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Mapping Macroscopic Plots in Narratively Complex Television Series

FLORENT FAVARD

Season two of American television series *Lost* (ABC, 2004-2010), a show already famous for its ongoing mysteries and non-linear plot twists, offers a new challenge to the survivors of the crash of flight Oceanic 815. John Locke, deeply invested in understanding the inner workings of the DHARMA scientific stations scattered across the island, ends up stuck under a blast door in the Swan station. In a pivotal scene of *Lockdown* (S02E17), a map drawn with invisible ink suddenly appears on the blast door, thanks to a black light briefly turning on, giving Locke a few seconds to memorize the scribbled, cryptic notes, and the fluorescent octagonal pattern pinpointing every DHARMA station on the island. One intriguing building at the centre is identified by a question mark. John Locke can be seen in further episodes, struggling to draw the map, remembering only a few key features: perhaps the question mark may lead him to understand the island's mysteries, and his own "destiny."

The use of a map is reflexive on at least two levels. First, it is an echo to the characters' need to *orient* themselves, as they travel on the island (both in space and time), and try to locate it on a world map; the characters also need to find themselves, sometimes quite literally (Locke, before the crash, wanted to go on a walkabout in the Australian outback), since many of them feel lost in their lives, are looking for meaning in their past, or need to learn to 'let go'. Secondly, it is a *mise en abyme* of specific reading strategies: the "forensic fans" (Mittell, 2009) of the show were quick to analyse the map by freeze-framing the scene, and uploaded a complete version on the internet, as they have done with every mystery during *Lost*'s six-year run. Those "orienting paratexts" (Mittell 2015, 261) were created by fans trying to piece together the show's puzzling long-term plot. Such paratexts may also be applied to trivia, a character's path or even the geography of the fictional world, and they have risen in the context of participatory culture and media convergence (Jenkins). They may be used by producers and audiences alike to describe

and illustrate various aspects of contemporary narrative complexity, blending episodic, stand-alone structures with long-term storytelling (Mittell, 2006). Indeed, most of American television series have become more than the sum of their parts, building intricate ‘mythologies’ as their writers, and the fans and critics after them, have defined overarching, long-term plots, complex character development, and the narrative and thematic potential of fictional worlds (Favard).

In order to analyse such complexity on the scale of entire series, academia may also have to find its own way to orient itself: if *microscopic* plots (contained and concluded in one episode) are easily describable, *macroscopic*, long-term, overarching plots, and the broader narrative structure called ‘mythology’, require new tools to be analysed, described, or even perceived, especially when one looks at such objects through a narratological lens. A coherent ‘narratology of television’ has been called for since the beginning of this century, at least (Allrath *et al.* 3).

After a quick overview of the rich, and yet overlooked, history of “diagramming narratives,” this paper will present one possible tool to visualize long-term plot and observe the organic evolution of narratively complex television series, building upon an initial proposal by Henrik Örnebring. While it draws from theory, the work presented here is still in progress, bringing more questions than answers: this is less a theoretical and well-rounded proposal than it is a slightly personal—yet, still academic—account of experimenting with serialized storytelling visualization.

Visualizing Narrative Data

“Narrative mapping” (Mamber) predates the contemporary era of data visualization, as even the structuralist endeavour of the 1960s “placed an emphasis ... on the synchronic systems that underlie both spatial and temporal modes of signification” (Ryan 12). Ryan distinguishes four scales of narrative mapping: the “universal deep structure” aiming at capturing the essence of narrative—one rare example being Greimas’s semiotic square; the “universal narrative structure,” which is the universal deep structure temporalized, taking into account the progression of a plot (understood in broad, generic terms, as a succession of events), with Claude Bremond’s “*logique des possible narratifs*” as its most famous representative; the “particular narrative structure” focusing on one specific narrative; and finally the “discourse level,” where the specificity of a particular retelling (an adaptation for example) or of a media are underlined (Ryan 16). While the method presented in these pages is an attempt to make sense of the evolution of macroscopic plots in narratively complex television series as a whole, it isolates particular narrative structures (each series has a specific diagram) and take into account the discursive level (specifically order

and focalization, but also various narrative devices such as cliffhangers, *in medias res* and so on).

Stephen Mamber and Marie-Laure Ryan both attempted to create typologies of narrative mapping: Mamber used a fivefold division, while Ryan spotted three main categories.

Mamber underlines five most common types: geographic; temporal; thematic or structural; conjectural; and conceptual. As geographic mapping deals with space—whether locations in the fictional world or comparisons with real world maps—temporal representations cover both the passage of time and the succession of events that define a plot. Thematic and structural mappings cover both plot devices and narrative motifs, such as “color coding” in a movie. The representation of possible outcomes of a given plot or action at one point of the narrative will fall under the conjectural category. Conceptual mapping engages in a deconstruction and reconceptualization of narrative elements, to shine a new light on otherwise ignored data.

Spending more time on a diachronic approach, Ryan nonetheless details her threefold typology: space, time, and mind. While the first two bear close resemblance to Mamber’s geographic and temporal mapping, Ryan’s third ace gives her a more coherent hand, as she focuses on the evolution of a character’s mental states and the possible outcomes they envision: will the plot give rise to a state of events expected—or feared—by one of the protagonists?

The main difference between Mamber and Ryan is not one of numbers, but of methodology and point of view: while Mamber envisions mapping both what is happening in the fictional world and how the narrative, as a discourse, presents those events, Ryan keeps an “internal” approach (Pavel 25), focusing on the fictional world, more or less independently from the shape of the narrative. In the following pages, considering both what happens in the fictional world and how it is presented on a discursive level, the method described will draw inspiration from both Mamber’s and Ryan’s conceptions of narrative mapping, while being closer to Ryan’s internal approach.

Studying Alias: Henrik Örnebring’s Method and Narrative Density

In his 2007 chapter “The Show Must Go On... And On: Narrative and Seriality in *Alias*”, Henrik Örnebring details the narrative complexity of J. J. Abrams’s *Alias* (ABC, 2001-2006), a spy thriller filled with camp action, science fiction, and fantasy. The series features Sidney Bristow, a CIA agent dedicated to bringing down rogue spies and terrorist cells, and first and foremost her archenemy Arvin Sloane, a man convinced that the prophecies of fifteenth-century inventor Milo Rambaldi will allow him to uncover the secret of immortality. The quest for Rambaldi’s artifacts and Sydney and Sloane chasing

each other, along with Sydney's romantic relationship with colleague Michael Vaughn, and troubled relationship with her parents (both being spies), form the basic structure of the overarching plots of the series, i.e. its *macroscopic* plots (in opposition to each episode *microscopic*, closed plots).

Alias is one the paragons of contemporary narrative complexity—and Abrams's first foray into enigmatic and long-term narration. It follows many narrative threads and a large ensemble cast, acquiring what Örnebring defines as “narrative density.” Many “subplots” cover more than one episode and evolve over entire seasons. Örnebring, acknowledging the serialized nature of narratively complex television series, aims at measuring how many long-term subplots are used by a given episode, excluding the microscopic plots started and ended within a single episode. In other words, he is listing all the narratives ‘layers’ intertwined in each episode. Örnebring defines a subplot as “any element of the story that is framed within the discourse as a *conflict* moving towards a *resolution*,” or “those parts of the text that can be summarized in a *question*.” He excludes “themes,” for example evolving relationships as they are “not represented as conflicts moving towards a resolution”—until, that is, they turn into subplots. Such transformation, Örnebring argues, occurs in the relationship between Sydney and her colleague Dixon, an agent unwittingly working for the enemy, believing Sloane's SD6 cell is part of the CIA. Sydney, determined to bring down SD6, must lie to Dixon, another father figure. But their relationship falls under the thematic umbrella identified by Örnebring because the series explores, on a thematic level, relationships based on lies and the fleeting concept of truth. Only in *Doppelgänger* (S01E05) does the situation start to be presented as a conflict, as Dixon destroys a plant, unknowingly killing CIA agents in the process, to Sydney's horror. The “theme” becomes a subplot that covers not only season one, but also season two until its climatic middle, when SD6 is brought down by Sydney and Dixon, the latter having finally learned the truth.

With that distinction in mind, Örnebring can then construct diagrams: horizontally, each diagram covers one season (here, roughly 22-24 episodes, one per column); on the Y axis, every subplot covering more than one episode is listed in the order of their appearance through the season. In each episode, if a subplot is used it is signalled by a black streak. This allows Örnebring to visualize narrative density, as some episodes use more subplots than other, more independent episodes. Episodes only using a microscopic plot launched and concluded within their 42 minutes are therefore entirely blank.

These diagrams, which look like Morse code, are firmly temporal if we are to follow both Mamber's and Ryan's terminologies. They focus on the temporal evolution of various subplots, as Örnebring defines them, along seasons and, eventually, the entire series. Dealing with narrative density, Örnebring's main objective is to measure the evolution of said density through the years,

effectively demonstrating, and even visualizing, a fact known by *Alias*'s fans: that the series, especially during its fourth season, became less serialized, using fewer long-term subplots, and more contained, microscopic plots within independent episodes. An evolution justified by ABC's fears over a decreasing audience: seriality, if not a sign of "quality TV," is a marker of complexity, and as such, can be as engaging for regular audience as it can be alienating to new viewers. Örnebring also monitors narrative devices associated with narrative complexity: the cliffhanger, a common trait of serialized storytelling, and the *in medias res* beginning, which is a specific 'signature' device of *Alias* (Örnebring isolates 11 *in medias res* beginning in the four first seasons of *Alias*).

But there is more to these diagrams than simply measuring narrative density and even Örnebring acknowledges this. Drawing from Angela Ndaljian's notion of "neo-baroque television", Örnebring concurs that narratively complex television series tend to conclude and launch subplots in the middle of a season—a fact that has been underlined by critics during the last few years, as the notion of "mid-season finale" (usually before the Christmas break between December and January) has become ubiquitous. Something is happening in the middle of those seasons, plot-wise: the fans know it, the critics know it, and even academics acknowledged it. But Örnebring suggests a method that has a side-effect: it *materializes* those shifts in narrative.

Going further: a need to visualize macroscopic plots

Örnebring's method, to my knowledge, was never picked up by his peers, although some academics have used similar diagrams to track specific elements of narrative, such as Vanessa Loubet-Poëtte when detailing *Sons of Anarchy*'s (FX, 2008-2014) exploration of writing and the return of discrete motifs through the seasons. During her talk entitled "Les fonctions de l'écrit intime dans la constitution du héros: Jackson Teller, volonté intime et destin tragique," she used a visual presentation including a diagram listing, with the episodes on the X axis, appearances of Jackson Teller's diary and John Teller's manuscript among other literary objects within the fictional world, and literary narrative devices on the discursive level.¹ Her diagram falls in the conceptual category if we are to follow Mamber's terminology.

Perhaps Örnebring's method, published as a chapter in a book focused on a cult TV program, did not draw enough attention. It has a heuristic value, nonetheless, being at its most basic level a form of retro-engineering. What Örnebring draws is similar to what can be seen on many writing room whiteboards (at least, in promotional shots and behind-the-scenes documentaries): the various

1. This talk was given during the "Littérature et séries" conference at Université Bretagne-Sud, on March 26, 2015.

subplots of a given season, broken down by episodes. Just as the writers need to have an eagle view of a season, academics studying television series can now *see* the evolution of intricate subplots over the seasons.

To further explore this heuristic value, this paper now needs to draw from personal experience in the academic fields of cinema and television studies as well as narratology. The remaining pages will focus on pragmatic, sometimes down-to-the-ground matters linked to the presentation of ongoing research and the teaching of television series narratology at university; these considerations, I think, are nonetheless necessary to better understand how I came to expand and modify Örnebring's method, and my own bias and limitations in pushing my own diagrams in one direction rather than another.

The focus of my thesis dissertation was on macroscopic plots in television, specifically plots that structured an entire program and made a "closure pledge," asking a major question in the pilot episode or the first few episodes, and then playing with the possible closure(s) that answering the question could lead to (Favard, dissertation). Among the first television series to behave this way were *Lost* and *Battlestar Galactica* (Syfy, 2003-2009). *Lost* was about castaways (Will they ever leave the island?) and the mysteries they faced (What is this island?). *Battlestar Galactica* focused on the last surviving humans of the Twelve Colonies, crossing the galaxy in the hopes of finding Earth before being annihilated by the Cylons (Will they find Earth? Will they defeat the Cylons?). Of course, other television series used teleological "macro-questions" to anticipate a "narrative closure" (Carroll), delaying it forever for the sake of keeping the narrative going, following the "infinite model of storytelling" that characterizes American television series (Mittell 2010, 81). What was different with *Lost* and *Battlestar Galactica*, and their many followers, is that they kept asking these macro-questions, making it their very narrative essence, using seriality devices (ongoing plots, cliffhangers, character development, ...), posing as narratives obviously suspended in a middle, between a beginning (the pilot) and an end, unpredictable and ever surprising in a competitive economic landscape... Until *Lost*, in its third season, was renewed for three more seasons by ABC, the writers and producers agreeing on an end date in an unprecedented move. Until *Battlestar Galactica* obtained the now very common 'last season', or as I call it, the "last turn of merry go round." Knowing that the end of a series is now an important selling point, networks seem keener on offering reduced seasons to end a show "on its own terms". While it is a marketing move, not entirely focused on artistic freedom, it is in line with growing audience expectations about "satisfying resolution[s]" (Mittell 2010, 80).

Trying to track the narrative evolution of these two teleological programs, I first started isolating either an episode in particular, or specific macro-questions, in order to explain serialized storytelling to students in a course on audio-visual narratology. Detailing narrative density, I used the opening

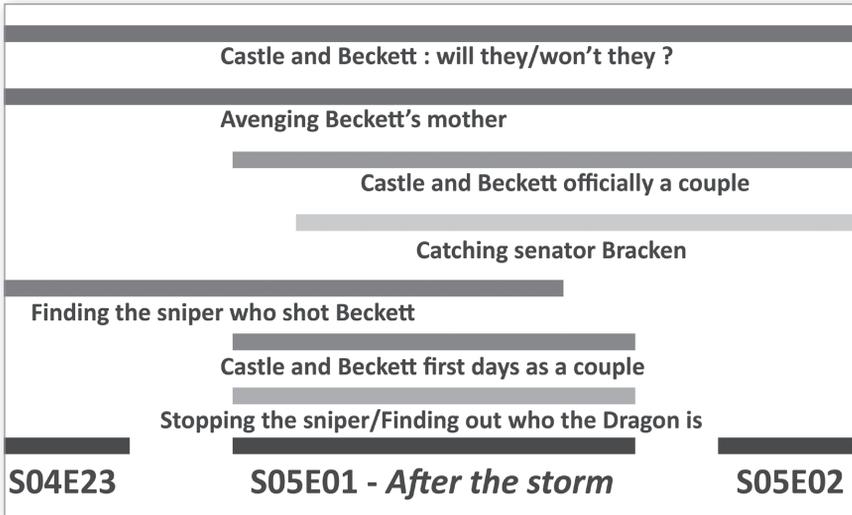


Figure 1. *Castle* © DR

episode of *Castle*'s fifth season (ABC, 2009-2016) to explain how microscopic and macroscopic plots intertwine in the space of 42 minutes.

I also had to explain the conventional structure of a season in less than 10 minutes, given the fact that I only have four hours per year to talk about television series in my class. I then decided to combine short scenes of *Fringe*'s first season (Fox, 2008-2013), from its pilot, mid-season finale, and season finale, with a graphic representation of the season, specifically highlighting the contrast between microscopic plots and two macroscopic plots (the war with an alternate universe, a plot that covers the first three seasons; and the appearance of the first season's main antagonist, Mr Jones).

While these graphic representations adequately served their purpose, the latter often fell short for one reason: the disposition of episodes in a grid breaks the continuous progression of a season and its macro-questions. However, it allowed me to distinguish between two uses of a macro-question: the red line materializing the subplot involving Mr Jones can sometimes get closer to the standard black streak circumscribing each episode. It indicates that some episodes heavily use the Mr Jones macro-question, while others use it as a simple 'background noise': through diegetic retelling (Mittel 2015, 181)—e.g., the characters mentioning Jones—an episode can exploit the viewer's long-term memory, reminding her that, in this serialized program, this specific 'subplot' is still going on, even if the episode does not deal directly with Jones, and no character action can be directly linked with the Jones plot's chain of events.

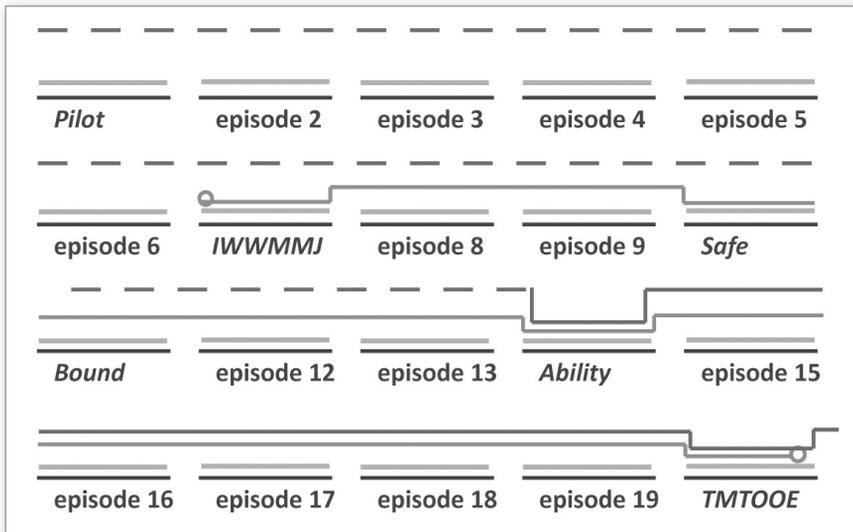


Figure 2. *Fringe* prototype © DR

This distinction led to one of the major modifications I implemented in Örnebring’s method: separating *effective* and *stealth* use of a macro-question. *Effective* use means the question will, in a given episode, influence the actions of at least one character in at least one scene—because even a single scene in an otherwise independent episode can move forward a macro-question. *Stealth* use covers exclusively those quiet references, whether a line of dialogue or a shot focusing on a specific element (an object or a place, for example), which do not lead the characters to take any relevant action regarding them, and whose sole purpose is to keep the macro-question alive in the viewer’s memory. I am borrowing the term ‘stealth’ from *Lost* writer Damon Lindelof, evoking “stealth serialized” shows covertly serializing their story while maintaining, and privileging, an episodic, ‘stand-alone’ structure to avoid alienating their audience with too much intratextuality and continuity (Bennett, 2014 79).

This first modification would lead to others, and during my thesis I unsuccessfully tried a few visualization methods before turning to Örnebring’s.

When Diagramming Brings Unexpected Questions

Watching Örnebring’s diagrams closely, one may notice that in season one, a connection is materialized by an arrow between two subplots, [Who is ‘The Man’] and [Syd’s mother alive?] Indeed, the season one finale reveals ‘The Man’ to be Irina Derevko, Sydney Bristow’s mother and Russian spy.

Two subplots merge to create season two's "Bristow family relationship", an arc both plot and character-related, as Irina tries to manipulate both the CIA—posing as a reliable source of intel—and her daughter. This type of intersection between macro-questions is only the tip of the iceberg: as Marie-Laure Ryan explains, "The purpose of diagramming stories should not be to make the simple look simple (why the need for a diagram in this case?), nor to make the simple look complicated, but to expose the hidden complexity of what appears self-evident" (36).

Expanding Örnebring's method and confronting it to a wide range of contemporary television series, I quickly faced another problem: while merging macro-questions were an obvious feature of narratively complex television, intricate macro-questions embedded into others like matryoshka dolls proved a great challenge. Just as any story, serialized storytelling can indeed use complex actions. A 'mega-action' is structured by multiple actions and characterized by its unpredictability. As Bertrand Gervais explains, 'taking a plane' is a simple action whose unfolding may be known by the reader or viewer, even if she never actually took a plane, since many stories may feature this "script" (in the narratological sense of the word, a script being "a predictable unfolding of events"); however, 'hijacking a plane' is a complex and unpredictable action, a "plan" in Gervais's terminology, that may require various steps with which the viewer may not be familiar, or which she may find unexpected, as "there is no known, normalized and therefore predictable way to hijack a plane" (Gervais). Likewise, over the course of *Lost*'s six seasons, there is no predictable way to realize the complex actions of 'leaving the island' or 'understanding its secrets', and both macro-questions require multiple, succeeding, parallel or competing steps, to lead to the possible and unpredictable closure.

Exploring *Battlestar Galactica*

To better illustrate this matter, I will draw from another narratively complex television series that focused heavily on macro-questions and teleological storytelling: *Battlestar Galactica*. The 2003 reimagining of a classic sci-fi program, *Battlestar Galactica* features the last humans to have survived the destruction of their 'Colonies' located on the other side of the galaxy. They are looking for the 'Thirteenth Tribe' that established itself on a distant planet called Earth. As they travel across the stars, they are chased by the Cylons, a form of artificial intelligence created by the Colonials, who rebelled and destroyed their masters. Unlike the original ABC series, the Cylons are no longer robots in shiny metallic armour, since some of them look like humans. There are twelve models or "skinjobs" Cylons, each with possibly millions of clones, and each model has at least one clone infiltrated in the Colonial Fleet, posing as a human and waiting for orders to sabotage ships or kill high-ranking

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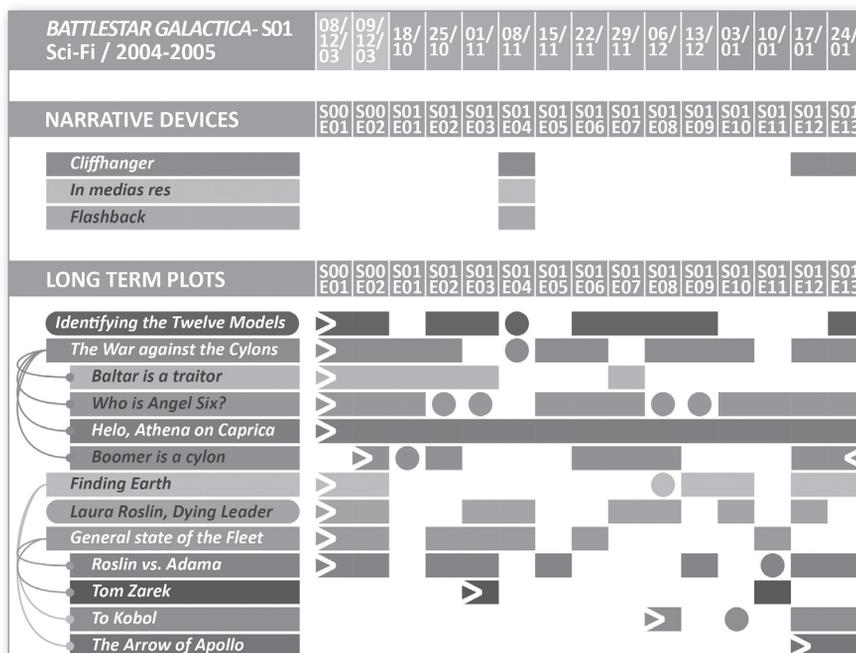


Figure 3. *BSG S1* © DR

military. Add to that a Cylon armada waiting for the Fleet at every turn with missiles and deadly raiders, and it is clear that the very survival of the Colonials is at stake in every episode.

Here is how I analysed the first season²: three macro-questions were quickly isolated. [The War against the Cylons] competes with the Colonial's objective, [Finding Earth]; the series also focuses on the Fleet's potential to destroy itself, as Commander Adama and President Laura Roslin embody the conflicts between civilians and the military, and terrorist Tom Zarek rises as an alternate voice for civilians, bolstering for free elections. Notice how each macro-question is composed of multiple meso-questions (mesoscopic being the intermediate between macroscopic and microscopic plots): [The War against the Cylons] is divided between the military and the Roslin administration unable to see Doctor Gaius Baltar for who he is, a traitor who sold the Colonies to the

2. Note that in the diagram, I included the two episodes of the pilot miniseries, coding them S00E01 and S00E02. The shades of grey in the first line featuring the first airing date may help, as it isolates initial airing periods separated by at least two weeks without a new episode (that is, 'civilian weeks' from Monday to Sunday, which represent at least three weeks in duration between one episode and the next).

Cylons; Baltar's own interior conflict is manifested by an hallucination—or is it a chip implanted in his head?—as he sees one of the Model Six giving him instructions; Boomer, a pilot, finds out that she is a Model Eight Cylon sleeper agent, and fights against her programming; and finally, another unsuspecting pilot, Helo, is trapped on one of the devastated colonies with another Model Eight that passes as Boomer.

An arrow pointing right symbolizes the start of a macro or meso-question, and a closure if pointing left; a streak means an effective use of the question inside each episode, while a dot signals a stealth use. Notice how, while an episode may effectively use a meso-question, it can also, at the same time, effectively use the corresponding macro-question in the same scenes, or in different scenes, which is why a macro-question and one or more of its meso-question may be featured in an episode without redundancy.

For example, the sabotage of the Fleet water reserves in *Water* (S01E02) is caused by Boomer, but it also brings up the larger question of the war against the Cylons when the episode focuses on Roslin and Adama, and raises the Baltar meso-question when the traitor is asked to devise a Cylon detector. However, *Bastille Day* (S01E03), focusing on the terrorist Zarek, uses the meso-question of Baltar (he asks for a nuclear warhead to construct his detector) but does not feature the macro-question [The War against the Cylons] in which Baltar is embedded, as the episode is busy with the [General State of the Fleet] and Tom Zarek.

Why, one might ask, did I then isolate [Identifying the Twelve Models] as another macro-question, when it could easily be a meso-question embedded within [The War against the Cylons]? Because this free macro-question (notice the rounded edges), while being linked to the main conflict against the Cylons and Baltar's detector, also impacts the general state of the Fleet as paranoia sets in. In the following seasons, it also influences [Finding Earth], since the Final Five Models may hold the secret to its location. I must admit I hereby committed a "*délit d'initié*"³ (Maroun 26) as I analysed the series knowing exactly how it would end: hence, the ambiguous and subjective status of the free macro-question may be useful to isolate questions that evolve on the same level as other macro-questions, but have a wide range of interactions with other macro and meso-questions. This is also why Roslin's cancer, that designates her as the "Dying Leader" foretold by the Sacred Scrolls, is categorized as a free macro-question, immediately following [Finding Earth] because of its connection to it.

3. *Délit d'initié* being the French equivalent of insider trading; however, the English term does not focus on the fact that it is prohibited (*délit*). Narratologists can also commit *délit d'initié*, as Maroun warns, by focusing too much on a teleological point of view. However, creating a diagram during the first viewing can lead to painful rearrangements later on, as retro-engineering reveals some unforeseen structures.

Practical Uses and Limits to the Diagrams: What Are They For? What Can't They Do?

There are many other methodological matters hidden inside those diagrams, but I cannot list them all here. One must also bear in mind that even though I have already applied it to more than a dozen series, this adaptation of Örnebring's method is still in flux. One unavoidable question is whether these diagrams are helpful. I may have an answer, but at the same time I cannot ignore the current limitations of this method.

The most obvious use of these diagrams is to visualize unfolding, serialized storytelling through retro-engineering. It may sound obvious, but many taken-for-granted phenomena more commonly explored by critics and fans than academics suddenly take shape, for example, the notion of "mid-season finale." In the American television industry, and, specifically, series that stretch from September to May, the evolution of a first season is twofold: first, its initial order by the network (usually a dozen episodes) ending around the Christmas break; then, its 'back nine order' completing the standard 20 to 24 episode American season. This 'back nine order' can come along with notes from the producers and the networks, and the writers may themselves choose to launch new plots; even during subsequent seasons, the Christmas break may lead to narrative reconfigurations. I agree with Ndalianis and Örnebring that the mid-season is therefore a critical point in contemporary serialized storytelling on television: macro and especially meso-questions will undergo closure, merging or even complete transformation during a mid-season finale, and new macro or meso-questions will rise.

These shifts are sometimes clearly visible through the diagrams. For example, the first season of *Fringe* is interrupted by three breaks (see the dates and the shades of grey in the first line). New meso-questions are launched just before or after a break, either because the writers anticipated a break in the narrative (the Christmas break and its classic back nine order) or the network decided to keep the program off the air for a few weeks and bring it back with engaging episodes featuring new plot developments.

The diagrams also offer an overview of narrative devices: the shifts between alternate realities can then be tracked in each season. However, the most interesting feature of these diagrams is that they underline the structural elements of a serialized storytelling structure (the merging, the matryoshka plots, the difference between effective and stealth use...) and could lead to further explore certain narrative mechanisms. In a structuralist fashion, I first took for granted the teleological unfolding of *Lost* and other closure-pledge TV series at the beginning of my thesis. Later, I was forced to acknowledge their mechanic and organic, sometimes confused, evolution determined by many other parameters besides an unpredictable ending. The retro-

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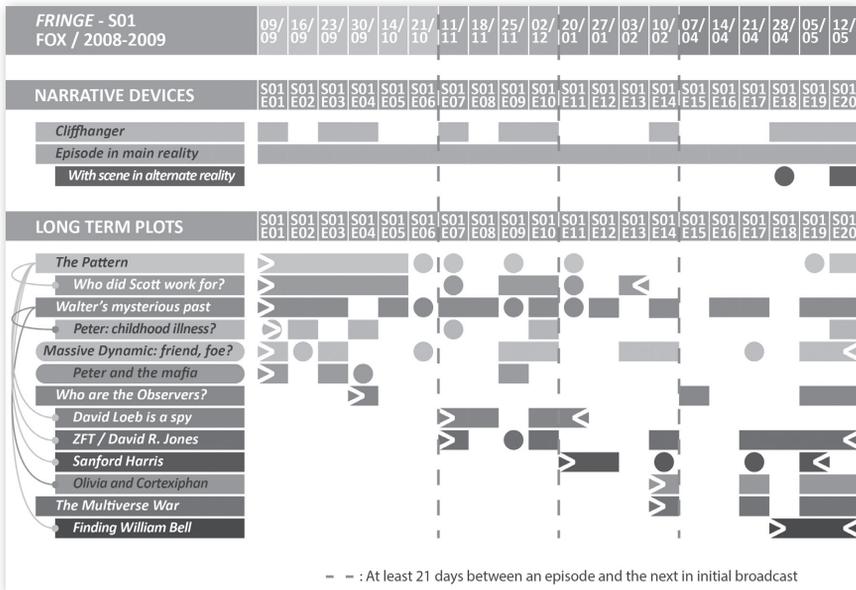


Figure 4. *Fringe S1* © DR

engineering of their narrative gives a partial eagle-eye view of the writer’s work. Diagrams proved adequate to quickly explain macro-storytelling: for example, *Fringe’s* first season diagram is ideal to explain how economic variables such as ‘back nine orders’ and necessary breaks in original airing can influence storytelling.

I say ‘partial eagle view’, though, for those diagrams have obvious limitations. For one, they are limited to plot, and cannot render the more diffused, organic elements of character development, or cover Mamber’s “thematic and structural mappings.” Another obvious problem is that they are two-dimensional representations: an interactive and/or three-dimensional representation may better combine their various elements, and make them more readable and self-evident on a semiotic level.

Finally, while diagrams can give us a better understanding of serialized, televised storytelling, they further cut us from the image and the sound. Even if television series rely heavily on plot compared to other audio-visual forms (cinema and video games most notably), their visual and acoustic characteristics—that is, the detailed analysis of a shot or a scene—are sometimes forgotten or downplayed. The method presented here is not supposed to be the only tool to describe unfolding serialized plots in television series, but rather a supplement in the ever-evolving toolbox of television narratology.

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