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# Seriality and Bridging Gaps in Interrupted Narrative Linearity

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This article will discuss how gaps in a putative linear narrative have been bridged in a transnationally distributed television sketch comedy series, which has been transformed into an episodic situation comedy. Within a dialectic of narrative continuity and interruption exhibited by the television series *Un Gars, Une Fille* (Quebec CA, 1997-2002), I will multimodally examine primarily the original version of this series to illustrate how setting, characters, and storyworld configuration, along with formal devices such as credits, logos, transition graphics, camera position, and music cues serve to bridge gaps in a presumptive narrative linearity. The investigation will focus on a series of segments in which the main characters, a young-ish heterosexual couple, i.e., the only permanent cast members representing the main protagonists of the entire series, pays a conflict-laden visit to the mother-in-law of the boyfriend/husband staged in two separate episodes. Narrative ruptures, along with the above-mentioned interwoven narrative continuity devices, achieve a tenuous interplay whereby time and space for audience interaction and interpretation are opened up in anticipation of evolving opportunities for digital interventions of audiences throughout the 20 years of continuing transnational productions.

## The dialectics of continuity and gaps in serialized narratives

Jason Mittell (*Complex TV* 10) defines seriality as serial storytelling with 1) a narrative world, 2) a consistent set of characters, who 3) experience a chain of events, 4) over time. Mittell further elaborates that series cohesion is undermined by “gaps, leading to temporal ruptures, narrmarcative anticipation, moments for viewer productivity,

opportunities for feedback between producers and consumers, and a structured system for a shared cultural conversation" ("Operational Seriality" 228). Mittell reminds us that serialized gaps are structured and contain "unavoidable fissures that force readers or viewers to disengage from the narrative before moving onward." Arguing against the notion of a serial defined by formal elements, Mittell emphasizes that seriality should be considered a "dynamic cultural practice" which arises from the "mandated gap between installments within a continuous narrative."

Serial continuity, on the other hand, is achieved by consistent accumulation of events that can be read by viewers who have been "taught how to read narrative events as self-contained or cumulative" ("Operational Seriality" 231). Mittell proposes that *setting* and *storyworld* are key factors in upholding narrative continuity in serialized narratives, as are *characters*. Mittell urges seriality scholars to investigate the "multiple forms of continuities and various structures of gaps" (237). Transnationally produced sketch comedy adaptations combining sketch modules into a sitcom series such as the television format adaptations of *Un Gars, Une Fille* offer appropriate objects for investigating the dialectics of continuity and gaps in the narrative sequencing and linearity.

Sketches have a short length of between one and ten minutes with a scripted and rehearsed production, along with the comedic exploration of a concept, character, or situation (Wikipedia). Due to their duration and content, shorter modules of comedy sketches easily combine to create single episodes of longer, i.e., half hour, situation comedy (sitcom) series. Script, rehearsal, and stage direction distinguish a sketch from the more improvisational skit. For the purposes of this article I consider the sketches in *Un Gars, Une Fille* to be narrative modules, whose linear sequencing can be shifted and re-configured as they are combined into situation comedies. According to Cameron , narrative modules are the result of a "database aesthetic" at the heart of recent complex

film narratives. Narrative modularity is characterized by dividing the narrative into “discrete segments” which are “subjected to complex articulations.” They suggest that time is divisible and “subject to manipulation” (1) For the purposes of this article, the sitcom *Un Gars, Une Fille* represents “a series of disarticulated narrative pieces” arranged with temporal indeterminacy. Hanne Bruun posits that sketch comedies have a socially critical function by analyzing a “presumably shared socio-political and cultural reality” (725), whereby “viewers are presumed to be knowledgeable about social and political issues, stereotypes, mentalities and narratives” of their societies and their societies’ normative frameworks. *Un Gars, Une Fille* diverges in many ways from what Poulaki critiques as the “chronological sequentiality” underlying conventional narrative theory, in which both causal linearity and linear temporality of the beginning-middle-end structure are *apriori* assumptions. Different kinds of gaps in narrative linearity are discernible in *Un Gars, Une Fille*, and I will demonstrate in this article how the narrative structure contains temporal, spatial, thematic/topical, affective, and causal-logical gaps which delay or divert narrative progression and sequentiality.

A roundtable discussion of contemporary seriality provides evidence of how narrative modules, i.e, sketches, might be strung together to form a situation comedy. In this roundtable discussion, author and screenwriter Lev Grossman indicated that serial authors strive to divide an episode, as the “maximum narrative unit size for a serial narrative”, into smaller segments with their own “miniature narrative arc” ( 110). These narrative arcs are characterized by an anticipated suspense, whereby “the viewer knows that the surprise is on its way” without the primary domination of the suspense. According to Grossman (Roundtable, 120), serial storytelling stretches out the narrative, so that the viewer almost “fall[s] into step with the people” they read about. The roundtable discussion returned repeatedly to the question of suspense as a primary factor in serial storytelling. According to literary scholar Sharon Marcus, another discussant at the

roundtable, suspense “involves guessing what’s going to happen” (120) but being wrong about it half the time. Lev Grossman picks up on Mittell’s mention of the storyworld as a factor in narrative cohesion and continuity by emphasizing that viewers strive to remain in the narrative universe of the characters (120). Discussant and film critic A.O. Scott concurred with Grossman by pointing to the desire of viewers to “spend more time with the people” in these storyworlds, a product of the character-driven nature of serial narratives (125) which invite identification with, dislike, or are able to induce the audience members to “just want to be with these people who become a circle of friends and intimates and familiars (125).

Kelleter (101) points to this and other kinds of “incessant continuity management” of popular series, which entail a recursive “pruning and coherence building within the ongoing narrative itself.” Kelleter characterized the storytelling market as an ongoing struggle to continually reposition “every single series” within the context of competing series (102). Furthermore, in the interests of maintaining future profitability the “entire field of serial entertainment” is involved in multiplying generic and “transgeneric” repertoires of similar productions.

### **Television Format Adaptations as Transcultural Series: The Case of *Un Gars, Une Fille***

This article considers television adaptations as a “show based on the format rights of an existing show (Chalaby 8) or, a “remake produced under license” (source). Referencing Michel Rodrigue, the original producer of *Un Gars, Une Fille*, Chalaby calls a format a “recipe” with an unchanging “kernel of rules and principles,” as well as adaptable components which are modified as the show moves from one market to another (10), involving an interplay between the local and the global. One of the primary concerns of televisual adaptations is to achieve an optimal degree of cultural (Straubhaar ), aesthetic

(Van Keulen ), or discursive (Uribe-Jongbloed and Medina ) proximity as the driving force for audience identification and loyalty. This study will focus on scripted drama and comedies in the discussion of the continuities and interruptions of *Un Gars, Une Fille* as a sketch comedy-based sitcom series.

Television adaptation studies avoid the pitfalls of fidelity theories underlying conventional intermedial adaptation studies by embedding televisual narratives within a historically, culturally, socially, and politically specific discursive context directed to realizing the greatest possible cultural proximity, based on the assumption that countries and cultures

prefer their own local or national production first due to factors such as the appeal of local stars, the local knowledge required to understand much television humor, the appeal of local themes and issues, the appeal of similar looking ethnic faces, and the familiarity of local styles and locales (cited in Straubhaar "World Television," 91; cf. La Pastina and Straubhaar "Multiple Proximities," 273).

This study will investigate the attributes of the narrative structure and sequencing common to most adaptations by examining the interplay of narrative linearity and sequencing of sketch segments as modules in the episodes of the primary original version. However, at times I will point to divergencies from, or conformity to the original to point out alternative or deviating structurations of the narrative to illustrate potential points of culturally specific interventions. It will, however, in the space of this article, not be possible to culturally, historically, or socio-politically contextualize these cultural differences inherent in the different versions.

*Un Gars, Une Fille* is a good example of a transnationally adapted television series with a lengthy history of official adaptations, currently numbering over 30. This series is also aligned with Kelleter's above-mentioned remarks on the generic and transgeneric repertoires of series in the face of market positionings in the field of social entertainment. Most officially sanctioned versions of *Un Gars, Une Fille* exhibit a stringent adherence to

common format rules laid down by the producers. These adaptations display slightly differently configured dialectically interwoven elements of narrative continuity and interruptions. All versions of *Un Gars, Une Fille* feature a heterosexual couple between their mid-20s to 40s as the primary, and recurring characters in the series, corresponding to the notion of sketch comedy described above. Other non-regular characters may appear in other episodes, but they are largely kept out of frame. The couple's interactions in the series take place in a variety of public and private spaces: bedrooms, bathrooms, living rooms, dining rooms, kitchens; shopping malls, government offices, doctors' and psychologists' offices, in moving cars, at the mother-in-law's apartment or house, in restaurants, on a camping trip, etc. With the exception of the French, Italian, and Spanish versions, which retain the original short sketch comedy format, each episode is usually less than 30 minutes long and contains three 5-7 minute sketches that may or may not be arranged in linear chronological order. Each sketch, or even series of sketches comprising the episodes, may be considered such a "mini narrative arc" as module mentioned by Grossman. Stringing together three sketch segments into a sitcom functions as a "schema" for "interpreting and organizing experiences, expectations and understandings" (Bruun 726).

Title Images Officially Adapted Versions of *Un Gars, Une Fille* (Selection)



Figure 1: Title images from a variety of official adaptations of *Un Gars, Une Fille*. Notice the common gendered color combination, the split color screen, and the images of the two main characters in most of the adaptations.

In addition to the two main protagonists, a large majority of narrative gaps are achieved by the sonic and graphic transitions between the shots, which bookend the mini narrative arcs of the sketches, while the sketch portions are separated by logos and music based



on the credit title graphics at the beginning and end of the episode. These transitions have a dual role to play as both emotional or affective gaps in the contested interactions between protagonists and antagonists. Mroz (2012) points out how affective devices such as these transitions function as “intensifiers” and move beyond meaning while also disrupting it (5). The audio and visual transitions in *Un Gars, Une Fille* represent just such “moments or images which suspend linear temporality and don’t necessarily fit into narrative progression” (5). In addition these transitions link the disparate modules of shots and scenes together as an aesthetically cohesive unit of the episode and series by means of their repetitions throughout the episode.

In my descriptions of the storyworld and the activities of the characters in each episode, I will label “scenes” those segments, which are located in a specific space or room in which a variety of interactions, discussions, and activities may transpire in a series of shots. These scenes contain the two major narrative arcs, the first extending from the beginning of part 1 until its final shot. The other major narrative arc traverses the entirety of part 2, as I will later illustrate in the Tables 1 and 2. The two tables contain the list of shots in each part of the scenes, and my descriptions and analyses will make reference to the shot numbers in these tables throughout this paper.

“Shots” are those shorter segments of narrative arcs separated by the graphic and sonic transitions mentioned above, in which specific discussion topics, movements, or actions take place. Every single version of the series configures the conversations between the couple and the mother-in-law not as a reverse-angle, back-and-forth close-up camera shot of all the dialog participants as is customary filming intense dialogs among protagonists and antagonists in films and most television series. Instead, the couple converses with the mother-in-law as a head-on point-of-view interaction in which the mother is never completely in the frame, if at all, as can be seen in the examples of Fig. 2.

The current study will scrutinize one scene in official adaptations of *Un Gars, Une Fille*, which exemplifies a particular kind of seriality constructed in this series combining continuous and interrupted narrative elements. Previous studies of this series (Larkey 2019; Larkey 2018) have focused on narrative content, structure, and sequencing of this scene, whereby similarities and differences of multiple versions were multimodally compared and culturally contextualized. I will therefore not be dwelling on the differences in this case.

This study will re-produce the story, the *fabula*, on the basis of a three-part, *syuzhet*-based, loosely structured narrative sequencing of the original version emerging from the sketch-derived scene and shot modules in the episodes. The *fabula* revolves around the competition for affection of both the mother-in-law and the boyfriend toward the daughter, ultimately “won” by the boyfriend. It will analyze the placement and function of the different narrative gaps exhibited in the episodes by the graphic and musical transitions separating each sketch segment. There is an indeterminate temporal and spatial gap between the previsit segments and the following 2-part segments of the actual visit at the mother-in-law’s home. These gaps interrupt and reset the emotional-affective linear and sequential temporality of the modules as the antagonistic emotions between the mother-in-law and the boyfriend evolve from the beginning in each shot.

### Finding the *Fabula* (1): The Mother-in-Law Scene(s) –

Previsit: The “good” daughter’s sexual bribery of her partner to visit her mother

The mother-in-law scene, characterized by its sole location in her dining room in most versions is divided into two distinct parts, with a pre-visit segment spatially located in the couple's own bathroom, and temporally separated from the actual visit (an indeterminately short while later), but in most versions positioned in the same episode as the first part of the visit. The second part of the visit to the mother-in-law is filmed in the same dining room space – thus not a spatial gap – but in a completely different episode, which connotes a further and longer indeterminate temporal gap. The combined visit(s)



Video Clip 1: The Seduction Shot-Greek Version. Notice how the music “completes” the implied sex act along with the camera, which captures the face of the boyfriend on the receiving end of the pleasure.

to the mother-in-law, totaling between 44 and 52 minutes depending on the version, terminates at the end of the second part when the couple leaves the mother-in-law's

apartment/house with leftovers from the (second) dinner meal. The general structure of linear narrative cohesion and sequentiality – with its beginning, middle, and end – is thus maintained, albeit loosely and ambiguously constructed on the basis of a thematic and spatial continuity. It is possible to illustrate the underlying basic narrative cohesion and sequentiality of the first and second parts – which we might call the syuzhet configuration – which can be televisually re-constructed by editorially recombining all three segments into a linear narrative with video editing software as evident in the previously mentioned studies.

The pre-visit segment is situated in the bathroom of the couple's residence, with the female protagonist informing her partner that both of them will be visiting her mother in a couple of days. Her partner protests, stating that her mother hates him, and he hates her mother and therefore he will not be visiting her mother. During his protests, however, his partner proceeds to initiate oral sex, indicated both by a camera movement drawing away and upward from her going down, and a music cue which sonically continues the sex act out of frame without an explicit visual staging. During this pre-visit seduction, the audience learns about the antagonistic relationship between the male protagonist and her mother, which raises the question (in the interrupted narrative later in the episode) about why the mother-in-law hates the boyfriend. This is one of the first spatial, temporal, and thematic gaps in the mother-in-law narrative, since a further bathroom sketch is subsequently inserted into the episode before the couple is seated in the mother-in-law's dining room to initiate part 1 of the actual visit.

In addition, the audience experiences the insincere protests of the male protagonist about not visiting her mother as he is on the receiving end of – the obviously pleasurable – oral sex and while proclaiming that “men have no principles.” This can be seen in the video clip 1 below in the Greek version of the series. This segment is just one of a series of shots in which the couple is interacting in the setting of their bathroom. Other

shots include the woman taking a shower, the man sitting on the toilet and either shaving, brushing his teeth, or cutting his nose hair.

### Finding the *Fabula* (2): The Mother-in-Law Scene(s) Part 1:

#### The “good” daughter, the “bad” son-in-law and the cantankerous mother-in-law

This multi-shot segment in the dining room of the mother begins with the aforementioned question lurking in the background, “Why does her mother hate the boyfriend?” In addition to the aforementioned temporal gap, a topical-thematic and spatial narrative gap is placed between the previsit and the first shot of the visit itself since the viewer does not witness the travel to the mother-in-law’s residence nor the entrance to her home. The audience is reminded of the question of the mutual animosity at the very beginning of the visit (shot 1B) when in spite of the seemingly friendly reception by the mother, the mother spitefully serves her daughter and her boyfriend one or two different varieties of cake (depending on the version) that the boyfriend is either allergic to or is known to dislike, a fact that the mother, in most versions, not only openly acknowledges, but also reveals that it was an intentional affront to the boyfriend, thus performing the very animosity that the protagonists had alluded to in the earlier previsit bathroom scene. The answer to the question about the cause of the mother-in-law’s animosity is delivered in the final shot of Part 1 (Shot 7A), approximately 5 minutes later, when the mother accuses the boyfriend of being a “polygamist”, even though the couple has been together for several years and seems dedicated to each other. Thus, at the outset of the visit the viewer is immediately confronted by the stereotypical depiction of the “bad” boyfriend and the spiteful mother-in-law.

## The Duality of Graphics and Music Transitions: Narrative Gaps and Narrative Cohesion

The repetitive and aesthetically uniform sonic and visual transitions separating each shot, in which different activities and conversation topics are staged, indicate on the one hand thematic-topical narrative interruption and temporal indeterminacy, but also the successive repetitive appearance of these transitions contributes to the episode's narrative cohesion and sequentiality on the other. The transitions therefore assume a dual but contradictory role of both an interruption as well as establishing a temporally loose narrative cohesion.

Each of the 8 different shots in the first part of the mother-in-law visit is separated by a fade in/fade out graphics of white text scratchings on a black background in the frame (see illustrations, Figure 2), accompanied by several bars of a signature music cue that is affective/emotionally, sonically and textually related to the previous topic of conversation in the segment. Each different official version of the series displays single words in the local language(s) in the textual fade out/fade in interjections. In addition, the staging of the segment in most versions of the series features an over-the-shoulder point-of-view (from the perspective of the mother-in-law) mostly stationary camera facing the young couple. Depending on the version, the eye-level medium close-up camera shot either excludes the mother-in-law in the frame entirely, or includes only partial facial or other features from behind. The illustrations of the mothers' position in the frames of the various versions can be seen in Figure 3.

The final shot (shot 7A) in Part 1 of the mother-in-law visit finally addresses the question raised in the pre-visit bathroom scene. The daughter's trip to the toilet (and thus

# **Un Gars, Une Fille** Shot and Scene Transitions Part 1

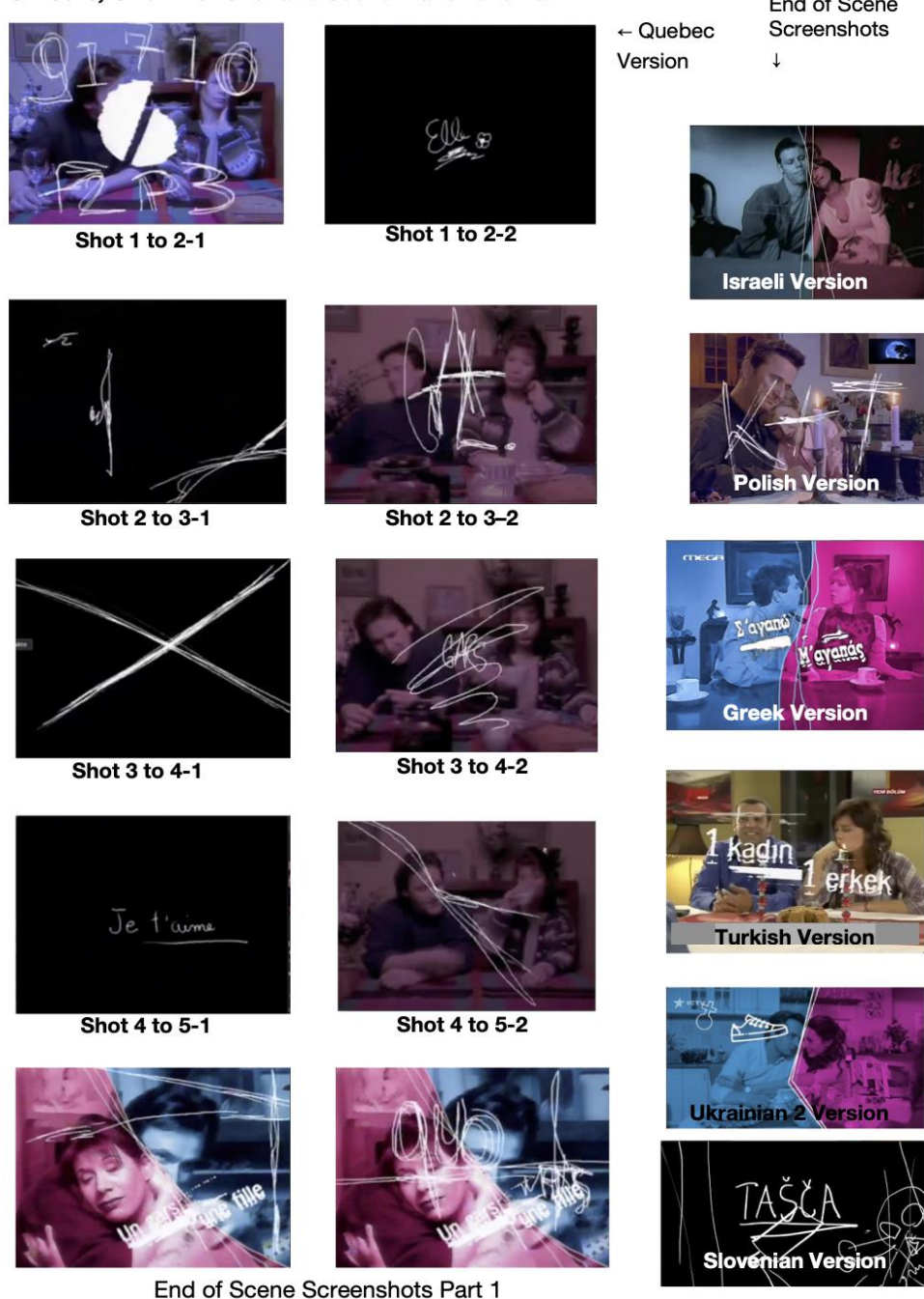


Figure 2: The left two columns are the shot transitions for the Quebec version of the mother-in-law scene, part 1, displaying the two images in each transition. The initial one is the fade to black with graphics, the second image is the fade to new shot. The end of the part 1 scene is depicted at the bottom of display. On the right column are end of scene screenshots for other adaptations.

absence from the frame) gives the boyfriend an opportunity to goad the mother to reveal

the reason for her hatred of him. In the daughter's absence from the table, the mother states that she suspects the boyfriend of being a "polygamist," an obsolete term which serves to discredit the mother-in-law as impartial arbiter of her daughter's relationship to him, signaling the stereotype of the conservative, distrustful and out-of-touch mother-in-law. However, the shocked incredulity of the boyfriend's response also reflects the audience's emotions upon hearing the – patently outrageous – justification for the mother-in-law's hostilities toward the boyfriend. However, this also sets up the subsequent, more analytical clarification in part 2 of the mother-in-law scene (shot 10) in the contentious conversation between the mother and her daughter.

This shot featuring the conflict between the boyfriend and his mother-in-law closes out this first part of the visit, during which several segments are recursively devoted to the daughter's and mother's wish for family offspring and the hope that the daughter might become pregnant. Several times during the different shots in the dining room during the visit the issue of the daughter's pregnancy is raised, first by the daughter, who – unpleasantly – surprises her boyfriend with her conjecture that her period is (four hours) late and she could be pregnant, prompting hopeful and approving comments from her mother, while the surprised boyfriend is decidedly less enthused about the prospect (shot 2). Throughout this part 1, the daughter performs the "good daughter" role by intimating that she is pregnant and thus starting a family for her mother to joyfully become a grandmother. In the final shot of the first part of the scene, the daughter ultimately returns to the table from the bathroom to announce with great disappointment and sadness that she is not pregnant. Her boyfriend's casual and insincere gesture of consolation provokes a negative comment by the mother confronted with the couple's public display of affection to close out both





Figure 3: Part 1 official versions of mother-in-law scene in which the couple is sitting across from the mother in a point-of-view shot. This illustrates how the mother is literally “out of the picture” of the couple’s life. The red rectangles or squares indicate the position of the mother. Rectangles surrounding the entire frame indicate that the mother is not visible at all.

the first part of the visit and the entire episode (shot 7B). The recursive references in the potential pregnancy story arc (shots 2 and 3) helps maintain suspense and anticipation throughout the scene, which emphasizes the emotional affinity between the

mother and daughter. During this scene, the boyfriend is relegated to a peripheral and ultimately antagonistic role (shots 5 and 6) until the final shot in which he superficially consoles his non-pregnant partner in shot 7B.

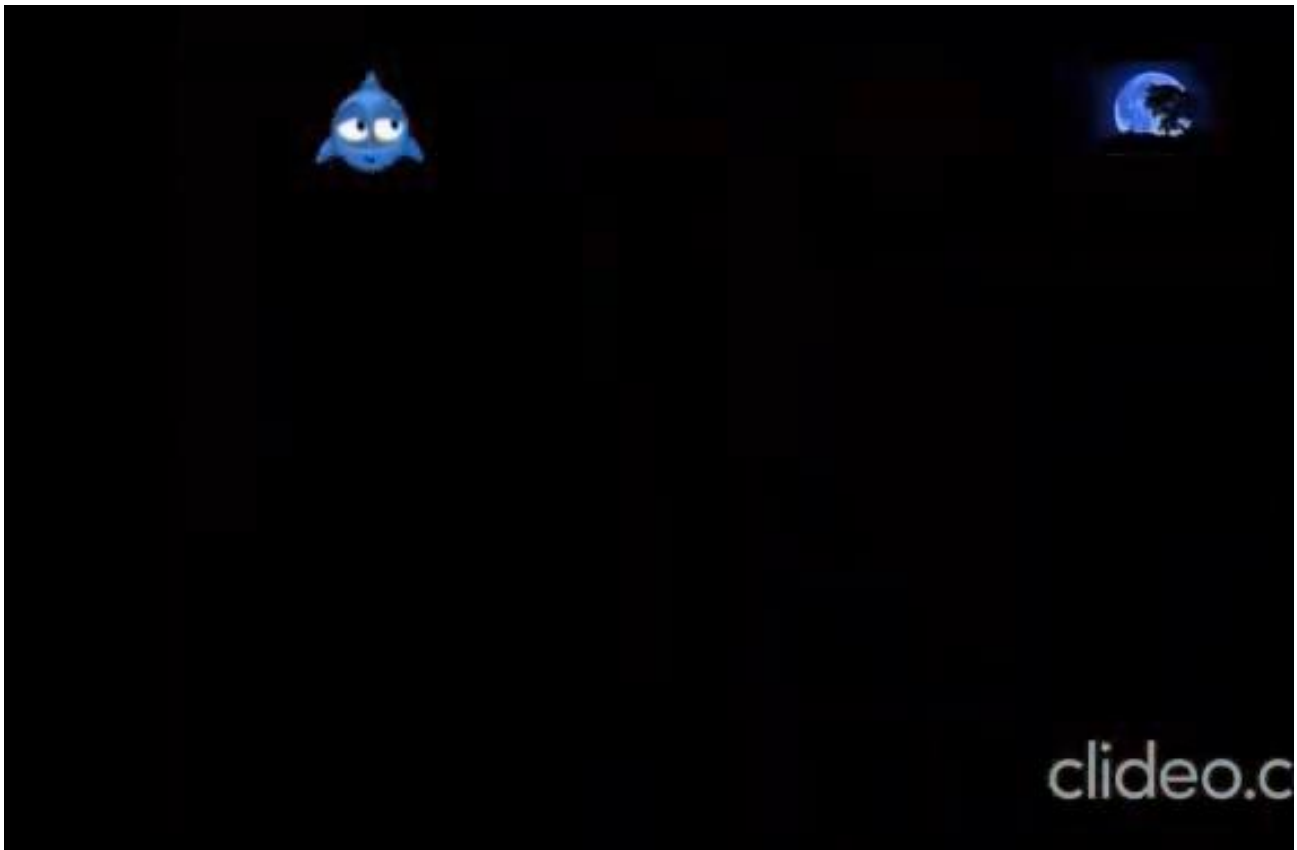
**Finding the *Fabula* (3): The Mother-in-Law Scene(s) Part 2: Mother loses the battle for the daughter's affection and intimacy.**

The final, negative comment by the mother witnessing the displays of affection between the boyfriend and her daughter in part 1 (shot 7B) prepares the audience for the continuation of the rancorous conflict between the boyfriend and the mother in part 2 several episodes later. While there is a temporal and topical gap between parts one and two, there is no spatial gap between the two parts since both scenes take place in the mother-in-law's dining room with a similar POV shot. This lack of spatial gap underscores the linear narrative continuity with the previously broadcast part 1 of the mother-in-law visit. Toward the end of part 2 it becomes clear that the boyfriend and the mother are engaged in a competitive battle for the emotional attraction and affection of the daughter. Depending on the culturally specific orientation of each different version (which to further explicate would go well beyond the scope of this paper), each specific version of the mother-in-law generates a certain degree of emotional sympathy for her. In her battle against the boyfriend, the mother is locked in an ultimately futile battle to maintain equal levels of intimacy and affection as in earlier phases of the girl's childhood in which the boyfriend had no role to play. The daughter's pregnancy hopes, which reflect a desire to renew the intimate relationship of her daughter's childhood, are disappointed, even if the mother and her daughter achieve partial success in performing this intimacy for the audience as well as the boyfriend in several shots in parts 1 and part 2. This happens with a segment in part 1 in which the boyfriend loudly fakes an emergency phone call on his

cell phone while the mother and daughter are engaged in a lively conversation about photos from the daughter's childhood, completely ignoring the boyfriend's attempt to garner attention from either of them (shot 5).

The boyfriend, however, whose sexual relations with the daughter are not only a topic of conversation between the boyfriend and the mother in several shots in part 1, but are also vigorously performed in the pre-visit seduction scene, represent the unsurmountable barriers to the intimacy and affection with her daughter against which the mother is powerless. This is an attitude shared transculturally throughout most of the adaptations. This ultimately prevents the mother from obtaining that same or similar level of intimacy with her daughter, which she nostalgically but futilely seeks. That is at the root of her antagonism against the boyfriend. This is evident in several shots, particularly the previously mentioned final shot of part 1 in which the boyfriend, while consoling his partner in a close and tender embrace, glares back at the mother in triumph at the very end. This is also confirmed in part 2 by the mother's efforts to rent out the daughter's bedroom against the protests and nostalgic desires of the daughter to at least maintain the formal trappings of past intimacy and affections of childhood (shot 11). The penultimate shot of part 2 (shot 12) finalizes this conclusion during a game of monopoly in which the mother is triumphant over the boyfriend and refuses to bend the rules of the game so that he can continue playing. Since the boyfriend has won "the game" of affection, sexuality and intimacy in real life, his willingness to be a loser at a monopoly game seems like a generous concession.

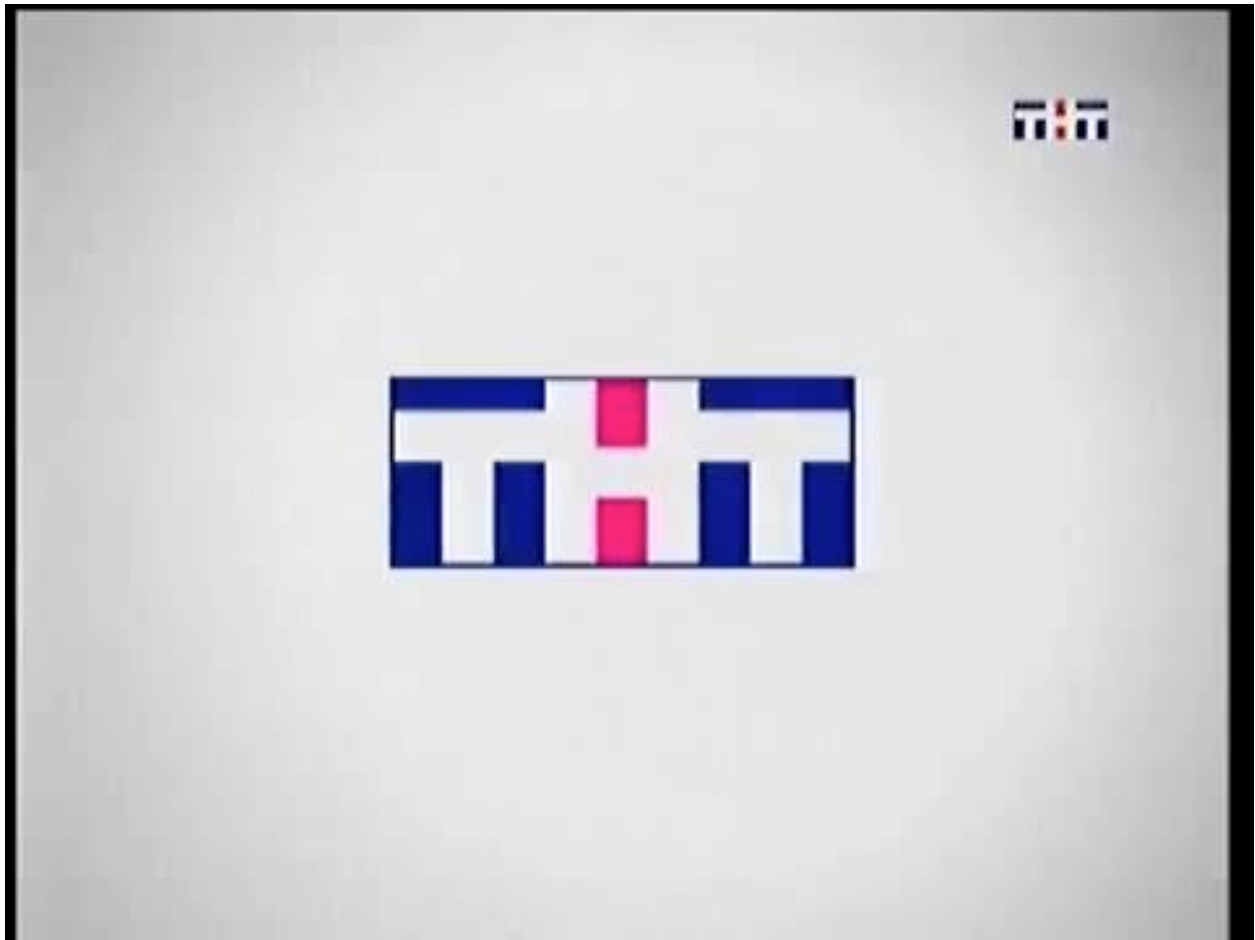
Despite the stationary camera in the dining room in most Part 2 versions, there are several narrative gaps in the segments based on spatial, temporal, and thematic criteria.



Video Clip 2: The leaving scene at the end of part 2 as staged in the Polish version in which the mother rambles on about the food she is giving to the couple to take home and emphasizing that the daughter should maintain close contact by calling the mother very often.

The most conspicuous are the changes in clothing that only become immediately evident when the two parts are viewed consecutively. This indicates a temporal gap of unknown and indeterminate duration between the first and second visits. The temporal gap is implicitly indicated in the fact that the viewer does not witness any departure of the couple from the mother-in-law's residence in the first part. Also, the second part of the visit starts with the couple seated in the same dining room as in part 1, but with different clothing. In some of the versions, the seating of the protagonists is also changed, such

that they have switched places in front of the camera. Also, the type of meal changes, since the couple will be eating dinner at the mother-in-law's house/apartment in part 2 while part 1 features coffee and cake. Conspicuous is also the change in topics of discussion, especially since the narrative arc relating to pregnancy spanning the first part does not return in the second. It is only mentioned by the mother in the context of contraception and inquiries about the sex habits of the couple in shot 9. There is no more explicit mention of a pregnancy either by the daughter or the mother. In addition, the male protagonist insultingly openly criticizes the mother's cooking in one part 2 segment in most versions, and she complains bitterly to her daughter about that (Shot 8C). Furthermore, in several initial segments of part 2, the meal is delayed by the forgetfulness of the mother, who twice keeps returning to the kitchen to retrieve condiments she neglected to place on the table earlier. Meanwhile, the boyfriend is getting increasingly impatient to start the meal, while the daughter prevents her partner from eating the food already on the table citing formal politeness and deference towards her mother (shots 8A, 8B, 8C). However, after the mother's final return to the dinner table the mother chastises the boyfriend for not starting to eat without her (shot 8C and video clip 3 of the Russian version). Moreover, there is an intriguing and friendly exchange between the mother-in-law and the daughter's boyfriend, with the mother-in-law apologizing to him for her daughter's messy habits (shot 9), while the boyfriend replies that he enjoys the sex with his partner very much and isn't concerned about such trivial concerns as the lack of order. This is also evident when the mother-in-law gleefully vanquishes the boyfriend in the congenially staged monopoly game (shot 12), while dismissing the daughter's efforts to help the boyfriend continue the game.



Video Clip 3: The Russian adaptation showing an extended credit sequence (shots 8A, 8B, 8C in the Quebec version) in which the mother first forgets the sauce, then she launches into an explanation of an aunt who has been involved in a gory car accident, followed by retrieving salt from the kitchen. Finally the mother chastises the boyfriend for not eating, after the “polite” waiting at the request of the daughter.

Finally, the most drastic alliance breakdown occurs when her mother announces that she wants to rent out the daughter’s former bedroom (shot 11) in the mother’s residence. The daughter finds herself isolated with her protest that her mother is violating the daughter’s family history and legacy. Instead of expressing solidarity with his girlfriend, the boyfriend agrees with the mother, who is striving to assume complete control over her own living space, and thus achieve greater autonomy in her own, i.e., the mother’s life. This

unexpected turn of events – the support of the mother’s autonomy by the boyfriend – is so shocking to the daughter that the conversation immediately stops.

The pivotal shot and climax of the conflict between mother-in-law and boyfriend performed in the story arc in part 1 (shot 7A), is the corollary major conflict between mother and daughter in part 2. The conflict is initiated by the daughter (shot 10) who, in doing so, makes explicit reference to a book globally popular in the 1980s and 1990s by psychoanalyst Nancy Friday entitled *My Mother, My Self*. This book explains the complicated competitive and manipulative relationship between mother and daughter in their contradictory roles as asexual caregivers and cultivators of warmth and affection for all family members on the one hand, and as attractive and even autonomous sexual partners for their spouses on the other. In the part 2 conflict segment the daughter speaks of her ambivalence and confusion while growing up at discerning whether the mother considered herself the (asexual) family’s affectionate caregiver and thus the “mother” authority figure, or if the mother was trying to be the (presumably) sexual trainer and educator acting like an autonomously directed, but not as emotionally accessible friend and thus equal to the daughter.

The screenshots in figure 2 for the part 1 segments, but also in part 2 of the mother-in-law scene, visually indicate to the audience that the mother, by being out of frame, is also largely “out of the picture” in the relationship with the protagonist couple. This also lays the visual foundation for the ultimate role of the mother, especially in her relationship with the daughter and the conflict in part 2. The lack of a father figure in the scene – the fathers are not only absent in the frame, but are removed from the family altogether in a backstory that refers to his death earlier in the scene (part 1) – underscores the same co-dependent competitive and guilt-ridden, but repressed anger underlying the daughter’s relationship toward her mother that also drives Friday’s (self-) analysis of her own relationship with her single mother in the book.

Friday's book offers an analytical blueprint for the topically arbitrary and seemingly random but contentiously depicted narrative modules depicting the tense but emotionally close relationship between mother and daughter. Friday's ideas explicitly undergird most versions of the sitcom and provide an analytical framework for unravelling the complicated relationship in the sitcom segments between the mother and daughter. Friday's theories afford insights into both the combative relationship between the boyfriend and his mother-in-law, as well as his occasional emphatic indifference toward, and marginalization within that relationship. The visit of the daughter to her mother reveals elements of what Friday calls the symbiotic relationship between mother and daughter (83) first emergent at four or five years old when the child initiates her journey towards a separate identity, autonomy, and selfhood, but is also terrified of a separation that might endanger the care and affection from the mother that such a separation would entail. This contradictory pressure may be maintained throughout the relationship into adulthood and manifests itself in a competition around sexuality, manipulated feelings of anger and guilt toward the mother, and displaced projections of anger towards others as illustrated in shot 8A-C in part 2.

The modularity of the sketch segments, the temporally indeterminate gaps in the narrative indicated by the change of topics, and the visual and sonic cues separating each segment contribute to a mitigation of the emotional and affective intensity created in each segment. They allow the audience members to self-construct the interpersonal relationship between the characters and establish emotional bonds with positive aspects as well as negative aspects of each character's personality without jeopardizing or rejecting any character out of hand.

This scene reveals to the audience the manipulative co-dependency of the mother-daughter relationship in spite of the daughter's path toward greater autonomy with her boyfriend. In this context, the daughter's initial efforts to induce the boyfriend to



visit her mother through sexual bribery in the pre-visit scene, which the audience might assume would be motivated purely by feelings of affection for the mother, also entails vestiges of guilt at not having visited her mother for many months and rejecting or not reciprocating the mother's affection. In the first shot of the part 1 visit (shot 1), after mentioning to the mother that the couple will be going on vacation for a week or two (depending on the version), the mother speaks of her isolation and lack of travel and pleasure since the father had passed away. While the mother is in the kitchen and out of voice range, the daughter then suggests to the boyfriend that the couple take the mother with them on their vacation, a suggestion that the boyfriend vehemently rejects under his breath. The guilt-producing mother reproduces the daughter's bribery on another level during the final shot of the scene part 2 (see video clip 2), during which the mother relentlessly and demonstratively gives the couple the leftovers from that meal and several others until the boyfriend, sometimes with, sometimes without the daughter depending on the version, storms out of the house or apartment in frustration, while muttering that by the time they are finished, it will be winter. The procrastination of the guilt-laden daughter is caused by the mother pleading desperately with the daughter to call her up by telephone every day.

The boyfriend's insistence on the pleasurable sexual nature of his relationship with the daughter underscores for the viewer and the mother the boundary of her relationship to her daughter (shot 9), and provides a redemptive quality to the boyfriend's relationship with the daughter in a changing patriarchal society. Nancy Friday emphasizes the importance of the security offered by the relationship in releasing tension compared to the woman achieving orgasm with her partner as a factor in whether the male partner remains or leaves:

We come to find more release in the certainty that he will never leave us than in having him inside us. *That certainty becomes more important than orgasm ever can be...*[italics in the original, EL]

The real thing, the penis inside, for many women never does live up to that early substitute: security. And tight security – control – is the antithesis of orgasm – letting go...Who he is, what he wants – *sex itself* [italics in the original, EL]– is never so important as the fantasy of permanent security he gives us (235).

Friday explains that men may contribute affection, intimacy and “moments in which they remind us so much of the love we once had with mother” but that women were “afraid to recognize it” (237). The relationship with men had the added advantage of sex, which the mother was striving to repress while the daughter was growing up, but with the partner this was no longer the object of prohibition.

It is easy to be unconscious of the fact that the feelings of tenderness we find with men are rooted in our earliest experiences with mother, when our present, and equally real feelings of sexual excitement are rooted very much in the now – this man, this moment, his arms and body. The difference between the two ideas is important.

The two major shots in both of the mother-in-law scenes (part 1 and part 2) illustrate this emotional closeness and autonomy of the relationship between the daughter and her mother when the boyfriend consoles her in the face of the failed pregnancy in part 1, and again after she breaks down in the conflict with her mother in part 2. In both shots, he is performing and demonstrating his capacity for affection and consolation as a form of emotional security.

### **Conclusion: Creating and Bridging Narrative and Temporal Gaps**

By deconstructing the narrative sequencing of the mother-in-law scenes and reconstructing the story, or *fabula*, we have on the one hand, reconstructed the narrative cohesion and continuity of that scene which began with the pre-visit seduction of the boyfriend and concluded with the couple leaving the mother-in-law residence in the final

shot (shot 13) in part 2. This has allowed us to make visible the patterns and instances of creating and bridging temporal, spatial, topical, affective, and sequential narrative gaps in producing the series. The analyses of the narrative arc continuities reveal different quantities and qualities of gaps, temporal and narrative, which are bridged by the transitions between the “mini-arcs” in the shots on the one hand, and the larger scene division between parts 1 and 2 on the other. Two main arcs emerge from the two parts of the mother-in-law scene: the first one concerns the competition and conflict between the mother/daughter alliance and the boyfriend and his partner. The various mini-arcs in part 1 highlight efforts by the daughter to perform being the “good” daughter to obtain the nostalgically recalled affection of the mother during her childhood. The pregnancy arc follows these conflicts through to the end of part 1 in which the daughter reveals her non-pregnancy and is consoled by the boyfriend, generating the pointed chagrin of the mother.

The mother-daughter alliance continues, but also dissolves in the course of the scene in part two with the first shot during the dinner, in which the daughter seems to assume the (displaced) role of the mother authority vis-à-vis the boyfriend to prevent a violation of an assumed politeness rule of her mother. However, here the first fissures in this alliance emerge during these segments when the mother chastises the boyfriend for not beginning to eat while she was in the kitchen. The embarrassing and inappropriate (for both daughter and boyfriend) sex inquiry of the mother-in-law points to a further breach between the two female characters. The transparent effort of the mother to paint the boyfriend as a manipulative and unsuitable partner for the daughter during the tarot card reading is countered by a snide remark of the boyfriend (shot 6) about the mother’s own manipulation of the card reading. The mother’s monopoly game win also contributes to undermining the alliance of the women in part 1, and this is cemented and widened by the intention of the mother to rent out the daughter’s former bedroom to increase the

mother's own autonomy and self-realization. The corresponding disappointment of the daughter with the mother points to the underlying contradiction between the two women from the beginning of the entire visit. This situation is contextualized by the mother-daughter conflict in shot 10, which also marks a turning point in the relationship in part 2.

Despite these conflicts, the animosity and emotional atmosphere in each mini-arc shot does not carry over into the following shot(s) in the great majority of cases, with the possible exception of the part 2 meal in which the mother successively retrieves condiments from the kitchen while the boyfriend seeks to start eating. Even after the emotionally bruising conversation and conflict between the mother and daughter in part 2, the following three shots begin without animosity by any of the three characters, and each shot develops its own hostile outcome separately to maintain or widen the emotional gap between the two women. This has the effect of minimizing the overall emotional impact of the mother-daughter conflict in the episode.

The topical and temporally indeterminate transition gaps between the shots therefore wipe the emotional slate clean from one shot to the other, as does the separation of parts 1 and 2 into different episodes weeks apart. This is especially highlighted in shot 1 of part 2 in which the boyfriend speaks at first approvingly of the dinner served by the mother, even though in a later shot he criticizes her food for being too dry. The "additive" and non-continuous nature of the modular shots in both parts 1 and 2 are bridged by the transitions, which seem to reset the affective-emotional "clock" between the three characters in the scenes, while contributing to the anticipation and suspense that the audience is trained to expect from each single shot and mini-arc. This emotional reset is directed to the audience, which, at the very least, expects a continuation of the previous shot's emotional context. However, with the end of the previous shot, this atmospheric affective context has disappeared in the subsequent shot. In addition, the shots are almost able to stand alone as narratives. The almost

random sequencing of shots made possible through the additive nature of the individual modular shots enables a *temporally* very loose, but also a *narrative* non-linear continuity based on the underlying contentious relationship between the three main characters.

Since there are no spatial gaps in the two major narrative arcs, the temporal, topical-thematic, and affective narrative arcs based explicitly on the Nancy Friday gender ideology ideas become primary in a putative linear cohesion of the story, although there is no clear linear narrative and the temporal continuity is explicitly indicated only by the re-edited sequencing of the pre-visit shot, the cake/coffee meals, and the leaving shot at the end of part 2.

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## Video Clips

Σ'αγαπώ μ'αγαπάς Ε 03: 05:33-06:31/23:07

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?=FB92Kehuht0&ab\\_channel=ΕλληνικέςΣειρέςκαιΤαινίες](https://www.youtube.com/watch?=FB92Kehuht0&ab_channel=ΕλληνικέςΣειρέςκαιΤαινίες)

Accessed on 28 November 2021

*Саша и Маша*, 9 серия: 00:11-01:15/22:53

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGXjEq7Ztiw&ab\\_channel=%D0%A1%D0%BC%D0%BE%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B8TV](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGXjEq7Ztiw&ab_channel=%D0%A1%D0%BC%D0%BE%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B8TV)

Accessed on 28 November 2021

*Kasia i Tomek*, odc. 11-12, 06:40-07:30/21:02

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sB-McUaedzc&ab\\_channel=Moon](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sB-McUaedzc&ab_channel=Moon)

Accessed on 28 November 2021



Shot #	Time Code In Episode			Content Description of Conversation in Shot		
	Shot Start mm:ss	Shot End mm:ss	Shot Duration m:ss	Color Key:		
				Boyfriend "wins"	Mother and daughter "win"	Pivotal Shot in Scene Part 1
1A	08:39	09:32	0:33	Daughter mentions going on week vacation; mother mentions how lonely she feels since death of husband; daughter suggests to boyfriend to invite mother along; boyfriend strenuously rejects idea.		
1B	09:33	09:48	0:15	Mother intentionally serves cake boyfriend can't eat; Boyfriend spitefully rejects mother's offer of coffee.		
2	09:50	10:38	0:48	Daughter surprises boyfriend about pregnancy; mother enthused, boyfriend not enthused.		
3	10:40	10:58	0:18	Daughter complains of heartburn, suggests cause is pregnancy.		
4	11:00	11:43	0:43	Mother inquires about former boyfriend; daughter protests against topic; current boyfriend suggests he is gay for maintaining contact to mother.		
5	12:17	13:22	1:05	While mother and daughter are preoccupied with family photos, boyfriend fakes emergency phone call to gain attention; mother and daughter ignore him.		
6	13:25	14:41	1:16	Mother reads tarot cards indicating boyfriend is cheating and manipulating daughter; boyfriend sees through trick and turns the tables on the mother.		
7A	14:42	15:30	0:48	Daughter leaves to go to bathroom, boyfriend goads mother to revealing reason for animosity; accuses boyfriend of polygamy.		
7B	15:31	16:02	0:31	Return of daughter announcing she is not pregnant; boyfriend consoles daughter; mother complains about public display of affection.		

Table 1: Shot sequences and durations of mother-in-law scene(s), part 1 showing the pattern of conflicts and their "winners." Also shows position and duration of the pivotal shot in part 1 of the scene in episode 3, season 1: the conflict between the mother and the boyfriend.

Shot #	Time Code in Episode			Content Description of Conversation in Shot		
	Shot Start mm:ss	Shot End mm:ss	Shot duration m:ss	Color Key:		
				<u>Daughter "wins"</u>	<u>Boyfriend "wins"</u>	<u>Pivotal Shot in Scene Part 2</u>
8A	00:01	00:23	0:22	Boyfriend wants to start dinner after being served by mother; daughter stops him as mother goes to fetch salt;		
8B	00:23	00:40	0:17	Mother returns to table; describes in appetite-destroying detail horribly disfiguring accident of an aunt; goes to fetch dressing from kitchen; daughter prevents boyfriend from eating again.		
8C	00:40	01:08	0:28	Upon return of mother boyfriend wants to start eating; mother chastises boyfriend for not having already started, embarrassing daughter.		
9	01:12	01:42	0:30	Mother starts conversation about grandson and if the couple uses anti-baby pill; boyfriend mentions that preventing pregnancy is easy because of the "telephone method" in which the couple is always interrupted during sex by the mother's phone calls.		
10	02:28	03:58	1:30	Mother-daughter conversation about daughter's mother-induced trauma as "friend" or "mother"; boyfriend sits largely disinterested until daughter breaks down in tears; boyfriend consoles daughter.		
11	04:00	04:58	0:58	Mother announces that she wants to rent out daughter's room; daughter protests against removal of vestiges of her previous life with mother; boyfriend agrees with mother's efforts at autonomy against daughter.		
12	05:00	05:47	00:47	Monopoly game; mother beats boyfriend; daughter fails to get mother to bend rules to allow boyfriend to continue; mother gloats about her apparent business acumen; daughter demands part of her inheritance out of spite.		
13	05:49	07:04	01:11	Getting leftovers before leaving: Mother hands one container of leftovers after another to daughter; boyfriend impatient to leave; mother tells daughter to call up every day for a talk on the telephone, even if she isn't at home; boyfriend storms out in frustration of waiting for both mother and daughter to end the farewell ritual.		

Table 2: Shot sequences and durations of mother-in-law scene(s), part 2 showing the pattern of conflicts and their "winners." This shows the position and duration of the pivotal shot in part 2 of the scene in episode 2, season 2: the conflict between the mother and the daughter.