's well presented. Not only are the producers able to shove the information out faster but the audience can take it in faster.'

The most noticeable aspect of this is in respect to the length of scenes, which now tend to be less than a minute long.

'That may be part of the same thing, this itch for novelty. I'm conscious of that fact. Sometimes I think that you could dwell longer on a particular subject and explore things more. Nowadays you tend to get them over in about two and half pages and shove on to something else.'

The tendency towards a larger number of shorter scenes is partly made possible by the availability of sophisticated post-production facilities. In the past, writing conventions were tailored towards live or as live multi-camera studio production and the movement from scene to scene was subject to the restricted mobility of a limited number of cameras. The quality of the writing is also seen as a factor. A rapid succession of scenes can disguise a certain paucity of dramatic material.

'I think that it may be that if one were to say compare serials that it may well be that the dramatic and intellectual content of some scenes is such that you can't stay there for a long time because there's nothing to say. In that sense, occasionally there'll be scenes and you say why is it here? There is absolutely no reason for this scene's existence. It says nothing.'

However, he is diplomatically quick to point out that this is not necessarily always the case with *Emmerdale*. If a scene has more dramatic content it is capable of being sustained longer.

'The last week I spent doing a very emotional acting week with four actors who reduced us to tears on location while we were doing it, and we had a long scene because it was worth seeing and so its worthwhile staying with it.'



Soap opera writers receive very little recognition for their work. Some see a lack of liaison with the writers is seen as a great restriction.

‘Writers are terribly important. I think we have a very odd attitude to them in this country, in that we pay them an enormous amount of deference and lip service on the one hand and they manage to claim enormous rights for themselves, probably rightly so, and yet they are not consulted, they either resent being consulted, or they regret the time that it takes. They think you’re negating their work if you query anything. I feel there’s rarely an honest discussion about scripts largely because of the time and largely because of the money. Writers are not paid enough to be able to stand back and spend enough time on what they do. I know that certainly a lot of directors, and to some extent some producers, don’t want to give up what power they have and don’t want to get the writer in. A lot of writers feel resentment that they’ve given their babies over to directors, producers, designers, actors even. They say “what are you trying to do with my work?” and we’re actually trying to get it over to the public, which is what they wanted. Often there is enormous mistrust and misunderstanding which is a great pity. You can actually get writers with whom you can work easily and confidently and who trust you and you trust and it can be a very interesting and rewarding experience. And everybody benefits from it and certainly the public does by the result.’

Neither *Emmerdale* nor *Coronation Street* were originally intended to run as continuous serials. Derek Bennett still remembers the excitement associated with the beginning of *Coronation Street*.

‘We didn’t know we were doing a soap opera, so we regarded it as a series, probably limited. The climate of television and the atmosphere was very different. Granada was a very exciting place to work, we were doing all sorts of new things. It wasn’t at all demeaning to do a half-hour series.

Tony Warren came up with this very interesting idea, and you must remember that it was the first working class thing. We were living in Manchester, we were amongst these things. It was a new departure and we were all very excited by it. It was a very gritty, grainy sort of thing and I think the quality of the writing was smashing. He had a great vitality and a great honesty about the writing. The cast were all hungry actors, and it appealed to them. We hadn’t done anything like that before and we wanted to do it. Everybody was very keen about the idea.’

‘We were quite young. I remember being told by one of the executive producers that all you people have got death wishes for your programmes, because while we didn’t want to fail, in a way you didn’t want to be associated with popular programmes. There was a kind of snob thing. We were young enough and arrogant enough to feel that we didn’t want to be popular, but I think that possible most of us got over that within the next ten years. You see in a way, Granada, great credit to them, encouraged that to some extent. I was allowed to make programmes which cost money and took time, which people made because they wanted to make them. I made drama there that people said, if you want to do it, and you have faith in it then do it. Granada was astute and careful with money and they certainly didn’t throw it around but they knew that they could balance things up and were prepared to write off a bit for the sake of culture and I think that’s a good thing.



Anybody who has been working for ten or fifteen years will tell you that it is not the same and that is not just because we have got older. There is a different attitude to things. Things have to make a more immediate impact and make a return because we're in a different sort of business. I regret this very strongly and feel very bitter about it. I think it was a political decision forced on the industry for quite the wrong reasons and I think that it has destroyed a very good entertainment business. I think that it has made a difference to the quality of the programmes and I think it will continue to do so.'

## Producer

MORAG BAIN once had theatrical aspirations and studied at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow, but left to work as an assistant stage manager at the Pavilion theatre. This led to a job as an assistant floor manager with the BBC, first in Scotland, then in London, working with Julia Smith on *Angels* and then on *EastEnders*, starting with the very first episode and going on to become a script editor. She admits that she has a great admiration for her mentors Julia Smith and Tony Holland and learned most of what she knows about that kind of programme from them. She met her former husband when he was working on *Emmerdale*. After leaving to have a baby she joined *Emmerdale* as story editor before being offered the post of producer.

'My brief was pretty obvious. I was well aware of what the task was because I had been here as story editor for two years and I knew that my predecessor was charged with trying to make the programme appeal to a wider audience. Traditionally the audience had been 55 plus on the whole and I knew that he was keen to interest younger people. I think also he had been charged with getting teenagers interested, although I think probably in his time he'd dealt more with the middle group. Certainly as story editor I found myself catering for that. So when I took over, I knew it was one area I had a lot to do, and pretty quickly. We had the young characters there, they just didn't have the stories. We had to do more for them, and we did that almost straight away. So I think probably, if I've made any major change, it's been doing stories for younger people. My mailbag tells me I'm doing too many stories for younger people, but my boss tells me I'm not doing enough.'

The audience profile to *Emmerdale* has shifted in response to changes in the programme. More young and affluent viewers are watching and the audience is rising in London and the South. Despite these shifts, the bulk of the audience remains over forty-five. There is a danger that too much change too quickly could alienate the older, loyal viewers. *Emmerdale* has certain qualities in common with *Coronation Street*, just as *EastEnders* and *Brookside* share certain similarities. *Emmerdale* is now chasing the floating viewers who may watch soaps but have now particular loyalty or alignment to a particular programme.



'I always say never underestimate your audience. If any producer, director, or writer does, then they're failing in their task. But at the same time I do think that there's a very high proportion of the viewing public who are not actively selecting to watch what they watch and in my view that makes them couch potatoes. A couch potato in my book is someone who is being passive and not being necessarily selective.'

At the end of January 1992, *Emmerdale*'s audience peaked at 12.73 million, without the benefit of a repeat, placing the programme at number twenty-three in the ratings. With so much serial drama in the schedules a certain saturation point may be reached. It is likely that only the strongest will survive.

'I think that those that don't do well won't survive. Something will go. I think *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale* and probably *EastEnders* will survive. What the public want is entertainment. So long as they're entertained, they don't really care what entertains them. They are discerning enough to say this isn't entertaining me. The public would rather have wall-to-wall soap than repeats of old films and old series. I think that *Coronation Street* will always survive. I think that *Emmerdale* will also survive. *Emmerdale* has a quality about it that is long lasting. *Coronation Street* and *EastEnders* are the two most quoted as being tough and great and good. *Emmerdale* is the forgotten soap because people forget that we've actually been on the air for twenty years. People who watch *Emmerdale* are very aware of the quality of the drama. I like to think that 12.73 million wasn't achieved just because it was raining that day.'

The most important element of the serial is the characterisation. In the jargon, the serial is character led, with the stories about people and their problems emerging from the characterisation. Issues emerge through the storylines as they affect the community portrayed.

'I think the public like to know the characters well. They like to know what the characters would do in any given situation. There is a predictability to a certain extent. One then has to embark upon the path of writing and storylining the predictability with the motto "don't underestimate the audience". Predictability implies that it's easy. I think irony is probably a better word. When you've been doing it for twenty years you do have to make sure that your predictability is different from the last time.'

The suggestion that serial fiction is formulaic is often rejected as an attack on the skill of the storyteller.

'To say that it is formulaic, probably there is a truth in it. I would strongly argue that an episode is not formulaic and that you can't write to a formula. I used to believe that you could write *Mills and Boon* which was formulaic – until I actually started investigating it when I was very hard up and out of work. It's not formulaic, it's actually not easy at all. Soap writing is a very particular kind of writing and it requires a particular kind of skill. I have had well respected, very good writers who cannot crack writing for soap.'

There is a certain suspicion about any attempt to investigate the existence of a soap opera formula. Programme producers often prefer to rely on instinct.



'I get a bit nervous about the academic critical eye that is cast over soap, because I don't work like that, so I find it very difficult to think like that. That's not to say that I don't have time for it. It intrigues me. At the risk of sounding like Julia Smith, I am first and foremost a programme maker that makes a programme that in my view is just there as an entertainment. I'm a storyteller.'

Morag Bain is sceptical about the value of an academic analytical approach to the production of a programme. She recalls some consultancy she did for some Germans who wanted to produce a soap to compete with *Lindenstraße* (Linden Street), itself partly modelled on *Coronation Street*.

'They were academic professors who sat down to write a paper about the project in hand. They actually produced a document having taken an episode of *EastEnders* and they said character A and B come into scene one and they converse, and in scene two characters C and D converse and in scene three A talks to D... and they went through an entire script breaking it down and they actually did write down a formula. We don't do it like that. If we did it would be very easy. I didn't learn anything from it except that it left no flexibility and it really left no room for emotion. Emotion plays a very big part in the telling of the story of a soap. There is a structure and that is the fundamental part of any story telling but in soap the interesting thing is it's an ongoing thing and you have many structures.'

In common with many producers, Morag claims that the structural characteristics of a serial cannot be boiled down to a set of formulae. Consistency, continuity and coherence are enforced through the system of storylining. Scripts are commissioned to the storylines. The scripts certainly conform to a consistent set of expectations:

'It used to be 23 scenes per episode. It used to be 72 pages for a script. More and more it can be 80-84 pages per script and 28-30 scenes and it still runs to time. The programme has paced up in the last six months quite considerably. When I came here, I was told: always 72 pages and always 23 scenes and if you stick to that you're bang on time. I said you can't do that. So maybe it was formulaic, but I don't believe in formulae.'

While a soap opera may not be explicitly based on a formula, the very nature of its production requires a certain formal structure. The amount of location production is largely determined by the shooting schedule.

'There are practical constraints obviously. We tend to do about 40:60 location to studio in a block of four episodes. It averages over the production block and it does tend to break down within an episode in the same kind of way. We are more and more pushing it to the limit, so I'll have one episode in a block which may be 90 per cent outside, but the balance will be that the other three episodes will be more in the studio to equal out the block. But I am trying to push for more location, to the point that maybe later in the year we'll be looking at the schedule to see if we can increase it.'



## Executive producer

KEITH RICHARDSON, controller of drama at Yorkshire Television became executive producer of *Emmerdale* in 1986. Having originally trained as an actor, he left the stage to become an agent, before moving to television and joining Yorkshire Television's drama department in 1969 as an assistant stage manager. He worked on *Castle Haven* and went on to become a unit manager on the very first episode of *Emmerdale Farm*, beginning an association which continued for more than two decades. Moving briefly to neighbouring Tyne Tees Television, he became head of drama, but returned to Yorkshire in 1983 and was promoted to controller of drama in 1988. As executive producer of *Emmerdale* his role involves long-term planning with the producer, establishing the general direction of the story and the continuing role of the characters.

'It's an interesting carry-over from movies. In movies, an executive producer was the man who had the money. He was either a studio person or he had his own money. I suppose if you like I'm the studio head, and as controller of drama I have an executive producer role on any production that I'm paying for, although it's certainly not my money. As an executive producer you are responsible for the overall look and shape. I don't involve myself in the day to day running. I take a much longer term view. I watch every programme. I comment if required. I'm only concerned with the end product. I think that's very important. In that kind of tightly knit group, people get very locked into their own problems, their own worries, the things that matter to them. I think you have to just stand back and take an overview. At the end of the day we're there to satisfy the audience.'

' Having been involved from the start, Keith Richardson is well-placed to consider the changes that have taken place in the programme.

'I think that all the changes that have taken place have been very gradual. It's evolved very naturally. We've always reflected real life. I think that we have reflected changes in the sense that the reason for dropping the title farm was we were saying that there was much more to look at, the dale itself and everybody who lives in it is more interesting. It allowed us to open it out slightly and to get more and younger people in it. So the evolution has been slow, a little bit like life in the dales is a bit racier now that it was twenty years ago. In the last three years I think we have made the conscious decision that we have to introduce younger characters, partly because the stories were too limited. Some people would call it strategy but I think we were just very careful. We did an awful lot of things a step at a time. We were able to change the title. If at the same time we had changed the music and the titles and thrown out some of the actors, people would have wondered what was going on. We just went a step at a time. You don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater.'

Perhaps the most notable change was to an extent imposed upon the programme by external events:



'We've lost the farm itself. The farmer who farmed it gave up the tenancy. Suddenly he announced in the spring that he was giving up, which took us all by surprise. Even more of a blow was that his son, who we had always assumed would take it over, said he wanted to be a long distance lorry driver. So suddenly the farm was empty. We obviously negotiated very quickly with the owner, and said we will make you a very comfortable offer, over the market value, to take it over and carry on, but we would have then been running an empty farm, which would have presented us with enormous production problems. The landlord, I think just got a bit greedy, and while he accepted our price, also said that we would have to pay him substantially if we actually exploited it in any way. We said if we're going to exploit it then we'll pay you less and you can share in the exploitation, or we pay you more, but you can't have it both ways. And he just dug his heels in and so reluctantly we let it go. Nobody believed that we would do it.'

The producers seized these circumstances as an occasion to introduce further changes in production practice.

'It gave us an opportunity to start again. We went through a difficult period while we were trying to find somewhere to go to. Most of the local farms have been so modernised that they really don't work for us, not quite the image we're looking for. We're very proud of the one we found which in pictorial terms is very much more attractive than *Emmerdale* was and we can also film inside which we could never do with the original farmhouse, so there's a lot of advantages in terms of production values in the move.

Curiously enough, all the moves that have taken place, like going to Farsley, were all to do with production techniques. *Emmerdale* developed this perception of being quite dull for a very long time, which was nothing to do with the storylines, which were actually quite brisk, it was the production techniques which were forced on them. There was a separate energy for the OB and an energy for the studio and they were both totally separate and there was sort of stop start feel. Now we shoot much more in continuity we can afford to do it single camera. Multi-camera set-ups are quite frankly twenty years out of date.

The thing I always kept quoting was that we've got to somehow get to the stage which *Brookside* has. We were always bedevilled with opening a door and there's a dreadful backdrop. Nothing would ever persuade me that the sophisticated audiences of today would believe that was the exterior. Whether the viewer was conscious of it or not, there was a restriction in the enjoyment because they were not getting a true picture.'

In other respects, Keith Richardson is also pressing for a move towards a style of production which is closer to film.

'My next personal hobby horse is to get rid of rehearsals. To have Annie Sugden, who has done it for twenty-one years, rehearsing a line like "I'll put the kettle on" is a complete waste of time. In film you don't rehearse. There will always be occasions when you introduce a new actor, but other than that I think that spending days in rehearsal is just a waste of time. So why not rehearse it *in situ*, more of a film style of shooting.'



While it performs consistently, *Emmerdale* has never been in the same league as the leading soaps in winning ratings, a fact of which the executive producer is keenly aware.

'Seven o'clock is actually an exceedingly volatile time. A lot of people are still having their tea and in the South a lot of people aren't even at home at seven o'clock. You can also be more adventurous with storylines, and at seven-thirty people have started to settle down for the evening. If you look at other shows in the seven o'clock time-frame, the seesaw is astronomical, and yet *Emmerdale* is actually consistent. In the case of *Emmerdale*, it follows local programmes which nobody watches. If you look at the figures in London it goes from something like 800,000 viewers up to about four million. We are also happy that all that we've done in changing the perception of the programme has actually been successful and we have actually picked up a younger audience and even more important from an advertisers point of view an AB audience. A lot of problems that faced ITV as a whole, not just *Emmerdale* was that the audience was getting older and older and more and more down market and we actually increased it substantially.

We're a federated system and each station has to satisfy its audience and if for whatever reason we weren't doing that in London there was a complete antipathy towards the programme. So it was really quite important, certainly before the new system came into place, that we were able to be turning its perception around. I think that we've done that and we'd like to continue to build on that. I think we've saved the day in London currently. If we continue to deliver with *Emmerdale*, we'll be all right.

You may well find that in order to make sure that London audiences actually appreciate the programme there may well be people who speak with a more southern accent maybe previously. And that's not cynical, that's actually not an unreasonable way of making sure that there's something there for people in London to watch. Everybody likes to see what they're comfortable with on television.'

With the introduction of the new system of central scheduling, there was a very real possibility that *Emmerdale* might not be recommissioned by the network. The decision to recommission was therefore greeted with considerable relief. The stability that comes with the production of a continuing serial for the network offers considerable stability in the new competitive broadcasting environment. As a result, *Emmerdale* is increasingly important to Yorkshire Television.

'There was a time when we had guaranteed hours of access, but we no longer have that so we are now in competitive a situation where at least twice a week we know we make a programme that we make some profit out of and that profit we then use to put into other productions. If you like it's a springboard out of which everything else happens.'

Under the former networking arrangements, by which companies were allotted a certain number of hours of network exposure, some executives resented the considerable commitment of network hours to serial drama.



‘Under the old system, that was quite a disadvantage if you had a guaranteed number of hours and half of them were taken up with a soap it limited your horizons quite substantially. Now of course, it’s absolutely the reverse. While you can keep a production base and have some, however small guaranteed profit out of *Emmerdale*, it allows us to expand into other things, so it has turned round if you like from being a sort of albatross to being our major production.’

With its immediate future secure, there was sufficient confidence to speak of extending the production of *Emmerdale*.

‘It’s our flagship and we’d like to get it up to three days a week like everybody else, and that’s another reason for making the production process slicker. We will make the suggestion and we will cost it very carefully. If we get it three times a week we can probably offer that cheaper than somebody else could come in with half an hour of drama. If you can amortise the costs over three multiplied by fifty-two weeks a year you can actually make it at comparatively reasonable cost. We could actually reach a fairly guaranteed audience much more cheaply.’

Meanwhile, over twenty years since the introduction of *Emmerdale Farm* as a lunchtime serial, Yorkshire Television confirmed its commitment to the soap opera form in submitting a proposal to the network for a fifteen minute weekday serial, *Runswick Bay*, set in a small seaside community on the North Yorkshire coast. Devised by an Australian, Geoffrey Newton, a former script editor on *Neighbours* and previously on *A Country Practice* and *The Sullivans*, it was intended to have something of the flavour of *Home and Away*, blended with the feel of *Emmerdale*, and no doubt also subject to the local climatic constraints. Ironically, a successful commission would bring the wheel full circle, since Yorkshire Television’s first ‘soap’ was also set in a seaside community, *Castle Haven*, written by Kevin Laffan who went on to create *Emmerdale Farm*.

## Network controller

VERNON LAWRENCE was appointed controller of drama and entertainment for the ITV network at the end of 1992. His career began in 1959 as a studio manager in BBC radio light entertainment, later moving to television as a producer and director of comedy and light entertainment. He joined Yorkshire Television in 1979 as an executive producer, responsible for a string of successful situation comedies. As controller of entertainment from 1985 he was also responsible for popularising the hour-long comedy drama series format. One of his most notable successes was commissioning the highly successful pastoral comedy series *The Darling Buds of May*, based on the H. E. Bates books. As a network controller, with an annual budget of up to £250m, he became responsible for the much of ITV’s prime time schedule.



In Britain, soap operas play an important part in forming the platform of the weekday evening schedule. In America, this function has traditionally been fulfilled by comedy. Having himself produced popular situation comedies, Vernon Lawrence suggests that this is largely because of the way that American sit-coms are generally a team product. With perhaps eight writers contributing to each episode, runs of thirteen or even twenty-six weeks are possible. In contrast, British sitcoms have typically been produced in runs of six or seven. As a result it can be difficult to build comedy. Soap operas, on the other hand, are structured in such a way as to sustain audience loyalty.

'They have usurped comedy and in the last decade or so they have grown phenomenally, becoming extremely popular with the audience. A really good soap is the cornerstone of the schedule. It is the beginning of the evening and it's where you desperately try and capture an audience. All scheduling is really based on inheritance or hammocking. If you start the evening, speaking for ITV, with *Coronation Street*, you're going to regularly, week in week out, month in month out, year in year out, get an audience of about 17 million at the beginning of the evening which means that whatever you put on afterwards there's a *potentially* enormous audience there. So therefore the following programme, in theory should inherit that enormous audience.'

The size of the audiences which such programmes deliver makes them a key part of the scheduling strategy.

'What is important is to hold on to those audiences, and what we should start doing is develop more during daytime broadcasting so that should the unthinkable happen and we lose one of those then at least we've got something we're nurturing out of peak.'

Given their popularity, the makers of such programmes recognise that they are in a relatively strong bargaining position. On the other hand, the position of *Emmerdale* remains rather more precarious.

'Well, *Emmerdale* is a different show to *The Bill* and *Coronation Street*, in so much that it doesn't achieve the audiences that the other two do. *Emmerdale* still suffers a bit: the perception is of being about Yorkshiremen wearing wellingtons behind stone walls shagging sheep—sadly. In fact that's what Keith Richardson's fighting desperately to try and drag it away from. As yet it hasn't dragged its audience to the degree that they have changed it. The audience profile is changing, but is not changing dramatically. So when you're talking about *The Bill* you're talking about an audience of 15-16 million. With *Coronation Street* you're talking about an audience of 17 million. With *Emmerdale* you're only talking about an audience of 11 million, which suddenly makes it much more vulnerable. It's under threat because the southern companies have never liked it. It's never performed as well in the South as in the North. It hasn't *travelled* in the same way that *Coronation Street* has.'

The threat to *Emmerdale* is that another programme performing in that slot might achieve an equivalent or possibly even larger audience. However, the experience of a serial such as *Eldorado*, despite a considerable investment by the



BBC, illustrates that no early evening programme is automatically guaranteed a large audience.

‘That’s the terrible, terrible gamble. That was the mistake made when ATV dropped *Crossroads*. There was *Crossroads*, three nights a week, it was a standing joke as far as its production values and performances were concerned. On the other hand it delivered a regular ten million, three times a week, which meant that an awful lot of people were getting a great deal of satisfaction out of that production, despite what the pundits and the writers might say. So you have to think extraordinarily long and hard before you make that decision.’

It is not simply the size of the audience which is important, it is also the nature of the audience.

‘Soaps generate large audiences therefore advertising revenue becomes very important, but the audience profile of *The Bill* will be distinct and different to the audience profile of *Coronation Street* and the audience profile of *Coronation Street* will be different from the audience that *Emmerdale* attracts. *Emmerdale* is desperately going for a young audience. They’ve just done a very scurrilous advertising campaign, purely to appeal to young people. That’s what they’re after. So you’ve got these different soaps with three totally different audience profiles. So although they are there to get big audiences and to set off an evening’s viewing, they also have their own individual attributes. ITV’s problem at the moment is firstly attracting sufficient young people and secondly attracting sufficient ABs. That’s what we’re after.’

ITV has also been very successful in the field of quality popular drama, especially with series of two hour episodes expensively shot on film, an area in which it achieved notable successes at the expense of the BBC. Soap opera is simply one element in the schedule.

‘I can’t see us doing another soap. It would totally unbalance the evening. We still have to have a very varied and very rich schedule which contains a certain amount of documentary material and current affairs, certainly comedy, certainly a lot of drama. Apart from soaps, the huge audiences that we deliver at the moment are by virtue of very strong drama output. One thing the BBC pride themselves on at the moment they aren’t delivering. So soap would never take over a whole schedule, would never take over a whole evening. Its part of a rich mix.’



## Summary

In talking to television professionals, it quickly becomes apparent that they seem to have very little idea of how soap operas actually work. Although there is a clear understanding of what works, there is comparatively little concern with why or how it works. The production process is highly proceduralised, but almost all the rules are unwritten. Professional assumptions are based on instinct and training, institutionalised over the years in the combined experience of those working in the industry.

Television, unlike literature, theatre or even cinema, has no real tradition of serious criticism. Among television professionals, there is a considerable suspicion of academic analysis. This is perhaps understandable in view of some work on television which is often heavy in its use of theoretical jargon and light in its understanding of production practice. With those involved in producing soap opera, there is an understandable defensiveness at the suggestion that the narrative construction is formulaic. However, the genre is of necessity demonstrably dependent upon the rigid requirements of continuous production. Many of the formal features of soap opera are a product both of the production schedule and the programme schedule. Some of these organising structures are acknowledged, but to a large extent they are taken for granted.

Although there is clear sense of moral responsibility, and a desire to address important and often controversial social issues in a balanced manner, there does not appear to be a widespread concern about the function of soap operas. It is not particularly clear why these people work so hard to tell these stories. While there is a certain professional pride in the product, the programmes themselves do not appear to be considered as being of particular cultural importance. While they might be respected for their craft, writers are apparently not held in high esteem. They simply service the demands of continuous output.

In contrast, there appears to be a clear understanding of the function of the continuing drama serial as part of a scheduling strategy. The main concern with the audience is in terms of numbers watching. The audience is respected, but only in case they turn off. Changes to the programme are concerned almost exclusively strategic and concerned with product positioning.

This awareness of audience demographics is increasingly acute in a new era of more commercially competitive television. Where soaps were once somewhat resented because they prevented producers from creating something original of



their own, there is now an increasing reliance upon them simply to do business. As a staple television commodity, there seems to be no anxiety that there will always be a market for soap.

**Interviews**

Kevin Laffan	21 August 1992
Derek Bennett	31 August 1992
Morag Bain	10 July 1992
Keith Richardson	26 March 1993
Vernon Lawrence	26 February 1993



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# Summary and Conclusions

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Television is an immensely important medium. It occupies a large part of our lives. On average we each watch television for about one full day a week. In comparison we go to the cinema on average about twice a year. Our exposure to television is such that to a certain extent television mediates our experience of the external social world. Beyond our direct perception, a great deal of our world knowledge is now acquired through television. Through fact and fiction, television apparently presents us with a window on the wider world, but it is not a transparent window. While it often purports to represent contemporary social reality, it is important to understand that the view through this window is carefully constructed.

Television is a much maligned and misunderstood medium. While extensive research is undertaken into the alleged influence of television, comparatively little study has been devoted to how it is actually understood. The most fundamental question is often ignored: what does watching television involve? This is an enormously complex question to which it is unreasonable to expect immediate answers, but the inquiry may elucidate questions about the effect that television has on viewers.

The comprehension of the television text has been studied mainly with respect to children. Television literacy has often been seen in prescriptive terms that are not distinguished from preconceptions about what constitutes worthwhile viewing. There is a high prestige placed on print literacy and literature in our culture and there has been an anxiety that television is responsible for eroding standards of verbal literacy. Much uneasiness about the influence of television has been based on the inaccurate assumption that viewing is a passive process. The literacy that is involved in viewing television has been largely overlooked. While fundamental differences between words and images must be acknowledged, there are certain similarities in the perception of audio-visual narratives with the reading process.



## Moving pictures

The moving picture is a powerful means of communication. Many of our preconceptions about the moving image derive from the medium of film. The ability to communicate in moving pictures is scarcely a century old. It is wholly dependent upon some form of technological apparatus.

In studying communication, it is useful to distinguish between the technology of transmission and the process of signification. Each of these areas has its own field of theory. Information theory and engineering theories of communication are concerned with transmission of a signal from a transmitter to a receiver by means of a channel. Semiotics is concerned with the nature of the sign and the relationship between that which signifies and that which is signified. These two fields have been kept apart by the disciplinary divide between science and art, but in fact they are intimately related. The study of the communication process necessarily involves an understanding of the nature of both the signal and the sign, that is both the transmission and the production of meaning. At both levels, communication can be seen to be coded.

Language is the basis of both the transmission and the production of meaning in much human communication. Written language allows human communication to be recorded, manipulated and transmitted through time and space and be received by any number of individuals. The technology required to support this has developed from papyrus to the printing press.

The phenomenon of moving pictures is based upon perceptual illusions. Moving images require some form of technology in order to be recorded, manipulated, transmitted and received. The first medium that made this possible was photographic film and this remains the privileged form. Electronic technology has since made moving picture communication possible without film, enabling instant transmission. There is a prevalent and persistent assumption that the film image is inherently superior to the electronic image. While this may have been valid in the past, there is nothing intrinsic in the electronic image to suggest that this will continue to be the case in the future. New technologies can improve the definition of electronic moving image reproduction to subjectively equal that of film.

However, the realism of the image is not simply related to the size and quality of the image on the screen. Realism is not necessarily dependent upon resolution or the technology of transmission. Realism is in the eye of the beholder and is



related to all sorts of expectations in the perceiver. It can be seen to be dependent upon the fidelity of reproduction made possible by the communications system and the perceived relationship of the reproduction to empirical reality.

All communication involves a process of encoding and decoding. In the case of film, this process is entirely analogue. There is a direct relationship between the image on the film and the subject that produced it. Until recently, electronic communication systems employed analogue coding because of its comparative simplicity. The development of digital systems offers a number of advantages over analogue coding. In the digital domain, continuous quantities are sampled and represented as discrete elements in a digital code. Different data types, such as words, images, and sounds can all be reduced to the same digital code. Consideration of the digital domain demonstrates the degree to which all communication can be coded.

The digital image is fundamentally different to the analogue photographic image. It stands in an entirely different relation to reality. It is a model of reality that can be manipulated and synthesised mathematically. It is also possible to create a virtual reality that has no previous empirical existence. For the first time, it is now technologically possible to create this representation interactively in real time. The apparently stable relationship between the sign and the referent, guaranteed by the analogue nature of photographic reproduction, appears to have collapsed.

Yet this simply demonstrates the degree to which all media can construct and encode their own reality. Filmic construction involves the combination of material to create a representation of a separate empirical reality. There may be an attempt to render the construction in such a way that it reflects reality, or it can represent its own creative reality. Animation can be used to create a representation that has no precedent in empirical reality. Realism is produced by the adherence to particular conventions that allow the construction of a representation that is internally consistent, coherent and to a certain degree credible. Realism is therefore a relative term.

## **Film language**

One of the most compelling metaphors for film has been that of language. Just as language is employed in literature to create narratives, so there has arisen a conventional system that allows narrative representations in moving pictures. The classical film style developed in response to the need for routinised production.



There are certain codes of filmic construction that grew up out of custom and practice and a conscious attempt to divine the rules of filmmaking. This led to the emergence of prescriptive manuals that essentially described the continuity system of shooting and editing. There is some psychological foundation for this system, which serves to guarantee the consistent and coherent representation of spatial and temporal relationships and so assist in comprehension. Failure to observe certain principles of construction can result in ambiguities, hindering the representation of the coherent and consistent narrative that is the goal of classical cinema. The procedures of the continuity system are universally recognised by practitioners, to the extent that it provides the basic grammar of filmic construction.

The notion of film language was originally used by early theorists and practitioners as a loose analogy, among other metaphors for the construction of film. Subsequently there was a conscious and concerted attempt to dignify film theory by applying a rigorous linguistic method to the study of film. The importance of this structural linguistic approach was primarily in recognising the complexity of the relationship between the image and that which it represents. The failure to find a grammar of film was a result of fundamental differences between the nature of words and images. A shot cannot be equated with a word. Ultimately, the similarities of images and words were insufficient to sustain a theoretical comparison with language. The inevitable conclusion was that there is not a language of moving pictures as such.

In a more general sense, it is the narrative arrangement of moving pictures that allows certain analogies with language, since language is used to construct narratives. A narrative sequence of images involves structure at the level of discourse, beyond linguistic analysis, which can only deal with language up to the level of the sentence, the highest order of grammatical unit. The practical failure of an attempt to define a typology of narrative shot structures was perhaps a result of too close an adherence to the model of structural linguistics. However, the undeniable importance of the enterprise was in seeking to examine certain general narrative structures that can be found in feature films. The basic distinctions made which relate to spatial and temporal organisation remain useful and important.

As a result of a failure to find a true language in film, many theorists went on to develop more metaphorical approaches. One such tendency was towards a psychoanalytic model, based on the proposition that the unconscious is structured like a language. As a result, much film theory became increasingly divorced from questions of perception and cognition. It is now necessary to restore theoretical



analysis from the realms of psychiatry to the psychology of perception. It is no longer adequate to base such considerations on the photo-mechanical medium of film. The modern moving image is increasingly electronic.

## **Video literacy**

The notion of video literacy is introduced as another approach to the question of the language of moving pictures. Instead of seeking to define a medium in terms of language and linguistics, video literacy refers to the comprehension skills involved in viewing. These basic skills are normally acquired at an early age in a similar way to spoken language and become completely subconscious and automatic.

Video literacy can be seen as a competence, or the knowledge that an individual possesses about the underlying organisational systems of screen media. Rather than looking for superficial structural similarities between the organisation of words and images, there may be deeper similarities at the level of cognition. This raises the possibility that the putative language of moving pictures may owe something to broader cognitive universals and may go some way to explaining how video competence is acquired. Viewing motion pictures actually demands considerable cognitive skills. Rather than a passive response to a stimulus, viewing can be seen to be an active intellectual process through which meaning is constructed.

Television can be approached as a text that is read by the viewer, and video literacy can be seen as the skill involved. Although there may be a grammar of visual construction, this cannot completely account for comprehension. Grammar can only describe organisation at a very local level. At the textual level of discourse, one of the most important organisational systems is narrative structure. This is a deep structure that operates beneath the surface structure of a particular language and is therefore to an extent medium independent.

Narrative provides a way of structuring and sustaining sequences. In moving picture media, narrative sustains from shot to shot, scene to scene, and episode to episode. Narrative structure does not simply involve a chain of causal connections. It requires structural relationships to be sustained, not just over the transition from one shot to the next, but throughout a text and possibly between texts. In the case of a continuing narrative, this may require the maintenance of a narrative structure of a period of days, weeks, months, or even years.



Clearly this requires some form of memory. Viewing constantly makes reference to a mental retrieval system, which stores previously encountered information about the organisation of the narrative world, together with general information about the organisation of the real world. Comprehension is achieved through the interaction of new narrative information with previously stored knowledge.

Our understanding of the organisation of memory systems has been clarified by work in the field of cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence, and the computer modelling of language. Memory models can be seen as being schematic, employing schema structures that have variously been described as frames, scripts or stories.

Viewing a narrative can be seen as an active schema-driven inductive process of hypothesis formation and testing. Narratives are generally constructed in such a way as to encourage the formulation of certain hypotheses. The comprehension of narrative emerges from the overwhelming desire of the perceiver to seek to find coherence in a text. An automatic attempt is made to attribute relevance and assign some form of structural organisation to the material. Where a narrative structure can be imposed, the text can be seen as portraying an event, or telling a story.

Motion pictures involve certain media-specific formal features for narrative construction. Cuts between shots provide strong cues to generate inferences about the construction of space, time and causality. It is proposed that this initially functions at a local level. On a change of shot, there is an attempt to attribute a new image as relevant to the context of the current scene. If this fails, a new scene may be assumed and an attempt is made to attribute the image as relevant to a preceding context. It is suggested that the viewer interacts with the text in a procedural fashion, attempting to assign new information to that which is already given. The storage of this information requires a high degree of generalisation, such that the viewer recalls the essence, rather than the detail of previously encountered information.

The shot is a formal unit, a fundamental building block. Shots generally cohere into scenes. The term scene is a screenplay convention derived from the theatre. A scene may be considered as a sense unit or local context. It is therefore a semantic as well as a material division, and for this reason can be difficult to define objectively. The boundaries of a scene are to a degree indeterminate, provisional, and subject to revision in view of subsequent narrative information.



Scenes may be thought of as narrative building blocks. Scenes may be nested within other scenes to suggest simultaneity or parallelism. The division into scenes is often signalled by certain boundary markers and the sound-track makes a key contribution. It is necessary for a viewer to recognise scenes and correctly identify their boundaries to make sense of the text. Every viewer will be familiar with the experience of incorrectly judging whether a new scene has begun. Usually this will be as a result of a deliberate ploy by the director for some dramatic effect. Subsequent information generally resolves this ambiguity and re-orientates the viewer. If the viewer is unable to segment a sequence correctly into appropriate chunks the material may become incomprehensible.

Video literacy can be seen as a viewing competence employed in applying certain procedures of comprehension in response to particular cues. The video text is a coded message that the receiver is constantly engaged in attempting to decode. It can be seen as a set of cues for procedures the viewer is expected to perform. The programme is therefore like a computer program, causing the execution of a set of instructions. Therefore, in analysing a text, it is neither accurate nor adequate to attempt to describe content. There must also be an awareness of the formal processes by which meaning is produced.

## Television texture

Much of our understanding about the nature of the moving image is drawn from film theory. With its longer history and higher cultural status, film is much better theorised than television. Largely because of its pretension to elevate film to the status of an art, film theory echoes literary theory and is generally concerned with high culture rather than popular entertainment. There has been a tendency to study the canonical classic rather than the contemporary blockbuster. In comparison, television theory is currently inadequate and not sufficiently distinguished from film theory. There is little adequate theory of some of the most popular televisual genres.

Film and television are different media, not so much in their technology, but in their mode of consumption. The fundamental differences between film and television narratives stem not from the nature of the image, but from the manner in which they are consumed and the relation of the medium to the audience. Different technologies and economic systems of distribution have led to different forms of production.



The very nature of television output makes it resistant to conventional critical strategies. The extensiveness of open-ended forms implies that it is difficult to delimit the text that is the object of critical inquiry. The ephemeral nature of the output means that the complete text is not available for study in the public domain. Video recording allows the preservation of a sample of output, but there is no systematic archive to which one can easily refer. The absence of a published recorded text renders normal scholarly activity almost impossible as there is no common body of reference.

Television can be considered as a temporal text. A text exhibits texture, which exists in the referential elements that connect it as coherent discourse. The derivation of the words text and texture suggests something that is woven. In the dynamic medium of motion pictures, space and time are woven through the text.

To be understood, a text must be read. Every text contains cues that cause the reader to make certain inferences and connections. There is a relative but restricted freedom with which these inferences can be drawn. This allows certain readings to be rejected as misreadings. Every viewer may receive a slightly different impression, but viewers will generally be able to agree on certain interpretations. This makes it possible for the television text to communicate meaning.

In attending to a text, the viewer may mark off material into shots and scenes. This segmentation is something that is intuitively and automatically performed by the viewer in attempting to make sense of the material. Formal divisions are made with reference to content and meaning. It is not possible to divorce form from content. Formal structure is a system of organising content. It does not exist in its own right.

In its structural organisation, the television text has a particular texture. Unlike the tight causal construction of classic cinema, the television viewing experience is very fragmented. The television text is highly segmented, often with only loose cohesion between segments. Yet it is not enough to dismiss television output as unconnected flow. Television clearly makes some kind of sense, otherwise it would presumably not be watched by viewers in their millions.

To avoid making sweeping generalisations about the nature of television output, it is necessary to look in detail at one or more forms that are typical of television. This will elucidate something, not only about that particular form, but also about television texts in general.



Television has an in-built bias towards serial forms. This is determined by the economics of production, the system of distribution and the predictable nature of the behaviour of mass audiences. The continuing drama serial or soap opera is a narrative form that is unique to broadcasting and is therefore a candidate for special study.

Soap operas are tele-texts *par excellence*. Soaps embody many of the formal features of television already identified. The continuing drama serial embodies many of the contradictions between film theory and television theory. Much of film theory is based on critical approaches to literature, hence the search for an equivalent to language in film. Film theory is oriented towards the study of closed texts. Classical cinema narratives have a tight causal organisation that moves towards closure and is therefore highly coherent. Unity and coherence are aesthetic qualities that are generally expected from an artwork. The narrative segmentation that is typical of the continuing drama serial subverts the impression of causality or a guiding narration. Coherence and consistency appear to derive instead from the creation of a credible textual world.

Forms such as the continuous soap opera are particularly resistant to critical interpretation because they deny the possibility of narrative closure. The scale of production also requires an industrial approach that minimises the contribution of the writer and director and so denies established critical approaches. In their extensiveness, soap operas appear to lie almost beyond conventional critical analysis.

One approach to the soap opera text lies in the concept of genre. Through a set of common characteristics, a genre sets up systems of expectations and creates a degree of predictability. This can play an important part as a labelling device in the marketing of popular fiction. Genres allow useful generalisations to be made about groups of texts. A genre is not simply a critical device. Knowledge of a genre can be seen as part of a reader's competence in coming to a text.

## Soap opera

The soap opera continuing drama serial is one of the most interesting and important television genres. Continuing drama serials are among the most popular programmes on television. Any understanding of television as a text must address the popularity of the continuing serial drama or soap opera. As a narrative form, the soap opera is unique to broadcasting. Just as the fictional feature film emerged



as the pre-eminent application of the cinema, so the continuing serial has emerged as one of the dominant forms of television entertainment.

Soap operas have a long history, starting in the thirties on American radio as an application of a new commercial medium. Originally designed as a support for advertising sponsorship, these serial dramas were intended to involve the audience and to build loyalty, both to the programme and to the sponsor's brand. At the time, the target audience was composed largely of housewives and many early critics were disdainfully dismissive of the form, establishing a stigma that to a certain extent continues. In the transition to television that followed, many of the same individuals and institutions were involved in production, giving rise to strong similarities in the form, although the technique of explicit narration was discontinued. In the visual medium, the conventions of classic cinema were adopted and adapted. Gradually, television rose in importance and displaced daytime radio drama. The slow dramatic pace of the soap opera was ill-suited to the prime time world of the action and adventure drama series. Instead, elements of the soap opera structure, especially the multi-threaded narrative, were absorbed and assimilated to create hybrid forms. Where the American soap opera has tended more towards escapism and fantasy, the British soap opera has developed within a tradition of a more documentary style of social realism. This may be partly for institutional reasons because of the original historical development of British broadcasting as a public service non-commercial medium. This tradition was assimilated in the duopoly days of independent television, but in the era of deregulation and satellite television, the distinction is narrowing.

Given the differences and divergences that can be found, there is a real difficulty in reaching a formal definition of soap opera, although most viewers intuitively recognise a soap when they see it. This difficulty of definition is common to all generic classifications. Membership of a genre can perhaps be best considered schematically, as a range of qualifying features, none of which is either necessary or sufficient. The most important defining characteristic of the continuing drama serial is the conception of an unending continuous narrative. This is a unique and somewhat ambiguous narrative form, subverting the general structure of narrative, which tends to be organised towards an ultimate resolution. It is often said that stories should have a beginning, a middle, and an ending. Soap opera, it seems, is concerned only with the middle.

The continuous nature of the soap opera has important consequences. One of the features of soap opera is the tendency towards redundancy and recapitulation.



According to traditional aesthetics, this is seen as inartistic. On the other hand, soaps are extremely complex, because of their epic temporal scope. The soap is an episodic epic. The lack of final resolution, and the avoidance of presenting a particular point of view, result in an 'open' form of narrative that is open to multiple interpretations and therefore has many levels of appeal.

Narrative continuity provides strong support to a sense of realism. The sense of reality that is frequently felt by members of the audience is much derided. The quotidian continuity of the soap opera extends the willing suspension of disbelief. It is not so much that the events portrayed are themselves recognised as real, on the contrary, they are highly constructed. It is more that they are felt to be real. In contrast to the coherence of the classic realist text, soaps present parallel narrative worlds that appear to co-exist in tandem with the lives of the audience. This lies at the heart of the special sense of involvement that is felt.

The soap has customarily been defined and discussed in terms of a predominantly female audience. This has formed the basis of much of the literature on the subject, which has largely been responsible for a certain critical rehabilitation of the genre. In the British context, soap opera reaches a rather more broadly based audience, partly as a result of being scheduled in the early evening. As a result, it should not necessarily be considered as an exclusively feminine form of fiction. The formal features of soap opera are closely related to the nature of the broadcast medium.

There are structural reasons why the continuing narrative is so prevalent. It is perfectly suited to the requirements of the television medium to attract a large and loyal audience. Soap opera is a powerful scheduling tool in the search for ratings. In Britain there is currently more soap on our screens than ever. There is a real danger that a saturation point might be reached. The British broadcasting environment has until recently been under strict regulatory control that has cultivated a public service commitment. This is now changing. Ultimately, it will be the economic environment of television that will determine the survival of so many brands of soap. The nature of the marketplace will determine what genres and forms continue to be successful.

The future of the continuing drama serial is only assured for as long as there is nothing more efficient at delivering a stable and predictable audience. Television genres, like fashions, move in certain trends. Programmers are always looking for the next big thing. There is an example in the experience of American radio, which saw the almost total demise of the daytime drama serial when the medium



was overtaken by television. More recently, the so-called super-soaps rose to dominance, but their reign seems to have been eclipsed. Even the future of network television itself is not as secure as some would like to believe. The consistent lesson of the development of communications media is that new technologies assimilate previous technologies and their forms.

It is almost inevitable that the dominance of terrestrial television will eventually be challenged. New forms of distribution such as video, satellite and cable are already eroding the importance of terrestrial television. The broadcast television audience will inevitably fragment as more delivery channels become available. Although new technology will facilitate new media forms, there is nothing to suggest that the continuous narrative will disappear. There is every indication that the demand for narrative entertainment will continue. Narrative appears to be a particular way of organising our understanding of experience. This goes deeper than particular media, or cultures, and is related to the way in which we use language as a means of communication.

## Soap viewers

Any analysis of the soap opera form must address the way in which it is intimately related to the requirement to deliver a large and loyal audience. The soap opera exists primarily because of the economic foundation of the television medium.

The original radio soaps were directed at a housewife audience. There has been an abiding assumption that, because of their historical origins, television soap operas tend to be watched mostly by women. This myth persists, partly because men are apparently particularly reluctant to admit to watching soaps, but they do. There is also an inaccurate elitist assumption that soap operas are only watched by other people. This attitude is particularly prevalent among many academics that have examined the phenomenon. Soap has not been seen as a literate form. Although the appetite for soap opera is seen as indicative of a lack of discrimination, audiences vote with their viewing figures. In the case of British networked serials, it can be shown that the composition of the audience is similar to that for television in general.

The broadcasting industry has developed highly sophisticated statistical procedures for measuring the size of the audience at any one time. This detailed quantitative audience research defines the currency of the commercial television industry. This information feeds back into the scheduling process and effectively



ensures that programming is geared to delivering large, predictable audiences. Soaps are ideal, because their continuing narratives create loyal viewers. Predictable programmes help to produce predictable audiences.

Most research into television viewing is restricted to who watches what and when, with little consideration for how and why. There is comparatively little research done into how people consume and comprehend television. Although the data is available, there is little incentive to analyse the viewing behaviour of individuals. Such information could even be counterproductive for the industry.

An examination of an evening schedule in terms of audience ratings can reveal something about television as a planned flow of programming. In Britain, the soap opera schedule has evolved to spread across the evening in such a way that serials are not in direct competition for an audience. Soaps represent a cost-effective means of delivering ratings. In the commercial sector they generate vastly more revenue than they cost to produce. As a result they are not dependent upon export income and so can remain regional in outlook.

Ratings figures are generally concerned with viewers who are only differentiated according to age, sex and social grade. Yet the television audience is not a monolithic mass and it is incorrect to continue to think of a single massive, passive audience. The notion of video literacy recognises the response of the individual viewer. The sheer scale of the soap opera audience is staggering. Among the millions of individual viewers, across the social spectrum, popular drama serials provide an unprecedented shared narrative experience. Irrespective of their intrinsic artistic merit, this must make them culturally important.

## Emmerdale

Taken as a case study, the history of a long-running television serial like *Emmerdale* is instructive. Like *The Archers*, the longest running radio serial, it is a rural drama and there is a certain continuity with the tradition of the original radio soaps. As a daytime serial that moved to prime time, it is unique. *Emmerdale* has changed significantly over the years, as have other serials. Over more than two decades, it has demonstrated a gradual shift away from the single authorial voice and has become the product of an industrial system of production. At the same time it has tended to move more towards the conventions of soap opera. There has also been a tendency to drift away from working class origins, a move that was also found in the development of other serials. This partly reflects a process of wider social change, but it is also indicative of what might be called a



bourgeois bias in television. There is a desire among those connected with the programme to see characters rise in status. There is also an apparent preference among viewers to see characters who are slightly more prosperous. Commercial pressures upon the programme to deliver an audience that is more attractive to advertisers have also prompted profound changes. As a result, the serial is now a very different animal. There are more young characters and the pace is faster, with more cutting between narrative threads.

No claim can be made for the excellence of *Emmerdale*. As a programme it is competent rather than outstanding, but it is interesting for being mediocre rather than the exceptional. *Emmerdale* is in many ways a typical soap. There is an inevitable tendency that all soaps will tend to look the same to some extent, because they are all in competition. Production personnel move from serial to serial, resulting in a certain homogenisation of style. The continuing success of the serial has been secured by confident investment in resources. The industrialisation of production has been assisted by the move to a self-contained production base that effectively provides a soap factory. The production schedule is crucially important in determining the structure of the serial in terms of practical considerations such as the proportion of exterior scenes.

Unlike serials that are shot on an exterior lot, the fictional world of *Emmerdale* is an elaborate construction, using both studio production and various location settings. While it gains authenticity from the use of real exteriors, and has the enormous advantage of a picturesque scenic setting, there is not such a strong sense of space, since the geographic relationships are less clearly defined. More recently, as a result of finding a new location for the farm, there has been a move towards a greater use of location shooting which has considerably increased the impression of realism.

Any attempt to analyse the narrative itself quickly encounters the difficulty of dealing with a continuing story that has been running for more than two decades. It is almost impossible to see where one narrative thread begins and another ends. In soap opera, it is often the case that one thing leads to another. Many viewers may have watched a serial, either regularly or irregularly, for many years and may therefore bring considerable prior knowledge of the narrative to their viewing. This knowledge will vary from viewer to viewer. For any individual episode, part of the potential meaning resides in its relationship to the preceding episodes and part of the meaning that is derived from it depends upon prior knowledge that is brought to bear upon it.



## Formal method

The difficulty in studying soap opera has already been identified. Apart from the question of defining the genre, there is the difficulty in defining the object of study. The extent of the continuing serial text is problematic. The interpretation of the narrative is dependent upon the accretion of sedimentary layers of meaning. Can a single episode be representative of a serial, or is a serial the sum of its preceding parts, and if so should this also include succeeding episodes?

One traditional empirical approach to mass media research has been the technique of content analysis. This quantitative method involves counting the occurrences of certain events in order to make comparisons. However, this assumes that content can be divorced from context and form. Content analysis can be criticised as continuing a behaviourist stimulus-response theory of the perception of complex media messages. The perception of the media can no longer be understood to be a reflex reaction or a passive process. The meaning of a programme is carried through its form. Form is a guide to decoding and is itself a significant element of the message.

One of the errors of traditional analyses of moving picture media is that some form of transcription is inevitably involved. Invariably, the apparent content of moving pictures is translated into words, a medium in which the critic feels more comfortable. Similar problems exist with the study of music or ballet, but these art forms have developed sophisticated conventions and systems of notation. In comparison, the language of television criticism is vague and impressionistic.

The method of formal analysis proposed is a quantitative, statistical approach that focuses on the formal features of a particular programme, genre or medium. The attempt at a statistical stylistic analysis follows the precedent of computational stylistics in musical and literary studies. Television is a time-based medium. The perception of the television text is constrained by the way in which it unfolds in time. Moving pictures are presented at a predetermined rate and this affects the way in which they are viewed. Fortunately, the temporal dimension can be conveniently and objectively measured. It is therefore surprising that so little work has been done in this area.

Questions about the duration of a shot, its type, function, and what will follow are among the principal concerns of the director and therefore are relevant and legitimate objects of study. This allows certain comparisons to be made between different episodes and programmes at a technical and stylistic level. Such an



approach offers a quantitative technique upon which to base qualitative conclusions. It avoids some of the behaviourist assumptions of traditional content analysis and is consistent with reception theories of comprehension.

The segmentation into shots and scenes reflects the viewer's primary contact with the formal structure of the text. This segmentation is partly a requirement of the industrial system of production, partly a requirement of the necessity for narrative compression and the need to manipulate the representation of space and time. The construction of a continuing serial is considerably constrained by the practicalities of production. It must also take into account the way in which it is likely to be viewed. This places certain constraints on the formal characteristics of the text.

The linguistic approach to film language involved looking for discrete units and attempting to determine their structural relationships. Irrespective of its status as a language, television does consist of discrete units or shots of determinable duration, arranged in a specific sequence in relation to other shots. They can be characterised in various ways according to type and function. A system of notation to describe cutting sequences allows an analysis of structural patterning and provides a measure of the complexity or redundancy of the cutting. This type of formal analysis can reveal something about the structure of a programme, that is quite literally how it is put together.

Statistical approaches to style have been applied to a certain extent in looking at shot lengths in Hollywood movies. Shot lengths for serial drama are reasonably consistent with those over a century of cinema. There is apparently a characteristic distribution of shot durations within the programmes studied which is similar to that found in feature films. There is a tendency towards shorter shots, with a minority of significantly longer shots.

The method adopted for collecting and analysing shot data employs a relational database to construct an accurate description of the relationships between shots. Although there is a certain amount of labour involved in coding this data, once collected, it can be used to compare many different variables. Essentially, this creates a statistical model of the temporal construction of the television text. This allows an inductive approach to be adopted. Quantitative data can be used to demonstrate qualitative differences between programmes. An analysis of formal features allows certain generic principles to be studied. The format, the formula of a particular programme, is the mechanism, an underlying structural code, according to which further episodes are generated.



The methods used here are comparatively crude and could be profitably refined. For one thing, only the simplest level of structure is represented. In practice, the relationships between shots must be exceedingly complex. The manual logging of shot data is also labour intensive. One possibility would be the development of electronic methods of semi-automatic data capture. The technology to do this is now becoming available. A further possibility would be to correlate the time-based data about the texture of the television text with experimental observations of actual viewing behaviour. By integrating empirical viewing data with a temporal description of the formal features of the television text it may be possible to see how individual viewers respond to texts on a minute by minute or even frame by frame basis. As well as providing a potentially powerful research tool, such a technique may have a number of commercial applications within the broadcasting industry, particularly when combined with available audience research data on viewing and appreciation. Although by themselves characteristics such as shot size and duration distribution are unlikely to account for the popularity of a particular programme, an analysis of these features may determine to what extent it differs in these respects to other programmes of that genre or to what extent it has changed over a period of time.

## Formal analysis

The statistical study of a sample of episodes from four serials revealed a number of formal features of the construction of such soap operas. *Brookside*, *Coronation Street* and *Emmerdale* each had an average shot duration of around 10 seconds, while *EastEnders* was much faster-moving, with an average shot duration of around 5 seconds. However, such averages may be misleading, since shot durations are not normally distributed around the mean. In fact, the distribution appears to be approximately lognormal, peaking at around 1 to 3 seconds. The most common shot framing was the medium shot. Two-shots dominated, followed by shots framing a single figure. An important indicator of pace was the number of scenes per episode. Scenes ranged from a few seconds to over four minutes in duration. *Brookside* had the longest scenes, while *EastEnders* had the shortest. Where studio production was employed, this represented around two-thirds of the serial. The integration of the interior and exterior scenes was also significant. In the case of *EastEnders* a certain amount of trouble had been taken to knit interiors and exteriors into a seamless whole, considerably enhancing the impression of realism.



The analysis of *Emmerdale* over an extended period revealed a degree of variation between episodes. In particular, it appeared that different directors tended to break scenes down in different ways, resulting in differences in average shot length. This highlights a difficulty in drawing conclusions about certain formal features based on a comparatively restricted number of episodes. The findings can only be valid for the period under investigation. Recent changes in production practice have increased the number of scenes and the proportion of location shooting.

The television text is constructed in shots and scenes and this is also how it is encountered by the viewer. If, according to a reception theory of video literacy, the comprehension of a moving picture narrative involves a process of gap-filling, then the interstices between shots and scenes represent gaps that must be filled by processes of inference. While the number of inferences that must be made in comprehending a narrative may be indeterminate, it may be assumed that the junction between every shot and scene represents a gap that must be filled. At the most local level, spatial relationships between shots are interpreted through non-conscious processes of perception. The spatio-temporal relationships between scenes must be filled out by higher level inferences. Finally, the intervals between episodes must be bridged by retaining a complex representation of the continuing storylines in memory.

The statistical regularities found in the construction of the continuing serials studied are indicative of the degree of predictability of the form. In terms of the number of shots and scenes, locations and characters, one episode of a soap is rather similar to another, and to a lesser extent the serials resemble each other. Such factors, which may be largely due to the practicalities of continuous production, are part of the generic system. Popular fiction is generally produced according to particular formulae. Although relatively banal, production factors, such as the average scene length, constitute part of the formula.

Soap opera was selected for study because it was symptomatic of certain tendencies in television and because of its popularity. The approach employed here could also be adapted and applied to other areas of output, such as television news, which is also in a sense a continuing narrative. This would undoubtedly raise different theoretical problems, but it might provide a more sophisticated addition to traditional techniques of content analysis. The application of a statistical study of the structure of a broad spectrum of television output would be



necessary to determine how far features such as shot lengths vary across genres and how far certain characteristics are peculiar to soap opera.

By looking at programmes in terms of shots and scenes, it is possible to make both qualitative and quantitative statements about the similarities and differences between different episodes, different directors and writers, and different serials and to monitor historical changes. However, there are limitations to this approach. Just as content analysis tends to ignore form, so formal analysis does not deal directly with content. This is both a strength, since it allows stylistic structural comparisons to be made largely independent of narrative, and a weakness, for similar reasons. A quantitative approach is not sensitive to poor writing, bad acting, or clumsy camerawork. It cannot account for viewer preference and is unlikely to explain whether a particular serial is likely to be a critical or a ratings success. While quantitative data may be used to support qualitative conclusions, there will always be a place for conventional criticism. Ultimately, perhaps all any critical theory can do is attempt to explain how something works and possibly justify its critical importance. That is not the same as predicting its popularity.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, a number of comments may be made in relation to the vexed question of whether there is indeed a language or a grammar of moving pictures. The evidence presented here, from Eisenstein to *Emmerdale*, suggests that the structural organisation of moving pictures is related to at least two separate issues.

Firstly, there is a small number of general principles specifically related to the structuring of motion pictures. These medium-specific maxims are codified in the continuity system of production, direction and editing which is institutionalised in industrial practice. They take the form of a limited number of rules that govern the construction of spatial and temporal relationships between shots in ways that avoid ambiguity or contradiction. The foundation of this system is closely tied to the perception of the moving image and the means by which the viewer infers spatio-temporal relationships produced by discontinuities in the visual sequence. Although the continuity system arose out of custom and practice, it resulted in films that were understood, and because it created the impression of transparent narration it supported the realistic aesthetic of classical cinema. The continuity system functions at a very local level, to produce a certain coherence and consistency that is expected of a text. Essentially it operates within the scene. If there is a counterpart to a grammar in the language of moving pictures, it is



probably related to the mechanisms of the continuity system. That is not to say that the continuity code resembles a true linguistic language. It does not, but it may involve the operation of certain cognitive universals similar to those involved in language, although specifically related to solving problems of spatial organisation. The comprehension of the continuity code is probably learnt, but because it is partly motivated by cognitive and perceptual universals, it is quickly acquired.

Secondly, more general structural systems are involved. A text is not understood simply as a result of its grammatical organisation. Texts involve systems of textual organisation. An important form of arrangement is that of narrative. The elements of narration resemble language in that narration is usually expressed in language. Stories told in motion pictures are generally similar to stories told in verbal language. That is because the forms that are used for narration are largely derived from language and literature. Language is also employed explicitly in the form of dialogue. Narrational structures may to a certain extent be culture specific, related to the stories that a culture tells. However, there do appear to be certain universal features of stories. This may be a result of certain cognitive universals to do with the way in which information is stored in certain causally linked non-reversible temporal structures like the hypothetical story schema. The ability to comprehend sophisticated narrative structures is probably acquired in line with general cognitive development. The narrational element is not necessarily medium specific. It can be translated into verbal language without substantial loss of essential structure. Narrative organisation is not necessary to the organisation of moving picture sequences. Pictures can perform other non-narrative communicative functions as illustrative, decorative, symbolic, atmospheric, or kinetic stimuli. However, narration plays an important part in sustaining a sequential form in literary texts. The continuous narrative is an extreme extension of this narrative principle.

The comprehension of moving pictures is related to language in the sense that all human understanding is linguistically informed. Ultimately, structuralist and poststructuralist theories have called into question the possibility of a 'real world' that can be known without reference to language, culture and ideology. The degree to which moving image communication may appear to be like a language may simply be a symptom of the degree to which all human cognition and communication are informed by language.



In summary, it is suggested that in the comprehension of moving picture narratives, medium-specific codes operate in parallel with more general narrative systems of organisation, in conjunction with an indefinite number of other codes and systems that ultimately concern our understanding of the organisation of the world.

The comprehension of the moving picture text probably involves two sorts of processes. Data-driven perceptual processes work bottom-up, while inference-driven processes work top-down. The systems of spatial organisation may be more relevant to perceptual processes that work bottom-up. The systems of narrative organisation may be more relevant to the formation of hypotheses working top-down. Both of these processes operate in parallel in processing the text.

The suggestion is that the television text, like a sentence, has both a surface structure and a deep structure. In the moving picture text, the surface structure is articulated in shots, scenes, sequences, episodes and programmes. The structure of these elements produces a particular texture that distinguishes the flow of visual discourse as a text. This surface structure may be studied using procedures of formal analysis. It is characterised by gaps that must be bridged in order to make sense of the material. These may range from connections between shots within a scene, to relationships between separate scenes both within episodes and between episodes. In order to relate this material in a meaningful manner, it is necessary to derive some form of deep structure. This may have a narrative organisation, but it may also employ many other framing schemes of reference. It is at this deep structure that a text produces meaning.

The process of comprehending a programme is seen as being similar to reading a written text. This involves a process of decoding or detransforming the sequential surface structure into a deeper structure of meaning. This is essentially the reverse of the production process whereby ideas and stories are transformed into a linear sequential presentation of information.

If meaning is ultimately generated by deeper structural relationships, any analysis of the superficial structure of formal features is necessarily limited. It is, however, a necessary first step. If the television viewer's construction of meaning can be seen as an active process rather than a passive reaction, this has important implications and applications in the study of the media. Naïve notions of realism are still widespread and an implicit behaviourism is still endemic in much communications research. To study the influences and effects of moving picture



media, it is necessary to have a more mature understanding of how they produce meaning. The moving image should not be seen as a simple stimulus that produces an automatic and uninterpreted response. To be understood, such a representation must be decoded in a complex way. This requires associating it with schematic knowledge about the current context and wider world knowledge. It is through the construction of complex relationships in incorporating this new information with previously acquired knowledge, that a modification of understanding may take place. In the long term this may ultimately result in behavioural change. While it is unlikely that a single representation will result in behavioural imitation, the long-term continued re-enforcement of particular values and attitudes may result in a social effect. In this respect, it is significant that the fundamental moral order of the soap opera world is one of social responsibility.

The world presented by the television text is the product of complex coding at many levels. It does not transparently reproduce reality. It constructs a particular coded representation that can be recognised and gains plausibility by reference to empirical reality. Despite the apparent realism of the soap opera, this representation is an elaborate illusion. It does not present an open window on a real world, but a form of telepresence in a parallel imaginary world. To return to our original epigraph, television offers a representation of 'reality viewed through an opera-glass and heard through a long tube'.



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## Appendix

### Scripts

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This appendix contains two sample scripts from *Emmerdale*. The first is of the opening episode, transmitted on 16 October 1972. The second, episode 1497, was broadcast exactly eighteen years later on 16 October 1990. It says something for the serial that five characters of the original cast were still appearing regularly on the programme's eighteenth anniversary, although the part of Jack was played by a different actor. However, many changes may also be seen, notably the move from a cinematic form of narration to the narrative segmentation characteristic of the soap opera serial.

These annotated transcripts of the programmes as broadcast are based on the original production scripts. Unless otherwise indicated, the scene divisions and stage directions are as originally scripted. Material which did not appear on screen is marked as ~~deleted~~. Any additional annotations are shown in *italics*. The shot divisions are those that appeared on screen. A transcript is an inadequate representation of the television text and should not be regarded as a substitute for a viewing copy. An attempt has been made to indicate the temporal dimension by including the time code of the start of each shot in the left-hand column. This is shown in hours, minutes, seconds and frames, starting at 10:00:00:00 for part one and 10:30:00:00 for part two. A number in brackets identifies the viewpoint of each shot, starting with (1) for the first shot in each scene and incrementing for each new viewpoint. The approximate shot framing is then given in abbreviated form from Very Long Shot, through Long Shot, Medium Long Shot, Medium Shot, Medium Close-Up, Close-Up, to Big Close-Up. This is followed by the names of the characters seen in the shot, in order of appearance and from screen left to right. This notation should enable the basic shot structure to be read, illustrating some of the formal features of moving picture narration previously identified.



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# *Emmerdale Farm*

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## **Episode 1: 16 October 1972**

**By Kevin Laffan**

10:00:00:00	IDENT: 'Yorkshire Television Colour Production'
10:00:05:00	OPENING TITLES. <i>MUSIC. AERIAL VIEW SHOT OF MOORLAND.</i>
10:00:10:18	<i>1.5 SEC. MIX TO SLOW PAN LEFT DOWN VALLEY. ZOOM IN ON VILLAGE.</i>
10:00:23:22	CAPTION SUPER: 'EMMERDALE FARM' (ZOOM IN).
10:00:30:15	<i>2 SEC. MIX TO SUN THROUGH TREES. PAN LEFT ONTO FARMHOUSE.</i>
10:00:37:21	CAPTION SUPER: 'BY KEVIN LAFFAN'
10:00:42:16	LOSE SUPER. <i>MUSIC CONTINUES UNDER.</i>
	<b>1. FILM. EXT. HILLSIDE ABOVE THE SUGDEN FARM. DAY.</b>
10:00:43:08 (1) VLS MARIAN	MARIAN ON HORSEBACK CANTERING ACROSS HILLSIDE ABOVE THE SUGDEN'S FARM.
10:00:48:04 (2) VLS MARIAN	SHE SLOWS DOWN, SOMETHING AT THE FARM HAS ATTRACTED HER ATTENTION.
10:00:56:11 (3) LS MARIAN	SHE TURNS HER HORSE AND RIDES DOWN THE HILL, CAREFULLY PICKING HER WAY THROUGH A FLOCK OF SHEEP WHICH IS CROSSING THE FIELD.
10:01:01:11 (2) VLS MARIAN	PAST THE SHEEP SHE REINS IN AT THE FIELD GATE INTO THE FARM LANE AND SITS ON HER HORSE, LOOKING DOWN AT THE SUGDEN'S FARMYARD.
	<i>LOSE MUSIC.</i>



(MARIAN IS A PRETTY GIRL OF 20 – A YEAR OLDER THAN JOE. SHE RIDES WELL, THOUGH HER HORSEMANSHIP COMES FROM SOME ELEGANT RIDING ESTABLISHMENT FOR WEALTHY CITY FOLK, WHICH IS OBVIOUS FROM HER 'OVER-DRESSED' RIDING GEAR. AS THE SERIAL PROGRESSES HER CLOTHES AND HER RIDING STYLE BECOME MORE AND MORE CASUAL).

SHE SEES:

10:01:08:03 (4) VLS MARIAN

*ZOOM OUT FROM MARIAN THROUGH WINDOWS OF HEARSE TO REVEAL FLOWERS ON COFFIN.*

10:01:18:22 (5) LS PEGGY, JOE, MATT, DRIVER

ALONGSIDE THE SUGDEN FARM A HEARSE (AN IMMACULATE ROLLS) IS WAITING. BEHIND THE HEARSE IS A SECOND FUNERAL CAR AND CHAUFFEUR FOR THE MOURNERS. THE MOURNERS ARE FEW. THEY STAND WAITING BY THE CAR. ~~THE CAMERA EXPLORES THEM.~~

MATT SKILBECK IS TACITURN AND THIRTY.

PEGGY (HIS WIFE) IS YOUNGER BY A YEAR OR TWO. SHE IS ONE OF THE SUGDENS. SHE IS RATHER HARDER IN THE FACE THAN A WOMEN OF HER YEARS SHOULD BE.

JOE SUGDEN IS HARDLY TWENTY AND GENTLER BOTH IN LOOKS AND MANNER THAN THE REST OF THE FAMILY.

OLD SAM PEARSON IS OVER EIGHTY, SMALL AND NOT VERY ACTIVE.

THE ESSENCE OF THE OPENING SHOT SHOULD BE THE QUIET.

THE DRIVER OF THE ROLLS SMOKES A CIGARETTE, UNCONCERNED BUT SLYLY. THE ONLOOKERS DON'T TALK. THEY JUST STAND.

~~THE SUN COULD MAKE THE GIRL (MARIAN WILKS) SHADE HER EYES: FOR IT SHOULD BE SUNNY, NOT A GLOOMY DAY.~~

THE MOURNERS SHIFT UNCOMFORTABLY AND A LITTLE IMPATIENTLY IN THEIR DARK CLOTHES. FINALLY PEGGY FIXES HER EYES ON MARIAN.

10:01:22:07 (6) CU PEGGY

PEGGY: (TO MATT) Matt.



10:01:25:20 (7) CU MATT, PEGGY Who's she?

10:01:30:21 (8) VLS MARIAN

P.O.V. PEGGY MATT SHAKES HEAD IMPLYING IGNORANCE AND INDIFFERENCE.

PEGGY: Have you heard tell anyone's taking Pickersgill's

10:01:32:24 (7) CU MATT, PEGGY MATT: No.

PEGGY: She's their side of wall.

MATT: 's ten past.

10:01:38:21 (9) CU JOE PEGGY: (TO JOE) Go and hurry Mum, Joe.

JOE: She's coming.

10:01:43:12 (10) MCU ANNIE ANNIE SUGDEN COMES OUT OF THE DOOR OF THE FARM. LOCKS THE DOOR BEHIND HER. SHE WEARS BLACK AND CARRIES A BIBLE.

10:01:47:20 (11) LS SAM, ANNIE, JOE, PEGGY SHE COMES DOWN THE DRIVE *PATH* TO THE OTHERS.

ANNIE: No sign of him then?

PEGGY: You should know better'n expect him.

ANNIE: Happen, but he ought to be here for his Dad's funeral. In you get then Dad.

10:02:03:09 (12) MS ANNIE, DRIVER THE MOURNERS GET IN THE CAR. ANNIE GOES TO THE FRONT OF THE ROLLS. ~~THE DRIVER HURRIEDLY GETS RID OF THE CIGARETTE.~~

ANNIE: (TO DRIVER) Take it slow... I don't want Jacob bumped about on his last ride.

10:02:09:04 (13) MCU SAM, ANNIE, PEGGY ANNIE TURNS AND GOES BACK TO THE SECOND CAR.

THE OTHER THREE (PEGGY, JOE AND MATT) ARE SETTLING THEMSELVES IN THE BACK SEAT. ANNIE SQUEEZES IN NEXT TO OLD SAM.

10:02:17:00 (14) MCU JOE, MATT

10:02:20:07 (15) VLS THE ROLLS AND THE MOURNERS' CAR MOVE OFF ~~WATCHED BY MARIAN.~~ ~~MARIAN TURNS AND RIDES AWAY DOWN THE HILL.~~



**2. FILM. EXT. SUCCESSION OF SHOTS IN LOCAL COUNTRYSIDE. DAY.**

A SUCCESSION OF SHOTS SHOWING THE CARS MOVING THROUGH THE VALLEY SCENERY AND INDICATING THE TYPE OF COUNTRYSIDE IN WHICH THE ACTION OF THE SERIAL WILL PASS. STONE WALLS, STEEP HILLSIDES, GRITSTONE OUTCROPS, BROAD SHALLOW RIVERS AND BECKS.

ARRIVE EVENTUALLY AT THE VILLAGE SOME COUPLE OF MILES FROM THE FARM. THIS VILLAGE TO BE IDENTIFIED IN THE EXTENT THOUGHT FIT FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SERIAL.

THROUGH THE VILLAGE TO THE CHURCH. ON THE WAY PICK UP WHATEVER WE DECIDE FOR AS THE PUB. IDENTIFY.

10:02:24:24 (1) VLS

*PAN LEFT WITH CORTEGE TO VILLAGE IN DISTANCE.*

10:02:39:24 (2) VLS

*PAN RIGHT.*

10:02:45:11 (3) MCU JOE, MATT

*INSIDE HEARSE. JOE ADJUSTS HIS TIE.*

10:02:47:14 (4) VLS

*TRAVELLING SHOT OF HEARSE FROM SECOND CAR.*

10:02:50:00 (5) MCU SAM, ANNIE, PEGGY

*INSIDE SECOND CAR.*

10:02:52:14 (6) VLS

*HIGH ANGLE TRAVELLING SHOT OF CORTEGE FROM BEHIND.*

10:02:57:10 (7) VLS

*THE FUNERAL PROCESSION CROSSES A SMALL BRIDGE OVER A RIVER.*

10:03:07:04 (8) LS-MCU JACK

*PAN LEFT WITH HEARSE AS IT ROUNDS A CORNER TO REVEAL 'THE WOOLPACK' PUB. ZOOM IN ON WINDOW TO REVEAL JACK WATCHING.*

**3. FILM. EXT. INT. PUB 'THE LAMB THE WOOLPACK'. DAY.**

NOT A TOURISTS PUB, A VILLAGE PUB. JACK SUGDEN IS STANDING OUTSIDE.

10:03:16:13 (1) VLS O.T.S. JACK

*OVER THE SHOULDER OF JACK AT THE WINDOW WATCHING THE CARS PASS.*

**4. STUDIO. INT. PUB SALOON - 'THE LAMB THE WOOLPACK'. DAY.**

EMPTY EXCEPT FOR JACK, JACK IS IN HIS MID-TWENTIES.



10:03:22:22 (1) MS AMOS, JACK

AMOS: There he goes then.

10:03:24:23 (2) MS AMOS, JACK

JACK: (TAKES BEER AND SITS) Ay... it's the end of him.

AMOS: He were a good man... in his way...

JACK: Think they'll say same when you go?

AMOS: Happen not... but I'll be past caring then, I reckon.

10:03:36:04 (3) MS-CU JACK

JACK DRINKS.

AMOS: Aren't you going to burial?

JACK: Think I should do you?

AMOS: He's thi Dad...

JACK: Ay - he's that.

10:03:46:15 (1) MCU AMOS

AMOS: Oh, there's no point in holding grudges against dead.

10:03:49:11 (3) CU JACK

JACK: I've no grudge against him...

~~AMOS: Ay well... it's your business, but actions are louder'n words.~~

~~JACK PUTS COINS ON TABLE FOR HIS DRINK.~~

~~AMOS: It's gone up a penny since you were here last.~~

~~JACK PRODUCES ANOTHER PENNY. AMOS PICKS IT UP.~~

~~AMOS: And still best and cheapest bitter i' Yorkshire... an' that means anywhere.~~

~~AMOS GOES. JACK STUDIES HIS DRINK, LOOKS AT HIS WATCH. DRINKS, BUT DOES NOT FINISH IT QUITE. GETS UP AND GOES OUT.~~

~~AMOS WATCHES HIM GO, LEANING ON THE BAR. THE ROOM IS NOW EMPTY OF CUSTOMERS. AMOS GOES OVER TO THE TABLE AND PICKS UP THE HALF-FINISHED GLASS OF BEER. LOOKS AT IT, WIPES THE RIM OF THE GLASS AND DRINKS THE CONTENTS.~~

5. FILM. EXT. OUTSIDE CHURCH / CEMETERY. DAY.

*QUIET PIANO ARRANGEMENT OF THEME MUSIC UNDER.*



THE APPROACH TO THE CHURCH AND CEMETERY. JACK COMES INTO THE PICTURE AND WALKS ALONG THE STREET INTO THE CHURCHYARD.  
 WREATH IS PLACED ON THE COFFIN.  
 THE MOURNERS PROCEED TOWARDS THE CHURCH.

10:03:52:13 (1) LS MOURNERS  
 10:03:56:13 (2) MS MOURNERS

**5B. FILM. EXT. PUB - 'THE WOOLPACK' DAY.**  
 JACK LEAVES 'THE WOOLPACK'.  
 HE CROSSES THE VILLAGE GREEN AND WALKS DOWN A LANE.

10:04:02:12 (1) VLS JACK  
 10:04:06:23 (2) MS-VLS JACK

**6. FILM. EXT. GRAVEYARD. DAY.**  
 FROM JACK'S P.O.V.: THE SMALL GROUP AROUND THE GRAVE SOME DISTANCE AWAY. A GRAVEDIGGER NEAR. JACK WATCHES THEN TURNS AWAY AND STARTS TO RETRACE HIS STEPS.  
 FAST ZOOM OUT TO OVER THE SHOULDER OF JACK.  
 REVERSE ANGLE OF JACK ON BRIDGE.  
 HIGH ANGLE. ZOOM OUT AS JACK WALKS OFF LEFT. PAN LEFT ONTO MOURNERS IN CHURCHYARD BELOW.  
 FADE MUSIC.

10:04:18:24 (1) VLS MOURNERS, JACK  
 10:04:25:13 (2) LS JACK  
 10:04:33:00 (3) VLS JACK

**7. FILM. EXT./INT. FARMYARD. DAY.**  
 JACK COMES FROM THE FIRST LANE AND GOES ROUND THE OUTBUILDINGS OF THE FARM. IDEALLY HE SHOULD LOOK INTO ALL OF THE DOORS, AT THE COWS, THE HENS, THE HAY STORE ETC. LOOK AT THE HOUSE. EVEN TRY THE DOOR.  
 JACK IN DISTANCE WALKING UP LANE TO RIGHT.  
 HE APPROACHES FARM BUILDINGS. A DOG BARKS.  
 JACK: (TO DOG) Hello Tim.  
 Do you remember me?  
 JACK TRIES THE FRONT GATE, HESITATES AND WALKS UP THROUGH THE FARMYARD.

10:04:50:15 (1) VLS JACK  
 10:04:53:12 (2) VLS JACK  
 10:04:56:03 (3) MCU JACK  
 10:04:59:06 (4) MCU DOG  
 10:05:01:20 (3) MCU JACK  
 10:05:05:14 (5) MS-VLS JACK



10:05:16:09 (6) LS-VLS JACK *HE TRIES THE BACK DOOR. IT IS LOCKED.  
THEN ROUND (OR THROUGH) THE  
COWSHED TO THE OTHER SIDE.*

*INT. COWSHED*

10:05:38:18 (7) VLS-MS JACK *JACK WALKS DOWN THE COWSHED.*

10:06:03:19 (8) MS JACK *HE ENTERS A BARN.  
INSPECT CORN BINS. FINGER THE GRAIN.  
~~KNOCK THE BIG SCALES.~~*

10:06:09:17 (9) BCU JACK *JACK PICKS UP A HANDFUL OF FEED AND  
SMELLS IT.*

10:06:17:22 (8) MS JACK

10:06:26:20 (10) VLS JACK *HE ENTERS ANOTHER BARN*

10:06:35:02 (11) MLS JACK *WALKS OVER TO A CALF AND PATS IT.*

*EXT. FARMYARD.*

10:06:51:07 (12) VLS JACK *JACK WALKS BACK OUT INTO THE YARD,  
PRECEDED BY A GAGGLE OF GEESE.*

10:07:02:02 (13) VLS JACK *THE GEESE WANDER OFF.*

10:07:04:19 (14) MS JACK *JACK WATCHES THEM.*

10:07:09:01 (12) VLS P.O.V. JACK

10:07:16:12 (15) MLS JACK *~~SOME SHEEP IN A WALLED PADDOCK.~~ HE  
STOPS AND LEANS ON THE WALL  
LOOKING DOWN THE VALLEY. LOOKS AT  
THE SCENE AROUND HIM WHICH  
SHOULD AS FAR AS POSSIBLE  
ILLUSTRATE THE HILLY NATURE OF THE  
FARM AND THE AMBIENCE OF THE  
DALES.*

10:07:25:01 (16) VLS MARIAN, JACK *(IN THE BACKGROUND WE SEE MARIAN  
CANTER UP TO HIM.) JACK'S REVERIE IS  
BROKEN BY MARIAN'S VOICE.*

*MARIAN: Do you like the view?*

*JACK TURNS TO MARIAN WHO HAS  
RIDDEN UP TO HIM BELOW THE WALL.*

*JACK: Oh... hullo!*

*MARIAN: (REMAINS ON HORSE DURING  
THIS SCENE) They've all gone to the funeral...  
if you don't know.*

10:07:30:10 (17) MS JACK *JACK: I do, as a matter of fact.*

10:07:32:09 (16) VLS MARIAN, JACK *MARIAN: I just wondered... Been giving the  
place a real going over,*



10:07:36:08 (17) MS JACK  
haven't you?

JACK: It's my home... Where's yours?

10:07:43:04 (18) MS MARIAN  
MARIAN: (INDICATING DIRECTION OF 'INGLEBROOK') In a day or two it'll be 'Inglebrook'. Father's just bought it.

10:07:47:08 (17) CU JACK  
JACK: Oh... One of the moneyed class.

10:07:50:21 (18) CU MARIAN  
MARIAN: That's right... and all from re-processing ascrilabric acids.

PAUSE.

10:07:56:09 (17) CU JACK  
JACK: It makes you think.

10:07:58:06 (18) CU MARIAN  
MARIAN: If this is your home

10:08:00:15 (17) CU JACK  
why can't you get in...?

10:08:02:01 (18) CU MARIAN  
I was watching you.

10:08:03:11 (17) CU JACK  
JACK: Prodigals aren't usually trusted with keys... even if we have time to collect one before going out to prodigalize.

10:08:10:07 (18) CU MARIAN  
MARIAN: Will they be killing the fatted calf for you?

10:08:13:17 (17) CU JACK  
JACK: (SHRUGS SLOWLY) Where does your father work at his acids?

10:08:16:18 (18) CU MARIAN  
MARIAN: Bradford... but we've been living in Hotten.

JACK: Do you work at anything?

MARIAN SHAKES HER HEAD SMILING.

10:08:23:00 (17) CU JACK  
Well... good luck!

JACK TURNS AWAY FROM HER.

10:08:28:11 (18) CU MARIAN

10:08:29:21 (19) LS-VLS JACK, MARIAN  
MARIAN HESITATES THEN TURNS TO RIDE AWAY, HALTS AND LOOKS BACK AT JACK.

10:08:38:18 (20) VLS JACK  
L.S. OF JACK LEANING ON WALL LOOKING OVER VALLEY, OBLIVIOUS OF HER.

**8. STUDIO. INT. PUB SALOON 'THE LAMB THE WOOLPACK'. DAY.**

ANNIE, PEGGY, MATT, JOSEPH AND OLD SAM, AROUND A SMALL TABLE. DRINKS BEFORE THEM. THERE ARE ONE OR TWO OTHER PEOPLE AT THE BAR.

10:08:41:10 (1) CU-MCU PEGGY, MATT, SAM, ANNIE, JOE  
*ZOOM OUT FROM CLOSE-UP OF PEGGY AND CRAB LEFT AROUND GROUP.*



PEGGY: He's no right to anything – no right at all.

ANNIE: That's your opinion.

PEGGY: Well, what you going to do about him then... tell me that?

ANNIE: It's more what he wants to do... we have to find that out first.

JOE: Will he have gone home do you think?

PEGGY: If he has it'll do him no harm to wait...  
we've had to wait for him long enough.

ANNIE: I'm puzzled why he didn't come to the burial.

PEGGY: He never bothered about Dad alive so why should he dead?

~~ANNIE: Peggy... you're my own daughter but you're getting a right sharp-tongued nagger...~~

~~PEGGY: I'm telling truth... what did our Jack ever do for Dad? ... Or us come to that? ... go on... tell me!~~

ANNIE: He's not bin as good a son as he ought... I'll give you that...

PEGGY: You got no option to do otherwise...

ANNIE: Happen not... but I can still fetch you one... married tho' you are...  
so watch your tongue. (PEGGY LOOKS DOWN ABASHED.)

Whatever rights and wrongs of case I'm having no family squabbles today,  
understand? (NO-ONE SPEAKS)

Jack's my son. I can handle him... and rest o' family. (~~PUTS DOWN HER GLASS~~)

If you're done we'll get back.

ALL GET UP AND START TO MOVE OUT.

AMOS COMES TO COLLECT THE GLASSES AND STOPS BY ANNIE AS THE OTHERS LEAVE.

AMOS: Bin a sad day for you then Annie.

ANNIE: Jacob and me had thirty good years together. I can't grumble.

10:08:57:01 (2) MCU PEGGY, MATT

10:08:58:19 (3) CU ANNIE

10:09:01:09 (4) MCU PEGGY, MATT,  
SAM, ANNIE

10:09:04:15 (3) CU ANNIE

10:09:08:00 (4) CU PEGGY

10:09:09:18 (3) CU ANNIE

10:09:14:07 (4) CU PEGGY

10:09:16:07 (3) CU ANNIE

10:09:21:07 (2) MCU PEGGY, MATT

10:09:24:02 (3) CU ANNIE

10:09:28:18 (1) MCU-MS JOE, ANNIE,  
SAM, PEGGY, MATT, AMOS



10:09:52:16 (4) MCU AMOS

AMOS: Ah, but he weren't an old man. I was sorry to see him go.

10:09:56:18 (1) MCU AMOS, ANNIE

ANNIE: Ay.. I dare say... he were about your best customer.

~~ANNIE GOES OUT. AMOS PICKS UP THE GLASSES.~~

~~9. FILM. INT. EMPTY ROOM WILKS'S HOUSE. DAY.~~

~~'INGLEBROOK', LARGE WINDOWS, LOOKING OUT OVER THE DALE. BILL WILKS IS TAKING IN THE VIEW WITH GREAT SATISFACTION. HE IS A BULKY SELF-MADE MAN NOT GIVEN TO RETICENCE. IN THE BACKGROUND THROUGH THE WINDOW MARIAN RIDES UP TO THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE. WILKS TURNS AND LEAVES THE ROOM.~~

**9B. FILM. EXT. INGLEBROOK. FRONT OF HOUSE. DAY.**

10:10:00:00 (1) VLS MARIAN

10:10:04:19 (2) LS WILKS, MARIAN

WILKS COMES OUT OF FRONT DOOR TO GREET MARIAN WHO RIDES UP, DISMOUNTS AND JOINS HER FATHER.

WILKS: I was wondering where you'd got to.

MARIAN: There's a farm back there.

10:10:15:13 (3) VLS P.O.V. WILKS

WILKS: Ay... grand view that.

~~PUTS HIS ARM ROUND MARIAN AND THEY LOOK AT THE VIEW.~~

MARIAN: What are you going to do with all this?

10:10:20:23 (4) CU WILKS

WILKS: Do with it? Nothing... just live with it... view like that's worth a few pounds of any man's money... and it's what I've worked for. You know I've half a mind to do without a telephone! Then I'd be really away from it.

10:10:37:18 (5) CU MARIAN

MARIAN: People live at the farmhouse.

10:10:39:08 (4) CU WILKS

WILKS: They won't worry us. Besides... we've a right of way through.

10:10:43:12 (5) CU MARIAN

MARIAN: Through the house?

10:10:44:15 (4) CU WILKS

WILKS: ~~(SLAPS HER PLAYFULLY)~~  
Don't be saucy...

10:10:46:00 (5) CU MARIAN

across their land to ours. ~~(TAKES HER HAND)~~



10:10:49:09 (2) LS WILKS, MARIAN

Now come one then, get away.

~~MARIAN: Does that mean we can go through whenever we like?~~

~~WILKS: More or less, yes... but what's it to you?~~

~~MARIAN: It's just nice to know we won't be trespassing.~~

~~SHE SMILES AND TAKES HIS ARM.~~

10. STUDIO. INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN. DAY.

AN OLD AGA TYPE COOKER. A LOW EARTHENWARE SINK ON BRICK STANDS. NOTHING MODERN AND NOTHING OLD CHIC. JUST OLD FASHIONED. THERE HAS NEVER BEEN THE MONEY TO MODERNISE AND IT IS DOUBTFUL IF ANNIE WOULD LIKE IT ANYWAY. THE INCONGRUOUS ITEM IS THE TV UP ON THE DRESSER.

ANNIE AND PEGGY ARE LAYING TEA. THEY STILL WEAR THEIR MOURNING CLOTHES BUT HAVE APRONS OVER. OLD SAM SITS IN AN UPRIGHT CHAIR.

10:10:50:07 (1) MLS SAM, PEGGY, ANNIE

PEGGY: Their name's Wilks, Amos says.

ANNIE: That doesn't tell us much.

PEGGY: Just thought you'd like to know.

ANNIE: I'm more interested in where Jack's got to.

10:10:57:03 (2) MS PEGGY, ANNIE

PEGGY: Too ashamed to show his face, I bet.

ANNIE: He always had too much cheek for that... always went his own way spite of anything or anybody.

PEGGY: Or anybody's feelings either.

ANNIE: He never did you harm.

PEGGY: I'm talking of family. Look at the number of times he's been in village these last years and never even bothered to look in and see you or Dad...

ANNIE: Ay... I give you that... that's not right in a son.

PEGGY: Not even to funeral... and now he's got farm. Dad shouldn't have make that will.

10:11:24:14 (3) MLS SAM

ANNIE: Happen not... but he did...



10:11:26:15 (1) MLS ANNIE, PEGGY

and we have to make the best we can of it.

~~11. O.B. EXT. FARMYARD. DAY.~~

~~THE YARD BETWEEN THE HOUSE AND THE COWSHED. JOE COMES DOWN FROM THE HOUSE AND ENTERS THE COWSHED.~~

10:11:29:13 (1) MCU JOE, JACK

**12. O.B. INT/EXT. COWSHED. DAY**

JOE IS FEEDING THE COWS IN THEIR STALLS.

**JACK:** Hullo Joe.

JOE TURNS AND SEES JACK LEANING AGAINST THE STALL DIVISION.

**JACK:** Remember me, do you?

10:11:39:11 (2) MLS JOE

**JOE:** Jack, in't it?

**JACK:** You've shot up, haven't you?

**JOE:** We expected you at funeral.

**JACK:** I was there but... in the background.

10:11:54:09 (1) MCU JACK

I don't like funerals.

**JOE:** (PAUSE) Are you coming in?

**JACK:** I'd better, I suppose.

*JOE LEAVES THE COWSHED.*

**EXT. COWSHED**

JOE TURNS TO GO. JACK STOPS HIM.

10:12:02:17 (3) MS JACK, JOE

**JACK:** Joe... (GOES LOOKS AT HIM) Did Dad have a tough time of it?

**JOE:** (SHAKES HIS HEAD) No, it were quick.

**JACK:** That's something. How's Mum taken it?

**JOE:** You'd best judge that for yourself.

JOE TURNS AND GOES. JACK HESITATES. ~~JOE TURNS. JACK FOLLOWS HIM.~~

**14. STUDIO. INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN. DAY.**

10:12:16:10 (1) LS JOE, SAM, ANNIE, PEGGY, MATT, JACK

ANNIE, MATT, SAM AND PEGGY AT THE TABLE. THE DOOR BETWEEN THEM OPENS. ANNIE TURNS AND SEES JOE.



ANNIE: Come on in... we're not having picnic.

JOE STEPS ASIDE AND JACK ENTERS. JOE CLOSSES THE DOOR.

ANNIE: So you've come home then.

JACK: Ay Ma... that's it.

PAUSE.

ANNIE: Get thissen a chair... tea's on table.

JACK OBEYS. PEGGY WATCHES HIM FRIGIDLY.

CAPTION SUPER: 'End of Part One' (MUSIC)

PART TWO

CAPTION SUPER: 'EMMERDALE FARM Part Two' (MUSIC)

15. STUDIO PRE-VTR. INT. FARMHOUSE/ PEGGY'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

A DOUBLE BED. MATT AND PEGGY PREPARING FOR BED. MATT UNDRESSES SLOWLY AND METHODICALLY PUTTING HIS CLOTHES ON A CHAIR. PEGGY USES AN OLD WARDROBE. KEEPS BUSY THE WHOLE TIME.

PEGGY: If it'd been Joe... or me... we'd never have heard last of it... but him... not a word does she say to him... not a cross word!

MATT MAKES AN INDESCRIBABLE NOISE OF AGREEMENT. GETTING OUT OF TROUSERS.

PEGGY: You'd think he'd just been down lane to see gate was shut instead of not showing his nose in place for near enough eight years.

And what's going to happen to us... that's what I want to know... do you reckon he'll stay?

Well what d'you think?

Something's got to be said to him.

If Mum's not going to have a go at him it's up to us...

After all it's our living... such as it is. He's no right to the farm... he's put nothing into it.

10:12:27:10 (2) CU ANNIE

10:12:32:10 (3) MCU JACK

10:12:36:10 (2) CU ANNIE

10:12:39:11 (4) MS PEGGY, MATT, JACK, ANNIE, JOE, SAM

10:12:43:21

10:30:00:00 (1) MS MATT, PEGGY

10:30:37:10 (2) MS PEGGY



10:30:47:13 (1) MS MATT, PEGGY

Suppose he sells the place! Could he do that?  
Could he?

**MATT:** If it's his, he can.

**PEGGY:** (COMES TO BED AND GETS IN)

Dad must have been out of his mind.  
Something's got to be done...

**MATT:** It's near midnight and milking at  
six.

**PEGGY:** Sorry... I do go on a bit sometimes.  
'Night, love.

PEGGY KISSES MATT'S FOREHEAD.  
SWITCHES OUT THE LIGHT AND SETTLES  
DOWN INTO BED.

**16. STUDIO. INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN.  
NIGHT.**

10:31:15:21 (1) MLS JACK

JACK IS GETTING INTO BED ON THE SOFA  
WHICH HAS BEEN COVERED WITH A  
COUPLE OF BLANKETS. HE SETTLES  
HIMSELF, LIGHTS A CIGARETTE AND  
SITS IN THOUGHT. AFTER A MOMENT  
STUBS OUT CIGARETTE AND SLIDES  
DOWN BETWEEN THE BLANKETS. AS HE  
DOES SO THE SOUND OF A DOOR  
OPENING IS HEARD. JACK SITS UP.

10:31:21:11 (2) MLS ANNIE

ANNIE IS COMING INTO THE ROOM. SHE  
IS IN NIGHT ATTIRE.

**JACK:** Oh... you forgot something?

**ANNIE:** Comfortable, are you?

**JACK:** The floor might be harder.

**ANNIE:** You can try it if you like. There's  
no charge.

**JACK:** I see someone's been throwing  
paint about a bit.

**ANNIE:** Not before time. Matt did most of  
it, with Joe trying to help and your Dad going on  
about the cost of paint.

10:31:47:20 (1) MS JACK

**JACK:** I never thought about Peggy being  
married.

10:31:51:17 (2) MLS ANNIE

**ANNIE:** It's what women do... are you  
married?

10:31:56:22 (3) MS JACK

**JACK:** Me...

**ANNIE:** Aye... you, there's no man so big a  
fool some woman won't take him.







10:34:00:24 (3) MS JACK ANNIE GOES OUT  
LEAVING JACK EXPRESSIONLESS.

**17. O.B. EXT. BARN. DAY.  
(DAY 2)**

10:34:04:14 (1) LS JOE THE OPEN END OF A BARN. JOE IS  
LOADING BALES ONTO A TRAILER  
HITCHED TO A TRACTOR. AS HE TURNS  
FROM THE BARN TO THE TRAILER HE  
SEES MARIAN COMING THROUGH THE  
GATE ON HORSEBACK. HE STOPS AND  
WATCHES HER. SHE WALKS HER HORSE  
TOWARDS THE BARN.

10:34:07:05 (2) LS JOE, MARIAN  
JOE: 'Morning.  
MARIAN: Oh hello. Lovely isn't it?  
JOE: Were you wanting something?  
MARIAN: No... I just... do you live here?  
JOE: That's right.

10:34:19:11 (1) MCU JOE  
10:34:20:15 (3) LS JACK PAUSE. JACK COMES FROM INSIDE THE  
BARN. NOW IN WORKING CLOTHES.

10:34:25:22 (4) MLS MARIAN  
JACK: Ah... how's the ascrilabric acids?  
MARIAN: (SMILES) I didn't realise you  
worked on the farm.

10:34:27:21 (3) LS JACK, JOE  
JACK: I don't... I get in the way... right  
Joe?  
JOE: Any pair of hands are useful on  
farm.  
JACK: He's a good lad, Joe... gentle  
(LEANS ON TRAILER)

10:34:38:06 (1) MCU JACK, JOE Well, if we're going to be neighbours we'd better  
get introduced... (TAPS HIS CHEST) Jack  
Sugden... Brother Joe (INDICATES JOE).

10:34:44:08 (4) MLS MARIAN  
MARIAN: Marian Wilks.  
JACK: Wilks!... Wilks and Fisher? That  
your Dad's firm.  
MARIAN: Do you now them?

10:34:52:03 (1) MS JACK, JOE  
JACK: Didn't they kill all the fish in the  
Tannet?

10:34:54:13 (4) MLS MARIAN  
MARIAN: (DEFENSIVELY) It was an  
accident.



10:34:56:01 (1) MS JACK, JOE  
**JACK:** I'm sure... nobody drops a couple of hundred thousand gallons of poison into a river deliberately... unless, of course, it's the cheapest way of getting rid of it.

10:35:05:03 (4) LS MARIAN O.T.S. JACK  
**PAUSE.**  
**MARIAN TURNS, ANGRILY AND RIDES AWAY AT A GALLOP.**

10:35:09:06 (1) MS JACK JOE  
**JOE:** (TO JACK) Well that weren't very nice...  
**JACK:** I thought you were the big animal lover.  
**JOE:** I do like animals...  
**JACK:** But what? Don't fish count?  
**JOE:** She didn't do it...  
**JACK:** She lives off it. In my book that's living off immoral earnings.

10:35:16:16 (3) MCU JACK  
**JACK GOES BACK INTO THE BARN. JOE LOOKS AFTER HIM THEN RESUMES WORK.**

10:35:25:14 (1) MS JACK, JOE  
**18. STUDIO. INT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN. DAY.**  
**PEGGY IS PEELING POTATOES. ANNIE IS MAKING UP THE STOVE AND GENERALLY GETTING READY TO COOK A MEAL. SAM SITS IN HIS CHAIR.**

10:35:32:11 (1) MCU PEGGY, ANNIE  
**PEGGY:** You should have asked him what he's been up to... we've a right to know.  
**ANNIE:** He'll tell us, all in good time.  
**PEGGY:** Like as not he'll be gone at week-end without so much as by-your-leave.  
~~**ANNIE:** He's told me he's staying a bit.~~  
**PEGGY:** ~~Bit's right... an' he's soft...~~ Matt said he was blowing like a winded horse mucking out for cows. Man like that's no good for working farm.  
**ANNIE:** You've go right needle to him, haven't you?  
**PEGGY:** He could sell the place over our heads – what'd we do then?  
**KNOCK ON THE DOOR.**  
**ANNIE GOES TO OPEN IT. WILKS IS THERE.**

10:35:57:09 (2) MCU ANNIE, WILKS



**WILKS:** Mrs Sugden? My name's Wilks. I bought 'Inglebrook', across the fields. I'd like a word with you please.

**ANNIE:** You'd best come in.

**SHE HOLDS OPEN THE DOOR. WILKS ENTERS THE ROOM.**

**WILKS:** Thank you.

**ANNIE SHUTS THE DOOR. PEGGY RISES.**

**ANNIE:** That's my daughter... Mrs Skilbeck.

**WILKS NODS. PEGGY INCLINES HER HEAD.**

**10:36:15:03 (3) MCU PEGGY**

**WILKS:** I'll get straight to the point Mrs Sugden.

**10:36:17:13 (2) MCU ANNIE, WILKS**

**10:36:20:11 (4) CU WILKS**

As the owner of Inglebrook I've a right-of-way across your land to my lower meadow... You know that?

**10:36:27:00 (2) CU ANNIE**

**ANNIE:** No I don't... who says you have?

**10:36:30:06 (4) CU WILKS**

**WILKS:** It's in the deeds...

**10:36:31:14 (2) CU ANNIE**

**ANNIE:** Have you brought them with you?

**10:36:32:23 (4) CU WILKS**

**WILKS:** No... I haven't...

**10:36:35:11 (1) MLS ANNIE, PEGGY, WILKS**

**ANNIE:** Well, I've lived here over thirty years, there's no-one has any rights in this farm but us... and it'll take a bit more'n your say-so to make me think otherwise.

**WILKS:** You can inspect the deeds any time you wish.

**ANNIE:** Where are they?

**WILKS:** At my solicitors... I can make an appointment for you to see them at his office.

**10:36:50:10 (2) CU ANNIE**

**ANNIE:** If you want me to look at anything you can bring it here... I've no time to waste gallivanting around solicitors' offices.

**10:36:56:11 (1) MS ANNIE, PEGGY, WILKS**

**WILKS:** As you wish... (HE TURNS TO GO) I'll be in touch.

**18B. O.B. EXT. FARMHOUSE KITCHEN. DAY.**

**10:37:02:22 (1) LS SAM**

**10:37:04:09 (2) LS SAM, WILKS, ANNIE**

**ANNIE:** Just a minute. (WILKS STOPS) No-one's going to stop you using gate... so what's all the fuss?



10:37:17:19 (3) CU ANNIE  
**WILKS:** I simply wish to claim my right-of-way over your property.

10:37:25:13 (2) CU WILKS  
**ANNIE:** There's no need to claim anything. We don't bite people's heads off for walking cross fields long as they shut gates and do no harm.

10:37:37:07 (3) CU ANNIE  
**WILKS:** It's not a question of walking Mrs Sugden. The main gate to Inglebrook's on a corner by the main road and I don't like it – so I propose to have it walled off and use the lower gate on the meadow as the main entrance.

10:37:40:19 (2) CU WILKS  
**ANNIE:** You mean you want to drive cars and things through our back way?

10:37:46:19 (3) CU ANNIE  
**WILKS:** If that's what you call it I do. At the moment it is impossible because it's littered with farm implements. I want them cleared away.

10:37:52:15 (2) CU WILKS  
**ANNIE:** Well, you can go on wanting... and they're not littered as you call it... they're stored... that's where we keep them.

10:37:59:00 (3) MS ANNIE, PEGGY  
**WILKS:** I am entitled to unimpeded use of that yard as a right of way.  
~~**ANNIE:** All you're getting from me is unimpeded way to door. Good day.~~  
**WILKS:** You'll have to move them, Mrs Sugden... the law's on my side.  
**WILKS GOES OUT.**  
**PEGGY COMES OUTSIDE.**

10:38:08:21 (2) LS SAM, ANNIE  
**PEGGY:** Well – I've not taken to him.  
**ANNIE:** He'll get no change out of me. I've enough problems.  
**SAM:** Well its not yours, is it?  
**ANNIE:** What, Dad?  
**SAM:** It's not your problem.

10:38:13:16 (1) MCU SAM  
 It's owner's... that's your Jack, and there's no saying what he'll do.

10:38:20:03 (1) LS JACK  
**19. FILM. EXT. MAIN STREET. DAY.**  
**THE VILLAGE MAIN STREET.**  
**JACK COMES WALKING DOWN INTO THE VILLAGE.**



~~STOPS BY THE BRIDGE AND LOOKS OVER AT THE WATER. FROM HIS P.O.V. WE SEE BOYS PLAYING. THROWING STONES. WALKING ACROSS STONES. FISHING WITH NET OR LINE. JACK TURNS, LEANS ON THE BRIDGE, AND LOOKS ROUND THE VILLAGE.~~

~~(I'D LIKE THIS TO SHOW HOW QUIET AND PEACEFUL THE PLACE IS)~~

~~MAYBE ONE OR TWO PEOPLE IN DOORWAYS. NOTHING HAPPENING.~~

10:38:24:23 (2) MS JACK

JACK WALKS ALONG TO A LETTER BOX. TAKES A LETTER FROM HIS POCKET. LOOKS AT THE ENVELOPE. FROWNS. HE IS HAVING SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT POSTING IT.

10:38:39:02 (3) LS JACK

DECIDES ON IMPULSE NOT TO. JACK WALKS AWAY, TOWARDS PUB. ~~MARIAN'S CAR IS OUTSIDE PUB.~~

**20. STUDIO. INT. PUB SALOON 'THE LAMB-THE WOOLPACK'. DAY.**

10:38:50:16 (1) LS EXTRAS, JACK

A FEW PEOPLE IN THE BAR. JACK COMES IN AND GOES TO THE BAR. AMOS IS THERE.

**JACK:** A pint, Amos.

10:38:57:00 (2) MS AMOS, JACK

**AMOS:** You're staying on at farm, then?

**JACK:** Gets around doesn't it?

**AMOS:** Folk always like to know what's going on.

10:39:05:08 (1) MS JACK

**JACK:** I bet... That right?

10:39:10:04 (2) MS AMOS O.T.S. JACK

**AMOS:** You're learning.

JACK HAS BEEN GLANCING ROUND AND SEES MARIAN WITH HER YOUNG MAN AT A TABLE IN A CORNER.

10:39:11:13 (1) MS JACK

**JACK:** What's got round about them?

10:39:15:01 (2) MS AMOS, JACK, ALEC, MARIAN

**AMOS:** Don't know him... she's Wilks's girl who's taken place next to you.

**JACK:** Ay. Well breeched I hear.

**AMOS:** Oh ay... there's a lot settling round about now... getting out from Leeds Bradford way. Putting up price of cottages no end.

10:39:29:08 (1) CU JACK

JACK IS ONLY HALF LISTENING. HE WATCHES MARIAN IN ANIMATED TALK WITH FRIEND.



10:39:31:06 (3) MS AMOS, JACK  
**AMOS:** Pretty piece... (JACK LOOKS AT HIM) Not as I'm interested. I've other things to think on.

**JACK:** Like what?

**AMOS:** Young man's game, that is... I'll take cribbage any day.

AMOS MOVES ALONG TO SERVE A CUSTOMER. JACK LEANS BACK ON THE BAR WATCHING MARIAN.

10:39:40:23 (2) CU ALEC, MARIAN  
 SHE LOOKS UP AND SEES HIM. HOLDS THE LOOK A SECOND.

10:39:42:15 (1) CU JACK

10:39:44:11 (2) CU ALEC, MARIAN  
 THE BOY FRIEND TURNS TO SEE WHAT HAS CAUGHT HER EYE.

10:39:47:01 (1) CU JACK  
 JACK DOES NOT MOVE HIS GAZE.

THE BOY FRIEND TURNS BACK. HE AND MARIAN TALK.

10:39:49:10 (3) LS EXTRAS, JACK  
 JACK WALKS OVER TO THEM, TAKING A CIGARETTE FROM POCKET.

10:39:51:23 (4) MS JACK

10:39:55:23 (5) MS ALEC, MARIAN, JACK  
**JACK:** Mind if I join you. Aren't you going to introduce me?

**MARIAN:** Alec Saunders... Jack...

**JACK:** Sugden...

**ALEC:** How d'you do?

**JACK:** Old Yorkshire name, Sugden... very old... mentioned in the Doomsday Book... what's your pedigree?

**ALEC:** Let's go.

HE GETS UP. MARIAN LOOKS AT JACK THEN FOLLOWS SUIT.

JACK REMAINS SEATED. LOOKS UP AT THEM AMUSED.

**JACK:** You haven't finished your drink.

**ALEC:** I'm particular who I drink with.

**JACK:** Doesn't look as if you are.

**MARIAN:** As soon as father knew what was happening he had the dumping stopped.

10:40:47:08 (5) CU JACK  
**JACK:** I'm sure the fish were very grateful... but unfortunately – dead!

10:40:53:06 (6) MS ALEC, MARIAN, JACK  
 MARIAN TURNS AND GOES.



ALEC GIVES A BAFFLED LOOK AND  
FOLLOWS HERE. JACK DRINKS  
WATCHING THEM GO. HE THEN GETS UP  
FINISHES HIS DRINK AND PUTS GLASS  
ON THE BAR.

AMOS: You didn't get much change there,  
did you?

10:41:03:16 (2) CU JACK

JACK: Early days...

~~JACK GOES OUT.~~

10:41:06:18

END CAPTIONS.

*CREDITS OVER AERIAL SHOT OF VALLEY.*

10:41:36:13

*1 SEC. MLX TO CAPTION: 'YORKSHIRE  
TELEVISION COLOUR PRODUCTION'.*



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# *Emmerdale*

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**Episode 1497: 16 October 1990**

**Created by Kevin Laffan**

**Written by David Lane**

**Directed by Catherine Morshead**

10:00:02:04

**TITLES**

**1.5 SEC MIX THROUGH TO...**

**1. EXT. VILLAGE. DAY.**

**TIME: 09:15**

10:00:32:09 (1) VLS SETH, BILL, JOE

**FX: CHURCH BELLS.**

**JOE PULLS UP OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE SHOP, WHERE SETH AND BILL MIDDLETON ARE PORING OVER A TABLOID PAPER. JOE GETS OUT OF THE CAR, JAUNTY. THERE IS THE SOUND OF CHURCH BELLS IN THE AIR.**

10:00:41:17 (2) MS JOE, BILL, SETH

**JOE: Morning, lads.**

**THEY LOOK UP GUILTILY.**

**SETH: Morning Joe..**

**JOE: Eh, who is it this time?  
Schoolmaster's wife or vicar's daughter?**

**BILL: Aye, that's right.**

**SETH: I'd, er, better be off to work then.**

**BILL: I'll come with you.**

**THEY SCURRY OFF AND JOE ENTERS WHISTLING INTO THE SHOP.**



**2. INT. HOME FARM KITCHEN. DAY.****TIME: 09:17**

10:00:52:04 (1) MS DOLLY, KIM

DOLLY AND KIM SIT TOGETHER AT THE TABLE, DRINKING COFFEE.

**KIM:** So how's things with your Charlie.**DOLLY:** Oh fine. But he's not really my Charlie.**KIM:** Is he somebody else's then? Or shouldn't I ask?**DOLLY:** He's married but he and his wife haven't got on for years.**KIM:** Is it serious?**DOLLY:** I don't think so ... well not yet any road.

CHRISTOPHER ENTERS.

**KIM:** Hello Chris. What's up?**CHRISTOPHER:** Just take a look at this.**3. EXT. VILLAGE. DAY.****TIME: 09:19**

10:01:15:19 (1) MS JOE

JOE IS LEAVING THE SHOP READING THE NEWSPAPER. HE STOPS JUST OUT OF THE SHOP ENTRANCE, GRABBED BY THE ARTICLE HE IS READING. A FEW MOMENTS LATER HE CRUMPLES THE PAPER IN FURY AND CHARGES BACK INTO THE SHOP.

10:01:20:12 (2) BCU JOE

10:01:22:16 (3) CU NEWSPAPER

**4. INT. BATES COTTAGE. DAY.****TIME: 09:20****KITCHEN**

10:01:24:07 (1) MS SETH, TURNER

SETH IS READING FROM THE PAPER AS TURNER LOOKS ON, CENSORIOUS.

**SETH:** 'Tearful Lynn said teenage temptress's charms led to the death of her husband in a bizarre... accident...'**TURNER:** It really is outrageous – as if they didn't have enough to worry about.



**SETH:** '... while her mother faces charges related to Peter's death, Rachel's father was on the run after an attempt on the life of her step-father.'

**TURNER:** Who gets pleasure in reading this sort of muck?

**SETH:** You're right Mr. Turner. It's rubbish.

**TURNER:** Yes, yes, quite right Seth. Come on, we've wasted enough time already. We must get going.

### **LIVING ROOM**

10:02:00:04 (2) MS TURNER, SETH

**SETH:** But before we start, I want double-time for today.

**TURNER:** Grab, grab, grab. That's typical of you. Trying to take advantage of a situation like this.

**SETH:** Time and a half then. And a telephone number.

**TURNER:** What are you blethering about?

**SETH:** You're not going to gamekeepers' dance, are you?

**TURNER:** Well no. If what you say about the new President's plans is true. Not my sort of scene. Strippers and beer – I ask you!

**SETH:** I reckon it'll be great. But I need an escort. Somebody with a bit of class to impress me mates with.

**TURNER:** What does the lovely Meg think about that?

**SETH:** Meg knows nowt about it. Last time I took her dancing she dislocated me ankle in jitterbug competition on Coronation Day in 1953. She were eight months pregnant wi' our Jimmy at time. What a sight that were.

**TURNER:** Well whose phone number do you want, for heaven's sake?

**SETH:** That Rosemary – you know, that nudie friend of yours.

**TURNER:** Mrs. Gray is a naturist.

**SETH:** She still takes her clothes off.

**TURNER:** She wouldn't thank me for giving you her phone number.



**SETH:** Why not? She's obviously desperate for a bloke – she went out wi' you twice.

### 5. EXT. VILLAGE. DAY.

**TIME: 09:25**

10:03:02:03 (1) MS JOE, EXTRAS  
FROM INSIDE CAR

JOE COMES OUT OF THE SHOP CARRYING ALL THE SHOP'S COPIES OF THE OFFENDING PAPER. HE THROWS THEM INTO THE CAR AND DRIVES OFF AT SPEED.

### 6. INT. HOME FARM KITCHEN. DAY.

**TIME: 09:45**

10:03:11:19 (1) MS CHRIS, ZOË  
START ON CU OF NEWSPAPER

ZOË, KIM AND CHRISTOPHER WITH THE PAPER.

**CHRISTOPHER:** 'The mini-skirted blonde, personal assistant to young haulage entrepreneur, Chris Tate, said: He might have been married to somebody else, but I'll always miss him.'

**ZOË:** I must say I never saw Rachel as a 'teenage temptress'. Or is that why you gave her the job?

10:03:29:00 (2) MCU CHRIS

**CHRISTOPHER:** It was Kathy's idea, actually.

10:03:31:00 (1) MCU ZOË

10:03:32:08 (2) MS KIM, CHRIS, ZOË

And I thought Beckindale was a quiet little backwater.

**ZOË:** That's where all the best scandal is, didn't you know.

**KIM:** I think you two ought to remember not so long back when how you hated a few local people revelling in our private affairs. Imagine what it's like with a few million are doing it.

10:03:44:12 (1) MS ZOË

**ZOË:** Oh yeah. They must feel dreadful. Poor Rachel.

10:03:47:11 (2) MS CHRIS

**CHRISTOPHER:** She was having a hard enough time at work last week. They'll really be getting at her now.

10:03:51:04 (3) MS KIM

**KIM:** 'Sexpot Rachel claimed that she had been carrying on

10:03:54:17 (1) MCU ZOË

her spicy affair with Pete Whiteley for over a year and she...', I never knew that.

10:03:56:07 (3) MS KIM

**ZOË:** Kim! What were you just saying?



10:03:59:17 (1) MS ZOË  
 KIM: Quite right. Should go in the bin.

10:04:01:01 (3) MCU KIM  
 ZOË: Where's dad?

10:04:03:13 (1) MS CHRIS, KIM, ZOË  
 KIM: Out for a run. While he still can. This time next week, he'll be lucky if he can walk.

10:04:17:01 (2) MCU CHRIS  
 ZOË: Ah. I hope the operation's successful. When will you know if it is?

10:04:20:10 (3) MCU KIM  
 KIM: When I become pregnant, I suppose.

10:04:25:01 (2) MS CHRIS, KIM ZOË  
 CHRISTOPHER: He's going through with it then?

10:04:26:08 (1) MS RACHEL  
 KIM: Of course. Your father's looking forward to having more children as much as I am.

10:04:26:20 (2) MS KATE, JOE, MARK, RACHEL  
 CHRIS GOES.

16:04:35:23 (1) MS RACHEL, ANNIE  
**7. INT. FARM KITCHEN. DAY.**  
**TIME: 09:50**  
 RACHEL SITS, RED-EYED FROM CRYING. ANNIE TRIES TO COMFORT HER, WHILE KATE AND JOE READ THE PAPER, FURIOUS.

10:04:43:11 (2) MS KATE, JOE  
 KATE: How can they do this? It's all twisted and ...

10:04:47:14 (1) MS RACHEL, ANNIE  
 MARK: It's not true is?

10:04:53:03 (2) MS KATE, JOE  
 JOE: Of course it isn't. Don't be silly Mark. It's the newspapers, they love doing it. Muck-raking.

10:04:55:10 (1) MS RACHEL, ANNIE  
 RACHEL: It's all my fault. All of it. I'm sorry Mum.

ANNIE: Don't blame yourself, love.

RACHEL: Yeah, I know. But if I hadn't have gone with Pete Whiteley...

KATE: Listen love. This has got nothing to do with what happened between you and Pete.

RACHEL: I know. But what they've called me ... it's ... it's as if I'm a tart or something. I'm not mum, really.

KATE: I know you're not. We all know you're not.



10:05:01:16 (3) MLS KATE, JOE, MARK,  
RACHEL, ANNIE

**ANNIE:** Of course we do love. It's these newspaper men. They, they like to make things up. They don't care whose lives they ruin.

**8. INT. FELDMANN'S FARM. DAY.**

**TIME: 09:55**

10:05:05:04 (1) MS ELIZABETH, ELSA

**ELIZABETH IS POTTERING IN THE KITCHEN AS ELSA ENTERS.**

**ELSA:** Mum, did you tell Nick you'd like us to get married?

**ELIZABETH:** Yes, I did.

**ELSA:** Why? You wanted to stop us being together. You brought us back up here, put us in separate bedrooms. You wanted to keep us apart, and now all of a sudden you want us to get married.

**ELIZABETH:** I wanted to give you time love. Time to get to know him. And I wanted to get to know him too. He's a good lad. And he's serious about you and the baby. I wanted to make sure of that more than anything.

**ELSA:** You were right Mum. I did need time to think.

10:05:42:12 (2) MCU ELIZABETH

**ELIZABETH:** And now you're not sure any more. Is that it?

10:05:45:03 (1) MCU ELSA

**ELSA:** I suppose so. I do love him. It's a big step though. I'm a bit frightened. I don't want to rush into it just because I'm pregnant. When I marry I want it to be forever.

10:05:59:01 (2) MCU ELIZABETH

**ELIZABETH:** Nick feels the same. I'm sure he does.

10:06:01:19 (1) MCU ELSA

**ELSA:** You brought me up too well Mum. I've always wanted an old fashioned courtship. You know, romantic walks in the moonlight, flowers. Getting to know someone properly.

10:06:11:05 (2) MCU ELIZABETH

**ELIZABETH:** An engagement ring. It's not like that though is it? I'm going to be an old married lady with a baby before I'm twenty. There won't be much time for romance.

10:06:13:24 (1) MCU ELSA

**ELSA:** I don't know that Nick's the romantic type Elsa. But he has got other qualities. More important ones.

10:06:25:05 (2) MCU ELIZABETH



10:06:33:01 (1) MCU ELSA

ELSA: I know. But a little bit wouldn't hurt would it? Only Nick could choose the Woolpack Tap Room to propose marriage.

10:06:39:16 (2) MCU ELIZABETH

ELIZABETH: I see what you mean love. But maybe you should tell him what you feel. Give him a chance to understand.

10:06:45:24 (1) MCU ELSA

## 9. EXT. FARM. DAY.

TIME: 10:00

10:06:47:03 (1) MS JOE, MARK

JOE AND MARK ARE RIPPING UP THE PAPERS, THROWING THEM ON A FIRE.

MARK: Who'd do this, Joe? Who'd tell them all this rubbish? I mean, that's what it is, isn't it? It was Pete Whiteley's fault. It wasn't Rachel's.

10:07:01:24 (2) BCU JOE

JOE SAYS NOTHING, AS THE FLAMES LICK ROUND THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF PETE AND LYNN.

## 10. EXT. HOME FARM. DAY.

TIME: 10:02

10:07:06:05 (1) MS FRANK  
TRACK AND DOLPHIN ARM

FRANK IS DRESSED IN HIS TRACK-SUIT, AS IF OUT FOR A RUN AS EVERYONE THINKS. ACTUALLY OUT FOR A SECRET DRINK, HE WALKS SLOWLY TOWARDS THE DRIVE, ALL THE CARES OF THE WORLD ON HIS SHOULDERS. HE STOPS, JUST OUT OF SIGHT OF THE HOUSE AND LOOKS ROUND, THEN TAKES A HIP-FLASK FROM HIS POCKET AND TAKES A LONG SWIG, EMPTYING THE FLASK. HE THEN TAKES A PACKET OF MINTS FROM HIS POCKET AND POPS ONE IN HIS MOUTH BEFORE STIRRING HIMSELF UP TO RUN AS HE TURNS INTO THE DRIVE TOWARDS HIS HOME.

## 11. INT. FARM KITCHEN. DAY.

TIME: 10:10

~~JOE SLAMS THE PHONE DOWN ON THE SOLICITOR.~~ ANNIE, KATE AND RACHEL SIT IN A STATE OF SHOCK.

~~JOE: Nothing. He says there's absolutely nothing we can do.~~



~~ANNIE: But surely, there must be something. It's all lies.~~

~~JOE: Aye. Well that's the problem, according to Trafford. They're not lies.~~

~~RACHEL: But Joe. It wasn't like that at all.~~

~~JOE: I know love. But stripped down to bare essentials it is what happened. You had an affair with a married man who had a baby on the way. And he was killed in a car accident by Kate. All the other stuff is just interpretation. That's what Traffor says anyway. And there's nothing we can do.~~

10:07:46:20 (1) MLS KATE, CHARLTON, ANNIE

CHARLTON ARRIVES.

CHARLTON: I just thought I'd drop in to see how you are.

ANNIE: You've seen the paper?

CHARLTON: I heard about it. All the copies of the newspaper were gone, but, of course, they were only too glad to let me see one. Human nature. ~~That's how these papers thrive... it's a sorry reflection on our society.~~

KATE: I could take it if it was about me. But all that rubbish about Rachel.

10:08:02:06 (2) MS RACHEL, JOE

JOE: It's the only way they could do it, love – in fact, according to the solicitor, they've been dead clever – two whole pages all about Lynn and her tragedy and just one line about the accident.

10:08:10:13 (3) MCU KATE

KATE: But the implication. They're almost suggesting that I killed him on purpose.

10:08:14:19 (2) MCU JOE

JOE: Exactly love. Almost. Like I say, they've done nothing we can get them for.

~~CHARLTON: If it is any consolation, a couple of people have genuinely told me how appalled they are by the paper printing this story.~~

~~ANNIE: We've had a couple of people phone up as well – friends... proper friends.~~

10:08:18:16 (3) MS KATE, CHARLTON

CHARLTON: I'd like you to know you've got plenty of friends at St. Mary's. And I'm sure they would be proud to see you all at the service this morning.

10:08:25:15 (2) MS RACHEL

RACHEL: Oh, you've got to be kidding. I'm not going down there for that lot to gawp at me. They'll be all smiles to my face, then they'll call me a hard-faced little trollop for daring to show myself in their church.



10:08:34:13 (1) MLS KATE, CHARLTON,  
ANNIE, RACHEL, JOE

ANNIE: Leave her, Joe. Let her sort it out in her own terms.

~~JOE: Trouble is, she's probably right.~~

~~KATE: Only one way to find out. I'm going. Okay?~~

~~SHE SMILES AT CHARLTON. HE NODS, UNDERSTANDING.~~

~~12. INT. FELDMANN'S FARM. DAY.~~

~~TIME: 10:15~~

~~[SCENE CUT.]~~

~~ELIZABETH IS READING PAPER AS NICK AND ELSA TALK. NICK IS MISERABLE FOLLOWING THE REJECTION OF HIS MARRIAGE PROPOSAL.~~

~~ELSA: We could go up Keller Fell.~~

~~NICK IS SILENT.~~

~~Or do you fancy somewhere else?~~

~~NICK: I don't feel like it.~~

~~ELSA: Come on Nick. It'll be nice to get some fresh air.~~

~~NICK: I don't feel like it really.~~

~~ELSA: What about the pictures?~~

~~NICK: Don't see the point.~~

~~ELSA: I just want to spend some time with you Nick. Just the two of us. Together.~~

~~NICK: Do you?~~

~~ELSA: Yes I do. I may not want to get married yet but I do want to be with you. With no one else around. I thought you did too.~~

~~NICK: I do.~~

~~ELSA: Well then?~~

~~NICK: Right. Let's go down by the river shall we? It's nice down there. And then we could call in the Woolpake for a drink later.~~

~~ELSA: Great. Let's go then.~~

~~THEY STAND UP AND LEAVE, HAPPY.~~

~~CLOSE ON ELIZABETH'S FACE SMILING TO HERSELF.~~



**14. INT. HOME FARM SITTING ROOM.  
DAY.****TIME: 12:00***[SCENE INSERTED FROM PART TWO.]*

10:08:39:08 (1) MLS FRANK

FRANK IS JUST FINISHING TIPPING A VODKA DOWN. HE HEARS KIM CALLING, HURRIDLY REPLACES THE GLASS AND POPS A MINT IN HIS MOUTH WHICH HE CRUNCHES. KIM CALLS AGAIN.

10:08:42:11 (2) MS KIM, FRANK

**KIM:** Frank!

SHE ENTERS.

There you are. Hey, don't go spoiling your lunch – I got Dolly's lasagne out of the freezer with my own fair hands. What're you eating anyway.

**FRANK:** Just a mint.**KIM:** Bad for your teeth.

10:08:58:17 (3) MCU KIM, FRANK

**FRANK:** Stop treating me like a kid!

10:09:00:11 (2) MCU KIM, FRANK

**KIM:** It was a joke.

10:09:01:21 (3) MCU KIM, FRANK

**FRANK:** Yeah. I'm sorry. Just ... a bit snappy.

10:09:07:12 (2) MCU KIM, FRANK

**KIM:** Don't worry. It'll be all right. The operation. It'll be over before you know it.

SHE BEAMS AT HIM.

**13. INT. FARM KITCHEN. DAY.****TIME: 10:20**

10:09:19:08 (1) MS KATE, DOLLY, JOE

KATE AND JOE WITH DOLLY. KATE IS PUTTING FLOWERS IN A VASE.

**KATE:** Thanks for the flowers, Dolly.**DOLLY:** It seemed silly really. I couldn't think of anything else.**KATE:** Oh no. They're lovely. It's really kind of you.**DOLLY:** Well you know. If there is anything I can do.**KATE:** Thanks. I'll let you know. Right, I er, suppose I'd better get changed. I want to look my best, don't I?**JOE:** I'll run you down there.**KATE:** Thanks Love.



10:09:55:24 (2) MCU JOE, DOLLY

10:09:57:14 (3) MCU JOE, DOLLY

10:09:59:16 (2) MCU JOE, DOLLY

10:10:03:03 (3) MCU JOE, DOLLY

10:10:05:17 (2) MCU JOE, DOLLY

10:10:08:13 (3) MCU JOE, DOLLY

10:10:15:02 (2) MCU JOE, DOLLY

10:10:18:19 (1) MS ANNIE, JOE, DOLLY

10:10:22:07 (2) MCU JOE, DOLLY

10:10:25:17

10:30:02:00

10:30:08:07 (1) MS TURNER, AMOS,  
SETH, BILL

**JOE:** Well Dolly. Getting Demdyke sorted out are you? Make a nice little love-nest will that?

**DOLLY:** What do you mean?

**JOE:** Well, surely it must be difficult getting together at Home Farm? You know, with er, with Kim there.

**DOLLY:** What's it got to do with Kim?

**JOE:** She'd be upset, surely.

**DOLLY:** No. No, she didn't seem bothered this morning.

**JOE:** You mean you talk to her about it?

**DOLLY:** Well, yes. Of course. I mean, she's a friend.

**JOE:** I must say I find it very strange. I mean, how you can face each other over a cup of coffee in the mornings?

**DOLLY:** Joe, What are you talking about?

**ANNIE ENTERS.**

**JOE:** It's all right Ma. We're just waiting for Kate.

Don't worry. Your secret's safe with me.

**CLOSE ON DOLLY'S FACE.**

**END OF PART ONE**

**PART TWO**

*I SEC MIX TO...*

**15. INT. WOOLPACK BAR. DAY.**

**TIME: 12.00**

**AMOS, BILL, SETH AND TURNER ARE AT THE BAR WITH WILKS. COPIES OF THE PAPER ARE MUCH IN EVIDENCE.**

**TURNER:** I'd always thought of her as a harmless little slip of a thing. But, but now...

**SETH:** Now you'll be on your guard against her wicked wiles?

**AMOS:** You should all be ashamed of yourselves, reading all that nonsense.

**WILKS:** Quite right Amos. Never heard so much rubbish in my life.



- 10:30:22:13 (2) MS WILKS  
Rachel is no more a scarlet woman than I am ... just got led astray by somebody old enough to know better.
- 10:30:29:04 (1) MS BILL, SETH, TURNER, AMOS  
**BILL:** Ah, there's no smoke without fire, Henry. It wasn't just a one night stand, you know.
- 10:30:32:22 (2) MS WILKS  
10:30:33:23 (3) MS SETH, TURNER  
**TURNER:** Yes, he's right, Henry.  
According to the paper, they were cavorting together the night Jackie Merrick died.
- SETH:** When did you read that then, Mr. Turner?  
**TURNER:** Ah. Well, I, I took the liberty of retrieving the paper from the bin. I just wanted to acquaint myself with the facts before I banned it from all council offices.
- 14:30:48:21 (1) MCU AMOS  
**AMOS:** I might not hold with trash they wrote – but I can't agree with muzzling Press.
- 10:30:53:14 (2) MCU TURNER  
**TURNER:** That's muck-raking, Amos – not journalism.
- 10:30:55:18 (1) MCU AMOS  
**AMOS:** That's rich, coming from someone who was revelling in gory details a minute ago.
- 10:31:00:22 (2) MCU TURNER  
**TURNER:** I was not revelling in it. I just wanted to present a balanced picture.
- 10:31:04:13 (1) MCU AMOS  
**AMOS:** And I suppose you knew nowt about this story when you bought that rag this morning, Seth?
- 10:31:09:10 (2) MS SETH, TURNER, JOE, DOLLY, BILL  
**SETH:** Course not. Or I wouldn't have bought it.  
**JOE:** Henry. Give us a pint and a gin and tonic. I would've thought you'd've had better things to do than read that trash.  
**DOLLY:** Come on Joe. Let's go into the Tap Room, shall we.  
**JOE:** You should be ashamed of yourselves.
- 10:31:26:18 (1) MCU AMOS  
**AMOS:** He's right. You should be ashamed of yourselves. You buy those things 'cause you think you might find summat salacious in them – lurid details about some poor devil's private life. And it's no different just 'cause you know people concerned.
- 10:31:39:24 (2) MS BILL, SETH, TURNER  
**TURNER:** We all know it was a very distorted picture in that article.



10:31:43:18 (1) MCU AMOS

AMOS: But every other time, when you don't know people concerned, when you don't know whether facts about them are distorted or not, that's all right? You're nowt but hypocrites – lot of you.

10:31:52:17 (2) MS BILL, SETH, TURNER

SETH: ~~But you just said the Press shouldn't be censored. You're contradicting yourself as usual.~~

AMOS: ~~Aye. So I did. But if people like you stopped buying it, journalists would be able to revert to the proper truth in life. Bringing the news to the people.~~

16. INT. WOOLPACK TAP ROOM. DAY.

TIME: 12:05

10:31:54:01 (1) MS JOE, DOLLY, WILKS

WILKS GIVES DRINKS AND EXITS. THE TAP ROOM IS QUIET.

JOE: It makes me so angry though. I expect it from total strangers, but not from so-called friends.

DOLLY: But they're not taking it seriously Joe. They know it's not true.

JOE: Yeah. I suppose so. I'm just glad Kate didn't come in with us.

DOLLY: I wish there was something I could do.

10:32:09:20 (2) MS JOE, DOLLY

JOE: You're doing it Dolly. She was very pleased you turned up this morning.

10:32:13:05 (3) MS JOE, DOLLY

DOLLY: Yes, talking about this morning, what were you on about?

10:32:16:08 (2) MS JOE, DOLLY

JOE: It's all right. It's nothing to do with me. I mean, if the three of you are happy with the arrangement...

10:32:22:24 (3) MS JOE, DOLLY

DOLLY: Yeah, That's what I meant. What are you talking about?

10:32:25:06 (2) MCU JOE

JOE: You and Frank.

10:32:27:06 (3) MCU DOLLY

DOLLY: Frank?

10:32:28:13 (2) MCU JOE

JOE: Um. You and Frank Tate. But if Kim doesn't mind, why should I...

10:32:33:00 (3) MCU DOLLY

DOLLY: You think me and Frank... No wonder. You idiot.

10:32:36:11 (2) MCU JOE

JOE: Dolly. I saw you. That day you said Frank wasn't at home. I saw him going into the house with you.



10:32:41:18 (3) MCU DOLLY  
And then the other night at dinner. I caught the two of you in the kitchen.

10:32:45:04 (2) MCU JOE  
He had his arms around you, and you were saying 'No Frank, please'.

10:32:47:21 (1) MS JOE, DOLLY  
DOLLY: Look Joe. What I'm going to tell you mustn't go any further. Promise? That time you saw us. Frank was drunk.

JOE: Oh. He didn't know what he was doing then.

SLOW ZOOM IN  
DOLLY: Yeah. No. No, no. It's more than that. It's not that he drinks too much. He's an alcoholic, he can't control it. If he has one, he has the lot. Till he passes out. That other night, he was downing a whole bottle of wine and I was trying to stop him.

JOE: How long – Well how long's this been going on then?

DOLLY: A few months. Trouble is Kim doesn't know anything about it. It's a secret. So you must promise you won't tell anyone.

JOE: Don't worry. I'll not breathe a word. I promise.

10:33:27:12 (2) MCU JOE  
So if it's not Frank then, who is it?

10:33:30:17 (3) MCU DOLLY  
DOLLY: Joe! You are a worse gossip than Seth Armstrong, you.

10:33:34:19 (2) MCU JOE

**17. INT. HOME FARM DINING ROOM.  
DAY.**

**TIME: 13:30**

10:33:35:18 (1) MS ZOË, FRANK  
FRANK AND ZOË SIT BACK AFTER LUNCH. ZOË HAS A GLASS OF WINE, FRANK HAS ORANGE JUICE.

SLOW CRAB RIGHT ROUND TABLE  
ZOË: Sundays are so civilized. Get up late, go for a ride – back for a large G and T with the papers, then a lazy lunch ... not that there'll be such a thing as a day off for you soon.

FRANK: What?

ZOË: When the bambino arrives. Or are you planning to have a nanny?

FRANK: I haven't thought about it.

ZOË: Well I bet Kim has.

ZOË: It'll be nice having a baby around.



10:34:08:00 (2) MLS ZOË, KIM, FRANK

FRANK: Hey – I've got enough with Kim being broody without you starting.

ZOË: Don't worry – a family is a long way down my list of priorities.

KIM ENTERS.

KIM: I can leave you two to clear up, I suppose.

FRANK: How long will you be?

KIM: Couple of hours. Why – will you miss me?

FRANK: I just wondered. That's all.

KIM: I'll make it an hour.

ZOË: She's full of the joys of Spring.

FRANK: Pity it's October.

10:34:30:17 (1) MS ZOË, FRANK

ZOË: Dad! Dad, is something wrong? You have been in a really strange mood just lately.

FRANK: No. I'm fine.

ZOË: Listen, if you're worried about what Chris was saying about the baby, don't be.

FRANK: ZOË – there is no baby.

10:34:39:15 (2) CU FRANK

ZOË: But assuming there will be. Chris is just feeling a bit out of it. You know how jealous he is of Kim. I think he just thinks that with a new family, you'll forget the old one.

10:34:42:07 (1) MS ZOË, FRANK

FRANK: And what do you think about it?

10:34:53:07 (2) CU FRANK

ZOË: I'm glad for you. Marrying someone, so much younger than yourself could have been a disaster...

10:34:55:22 (1) CU ZOË

but so many of my friend's fathers not only look old, they act old...

10:35:02:10 (2) CU FRANK

and here's you trying for another baby. Cheers!

10:35:06:16 (1) CU ZOË

FRANK: Hey, what about this lot?

10:35:12:16 (3) MLS ZOË, FRANK

ZOË: I never had you down for a sexist pig. Surely you don't think that this is woman's work.

ZOË EXITS. AND THEN RE-ENTERS.

ZOË: Dad, um, if anyone rings, I'll be back for tea.



10:34:08:00 (2) MLS ZOË, KIM, FRANK

**FRANK:** Hey – I've got enough with Kim being broody without you starting.

**ZOË:** Don't worry – a family is a long way down my list of priorities.

**KIM ENTERS.**

**KIM:** I can leave you two to clear up, I suppose.

**FRANK:** How long will you be?

**KIM:** Couple of hours. Why – will you miss me?

**FRANK:** I just wondered. That's all.

**KIM:** I'll make it an hour.

**ZOË:** She's full of the joys of Spring.

**FRANK:** Pity it's October.

10:34:30:17 (1) MS ZOË, FRANK

**ZOË:** Dad! Dad, is something wrong? You have been in a really strange mood just lately.

**FRANK:** No. I'm fine.

**ZOË:** Listen, if you're worried about what Chris was saying about the baby, don't be.

10:34:39:15 (2) CU FRANK

**FRANK:** ZOË – there is no baby.

10:34:42:07 (1) MS ZOË, FRANK

**ZOË:** But assuming there will be. Chris is just feeling a bit out of it. You know how jealous he is of Kim. I think he just thinks that with a new family, you'll forget the old one.

10:34:53:07 (2) CU FRANK

**FRANK:** And what do you think about it?

10:34:55:22 (1) CU ZOË

**ZOË:** I'm glad for you. Marrying someone, so much younger than yourself could have been a disaster...

10:35:02:10 (2) CU FRANK

but so many of my friend's fathers not only look old, they act old...

10:35:06:16 (1) CU ZOË

and here's you trying for another baby. Cheers!

10:35:12:16 (3) MLS ZOË, FRANK

**FRANK:** Hey, what about this lot?

**ZOË:** I never had you down for a sexist pig. Surely you don't think that this is woman's work.

**ZOË EXITS. AND THEN RE-ENTERS.**

**ZOË:** Dad, um, if anyone rings, I'll be back for tea.



FRANK, COUGHING ON HIS DRINK, JUST NODS. SHE SMILES AND GOES. HE DOWNS THE CUPFUL IN THE WAY SERIOUS DRINKERS DO, NOT JUST SIPPING BUT SWIGGING.

**18. INT. FARM KITCHEN. DAY.**

**TIME: 13:45**

10:35:44:20 (1) MS ANNIE, RACHEL, MARK

ANNIE AND RACHEL CLEAR UP AFTER DINNER, AS MARK PREPARES DOG FOOD FOR LUCY.

**MARK:** I don't think I'm going to go to school tomorrow.

**ANNIE:** Why, are you poorly?

**MARK:** Everybody's going to be talking about it.

**ANNIE:** Ashamed to face them are you?

~~**MARK:** It's not that.~~

~~**ANNIE:** That's what it'll look like.~~

**RACHEL:** Mark – you weren't even mentioned.

**MARK:** Yeah, but they know you're my sister, don't they.

**RACHEL:** So what are you going to do – go round with a sack over your head?

**MARK:** Might not be a bad idea for you. Annie. What are we going to do?

**ANNIE:** Ignore them. If they see they're getting at you, they'll carry on but they'll just give up if you ignore them.

**MARK:** Yeah, I suppose so. I'm just off out to feed Lucy, all right.

**RACHEL:** I've ruined everybody's lives, haven't I, Annie?

**ANNIE:** You made a mistake that many a lass has made before you... you're just paid a heavier price for it, that's all. But I'll tell you this – the day you and Mark came to live here was one of the happiest days of my life...

10:36:29:21 (2) MCU RACHEL, ANNIE

and nothing that happens can ever change that.

10:36:32:16 (3) MCU RACHEL, ANNIE

10:36:34:13 (2) MCU RACHEL, ANNIE

SHE HUGS THE GIRL.



~~19. INT. HOME FARM DINING ROOM.  
DAY.~~~~TIME: 13:50~~~~FRANK PICKS UP THE WINE BOTTLE. IT IS  
EMPTY. HE PAUSES FOR A MOMENT,  
THEN GOES THROUGH TO THE LIVING  
ROOM, TAKING HIS CUP WITH HIM.  
FRANK ENTERS HALL FROM DINING  
ROOM AND GOES THROUGH TO THE  
LIVING ROOM.~~20. INT. HOME FARM LIVING ROOM.  
DAY.

TIME: 13:51

10:36:35:16 () MS FRANK

FRANK ENTERS AND GOES TO THE  
DRINKS. HE PUTS DOWN HIS CUP AND  
POURS SOME WHISKY INTO A GLASS - A  
GOOD MEASURE. HE DOWN IT IN ONE.

## 21. INT. WOOLPACK BAR. DAY.

TIME: 13:55

10:36:50:12 (1) MS BILL, SETH, EXTRAS

SETH IS AT THE BAR DRINKING WITH  
BILL MIDDLETON.SETH: That nudie lass would be best. But  
Turner wouldn't give me her phone number.BILL: What you going to do then? Go by  
yourself?10:36:56:13 (2) MS ELSA, MARK, SETH,  
BILLELSA: I'll just have an orange juice thanks  
Nick.NICK: Okay. Orange and a bottle of pils  
please Henry.SETH: Elsa. Do you reckon you could get  
me that nudie lady's telephone number for me  
out of Turner's files.ELSA: What Rosemary? No, it's in his  
personal diary. Why?BILL: He wants to take someone to the  
Gamekeepers' Ball.

ELSA: Shouldn't you take Meg?

SETH: Oh, no, no. She doesn't want to go.  
It's not up her street at all. That's why I need that  
Rosemary's number.ELSA: Well, what about the dating  
agency? That's where he got Rosemary from in  
the first place.

**SETH:** Do you know their number then?

**ELSA:** No, but I could find it.

**SETH:** What about now? You've got the keys to the cottage? And he's not around at the moment.

**ELSA:** I don't know Seth. I shouldn't really.

**SETH:** Come on. He'll never know.

**NICK:** Oh come. Let's get it. You wouldn't want to stop Seth having a bit of romance in his life would you?

**22. INT. HOME FARM SITTING ROOM.  
DAY.**

**TIME: 13.57**

10:36:42:16 (1) MS FRANK, KIM

FRANK IS ON HIS SECOND GLASS...  
DOWNING IT AS HE DID HIS FIRST, AS  
KIM ENTERS. IT IS DIFFICULT TO DECIDE  
WHO IS MORE SHOCKED.

**KIM:** What are you doing?

**FRANK:** Having a drink.

10:37:50:12 (2) MCU KIM

**KIM:** But you stopped drinking.

10:37:51:23 (3) MCU FRANK

**FRANK:** Well now I've started again.

10:37:53:15 (2) MCU KIM

**KIM:** Why?

10:37:54:05 (3) MCU FRANK

**FRANK:** Why not? It's nice. A little drink or two. Makes you feel better.

10:37:58:06 (1) MS KIM, FRANK

**KIM:** Frank.

**FRANK:** I feel better. Do you feel better? I feel on top of the world. In fact, I think I'll have another one.

**KIM:** For God's sake, Frank. How many have you had?

**FRANK:** Not enough. Not nearly enough.

**KIM:** Frank, love. You promised.

**FRANK:** Promises, promises. We all make promises don't we. I tell you what. I promise to have another drink.

**KIM:** Give it to me. You don't need it.

**FRANK:** I do. I do.

**KIM:** How long has this been going on?

**FRANK:** A day, a week, months, a year. Who knows.



10:38:29:08 (3) CU KIM, FRANK      How long have you wanted a baby.  
 10:38:31:17 (2) CU KIM              That's how long. Frank, I want a baby.  
 10:38:34:16 (3) CU FRANK            Have your vasectomy reversed, Frank. Prove yourself a man, Frank. That's how long.  
 10:38:44:05 (2) CU KIM              Have a drink Frank.  
 10:38:52:02 (3) MCU FRANK          KIM LOOKS AND THEN EXITS.

**23. INT. HOME FARM KITCHEN. DAY.**  
**TIME: 14:05**

10:38:56:04 (1) MLS DOLLY, KIM      DOLLY IS THERE, AS KIM ENTERS AND SITS AT THE TABLE.

DOLLY:    Yes, Thanks Ma, I'll see you soon. Bye. What on earth's the matter?  
 KIM:        Frank's drinking. Frank's drunk.  
 DOLLY:    Is he?  
 KIM:        He promised me. I really thought he'd cracked it this time. It's been years.  
 DOLLY:    Kim...  
 KIM:        I don't quite know what to do.  
 Before, when we were... when he was still married I used to cover up for him.  
 But now. Now I have to deal with it.  
 DOLLY:    I'm sure he'll listen to you Kim.  
 KIM:        If it's just the once, then it shouldn't be too bad. Just one lapse.  
 He should be able to stop again shouldn't he?  
 DOLLY:    Yes, yes.  
 I'm sure he can.  
 KIM:        It's probably best if I don't make too big a deal over it. I mean it's not as though he's been drinking regularly.  
 If I just show him that it's just the once, and that it doesn't matter.  
 DOLLY:    Kim, there's something I ought to tell you.  
 KIM:        Tell me what?  
 DOLLY:    This is not the first time.  
 KIM:        What?

10:39:20:21 (2) MCU DOLLY  
 10:39:23:23 (3) MCU KIM  
 10:39:28:01 (2) MCU DOLLY  
 10:39:29:22 (3) MCU KIM  
 10:39:31:23 (2) MCU DOLLY  
 10:39:34:03 (3) MCU KIM  
 10:39:39:20 (2) MCU DOLLY  
 10:39:43:14 (1) MLS DOLLY, KIM  
 10:39:53:07 (3) MS KIM  
 10:39:58:02 (2) MCU DOLLY  
 10:40:00:12 (3) MCU KIM  
 10:40:02:07 (2) MCU DOLLY  
 10:40:03:16 (3) MCU KIM

10:40:05:10 (2) MCU DOLLY

**DOLLY:** Yes, it's happened before. But he made me promise not to tell you, you see.

10:40:10:04 (3) MCU KIM

**KIM:** You've been covering up for him. How many times?

10:40:13:13 (2) MCU DOLLY

**DOLLY:** A couple. Three or four.

10:40:15:24 (3) MCU KIM

**KIM:** Oh I see. It really is the same old Frank then isn't it? Keep it hidden from the wife, and get the housekeeper to cover it up. Makes a change from his secretary I suppose. Why didn't you tell me.

10:40:30:17 (2) MS DOLLY

No... don't answer.

10:40:34:20 (3) MCU KIM

I never told Jean either.

10:40:37:12 (2) MS DOLLY, KIM

**DOLLY:** I wanted to believe me. I just didn't know how. And each time he said he'd never do it again.

10:40:44:03 (3) MCU KIM

**KIM:** Oh I know. Convincing isn't it? When did it start?

10:40:50:15 (2) MS DOLLY, KIM

**DOLLY:** ZOË's graduation.

10:40:56:09 (3) MCU KIM

**KIM:** I should've guessed.

Why didn't I see it?

#### 24. INT. BATES' KITCHEN / LIVING ROOM. DAY.

**TIME: 14:10**

10:41:00:00 (1) LS ELSA, SETH, BILL, NICK

SETH AND BILL MIDDLETON ARE WITH ELSA AND NICK AT WHATEVER SERVES AS TURNER'S FILING CABINET. THE COTTAGE IS STILL DENUDED OF FURNITURE.

**SETH:** When's he going to get some more furniture in here, Elsa?

**ELSA:** I don't know. I wish he would though. How can I work in conditions like this?

10:41:06:15 (2) MS BILL, NICK

**BILL:** I wish I'd been there.

**NICK:** Oh you should have seen Turner's face when Mum drove off, I thought he was going to burst.

10:41:12:10 (1) MS ELSA, SETH

**ELSA:** There you go. A photocopy of his application.

10:41:16:00 (2) MS BILL, NICK

**BILL:** Can you get me a bird out of there an' all?

10:41:17:09 (1) MS ELSA, SETH

**SETH:** Well if it got Turner one.

**SETH:** This can't be Turner's.



10:41:26:03 (2) MS BILL, NICK

10:41:27:06 (1) MS ELSA, SETH

10:41:31:08 (3) MS SETH, BILL, NICK

10:41:47:07 (1) MCU ELSA

10:41:48:17 (3) MS SETH, BILL, NICK

10:41:50:08 (1) MCU ELSA

10:41:51:20 (3) MS SETH, BILL, NICK

10:42:03:04 (1) MCU SETH

10:42:05:15 (2) MCU BILL, NICK

10:42:06:13 (1) MCU SETH

10:12:07:17 (1) MS KIM, FRANK

**ELSA:** It's got his name on it.

**SETH:** Distinguished career in the Royal Air Force! He did two years national service.

**ELSA:** Maybe he did well.

**SETH:** He must have done. It says here he were a test pilot.

**BILL:** You're kidding.

**NICK:** Let's have a look. It says his hobbies are water skiing and power boat racing.

**BILL:** Who Turner! More like eating and drinking. I thought I'd read some lies in that paper this morning, but it's nowt compared to this.

**NICK:** It says he's 45 years old. He's older than that isn't he Elsa?

**ELSA:** Yeah, much older.

**SETH:** Sounds good though, dun't it?

**ELSA:** Sounds a big daft to me.

**SETH:** It'll do for me.

**BILL:** What are you doing, man?

**SETH:** Well if lies like that can get Turner a classy bird like that Rosemary, it'll get me one. Especially seeing as I'm better looking than him.

Well, I would be if I had my teeth in.

## 25. INT. HOME FARM SITTING ROOM. DAY.

TIME: 14:15

FRANK TIPS THE REMAINS OF THE BOTTLE INTO HIS GLASS. THERE IS NO SAVOURING THE DRINK, HE IS SIMPLY GETTING DRUNK, SUCCESSFULLY. KIM ENTERS. SHE TRIES A SMILE.

**KIM:** Put the bottle down, love.

**FRANK:** Have it.

**KIM:** This is stupid.

**FRANK:** Join me. Pull up a glass.

**KIM:** For God's sake, Frank. Think what you're doing. You stopped before because you were killing yourself.

10:42:48:08 (2) BCU FRANK

10:42:51:18 (3) BCU KIM

10:42:52:24 (1) MS KIM, FRANK

10:43:04:08 (3) CU FRANK, KIM

10:43:14:17

10:43:48:19

**FRANK:** Well we've all got to die sometime. I'm a lot nearer to that than you are. Even without this... a lot nearer. Twenty years nearer.

**KIM:** You're not old, Frank. It's all in your mind. You said so yourself.

**FRANK:** Then, you should never believe a drunk. Now, get lost – go play with your horses. That's what I bought them for.

**KIM:** Why are you doing this? Is it really the baby?

**FRANK:** The baby!

What baby? I keep telling you Kim there is no baby.

You want to know why, I'll tell you. It's you. You don't care for me. All you care about is you, and what you can get out of me. This house. Money. Your blasted horses. Babies.

**KIM SITS DOWN, DEFEATED. FRANK GOES UNSTEADILY OVER TO HER AND YELLS IN HER FACE.**

All right Kim. You can have it. All of it. You want babies. I'll give you babies. You can have anything you want. Because that's what I'm here for, isn't it?

*CREDITS.*

**END OF EPISODE 1497**



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