Putting Together Rurality: Media Producers and the Social Construction of The Countryside

by

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"Day after day we seek an answer to the ageless question Aristotle posed in Ethics: how should a human being lead his life?...Traditionally humankind had sought the answer to Aristotle's question from four main wisdoms -philosophy, science, religion, art - taking insight from each to bolt together a liveable meaning. But today who reads Hegel or Kant without an exam to pass? Science, once the great explicator, garbles life with complexity and perplexity. Who can listen without cynicism to economists, sociologists and politicians? Religion, for many has become an empty ritual that masks hypocrisy. As our faith in traditional ideologies diminishes, we turn to the source we still believe in: the art of story. The world now consumes films, novels, theatre, television in such quantities and with such ravenous hunger that the story arts have become humanity's prime source of inspiration, as it seeks to order chaos and gain insight into life. Our appetite for story is a reflection of the profound human need to grasp the patterns of living, not merely as an intellectual exercise, but within a very personal, emotional experience. In the words of playwright Jean Anouilh, 'Fiction gives life its form"

Robert McKee (1997 pp.11-12)
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Abstract

This thesis examines the symbolic construction of rurality within a key site of contemporary cultural reproduction, television. In particular, it undertakes a semiotic analysis of ruralities in the popular texts of series television drama, and then relates these to the thoughts and practices of programme makers charged with their creation. The thesis defines a space for greater critical reflection upon popular media texts within the context of a broader cultural turn taking place across the humanities and social sciences. It demonstrates how the endeavour of contemporary rural studies is defined, in part, by this movement of ideas, but argues that it has failed to adequately explore the relationship between television and the cultural construction of rurality. This absence is surprising given the ubiquitous nature of these discourses in everyday life and a spate of highly popular televisual forms that appear to draw heavily on notions of rurality. The thesis takes as its substantive focus for discussion the series dramas’ Dangerfield, Heartbeat and Peak Practice, demonstrating the way rural identities are constructed in a variety of ways through their texts. It begins by highlighting a predominantly idyllic construction of rural setting at work in these dramas and the way that the established social relations of these settings are built around a culturally competent set of problem solving, middle class, incomers. The analysis goes on to reveal how narrative conflict at work in these symbolic worlds defines the social relations of rurality in both a positive and negative fashion, and highlights the way that rural identities will often be transformed, as well as affirmed, over the unfolding of narrative events. The thesis then explores the forces of media production surrounding the creation of these texts. Moving through the key stages of the production process - from the thoughts and practices of originators to those of the contemporary production teams - it reveals a wide range of changing, and often conflicting, demands being made of these dramas’ meanings. The thesis demonstrates how these complexities of multiple authorship serve to consciously and unconsciously delimit readings of rurality from the text. Discussion concludes by reaffirming the importance, and exploring the possibilities, of a research agenda that critically interrogates popular media constructions of rurality along the circuit of culture.
Note on Text

This thesis is written in a combination of third and first person voices. When I started constructing this thesis I did so exclusively in the former. This was not a conscious decision at the outset of the research. It was a continuation of a particular set of writing protocols that I had implicitly accepted as the correct way of doing things through school, work and university. As I developed my ideas in this thesis I realised this was quite problematic, and more than a little ironic, given the project’s focus on the cultural construction of rurality. It became clear that third person writing can often take on a quite omnipresent feel, much like my object of concern in this thesis, television drama. It can create a sense of objective authorship that erases the very particular conditions under which ideas, such as those in this thesis, emerge. I have strategically chosen to step out of this voice at particular stages in this thesis and write in the first person, particularly where I feel it is important to emphasise my position within this story. My decision to keep much of this account in the third person, however, is at least partly to do with a style of writing that I feel comfortable with, which is pretty important given the time spent writing it! It is also to do with my ambivalence towards the use of 'I'. While I do acknowledge that I am, in the last instance, the architect of this piece - it is an intervention for which I am responsible - I do not wish to imply that the piece is entirely reducible to me, but rather the outcome of a variety of discourses through which the 'I' is constructed, and able to speak.
Chapter 1

Introduction
Writing as part of a recent collection of discussions seeking to explore the contested nature of the sign 'rural' through the terrain of social and cultural theory, Paul Cloke makes the following comment:

"Rurality as a social and cultural construct is subject to a constant flux of production, consumption, reproduction, representation, commodification, manipulation and so on. The interplay between power and the cultural realm is for me as vital a subject as is the perhaps more obvious, or at least more conventional interplay between power and the material political economic realm. Ruralities are being made and remade, experienced and re-experienced. Rural life reflects at one and the same time the boundlessness of the imagined landscape and community and the restrictiveness of access to the material and cultural conditions which permit the imagined to be lived out other than in an imagined form. The notions of power both over the imagination and over material and cultural conditions remain crucial for me in reaching an understanding of rural life."

(Cloke 1994, pp.171-2)

It would be fair to suggest that the above comment expounding the importance of the cultural realm to rural geographical thought is very much of its time. In a field of enquiry that for many years has been pivoted around a political economic mode of explanation (of which Cloke himself has been a key proponent), the idea that the rural, as a social and cultural construct, should be seen on an equal footing with such a dominant realm of thought is indicative of the way rural geographers have become embroiled in a much broader turn towards the cultural across human geography (see Phillips 1998).

This thesis is borne out of the possibilities an ascendant concern for the cultural now affords rural geographers to transgress the boundaries of historically distinct canons of study and consider the shape, constitution, and wider social significance of,
contemporary rurality in new and productive ways. In particular, this thesis is concerned with pursuing some of the relations of power that work through the 'boundlessness' of Cloke's 'imagined landscape and community' through a terrain of study traditionally thought the preserve of media studies: television. In this respect, while a turn towards the cultural is an important marker of how the rural is currently being delimited, explored and explained within rural geography, a substantive theoretical and empirical engagement with the popular discourses of television has not been forthcoming.

This movement of ideas into rural geography has occurred at a time when a vast range of texts that draw upon common signifiers of rurality have been emerging, and in many instances dominating, the schedules of British television broadcasting over the last few years. As will be shown later, these constructions capture the interest of a tremendously large amount of people across a broad range of genre: from soap opera to serial drama through to current affairs and lifestyle programmes. The intention of this thesis, therefore, is to begin to define a space in which greater critical reflection upon popular television images of the countryside can emerge.

The following discussion begins by briefly outlining the way in which geographers have increasingly sought to explore the relationship between geography and the media. It highlights the interdisciplinary nature of much media research and demonstrates the way that the current impetus for this type of inquiry in geographical research has been provided by the recent ascendancy of cultural studies and cultural geography. It goes on to explain the way in which rural research has become begun to speculate upon
contemporary media constructions of rurality in popular culture.

While this work has provided some insight into the way that rural identities are portrayed in the popular media, it suggests that much of this endeavour is still quite shallow in detail. It draws attention to the popularity of media constructions of rurality currently at work in the outputs of the television industry, and within this, their particular appeal within series television drama. According to the formal assessments of the media industry, these texts are regularly commanding the attention of up to 17 million viewers an episode, and yet, beyond cursory reference, rural studies has so far failed to engage with what ideas about the countryside they may service. It is to this end that the chapter argues for a thoroughgoing treatment of these forms.

However, it also suggests that any critic-driven reading of the text should also explore its insights in relation to the wider circuit of cultural production. Whilst acknowledging the importance of linking texts to the situated relations of the audience, it proposes an agenda for research that considers the way in which the relations of media production might attempt to construct discourses of rurality through these dramatic texts.
1.1 The Mass Media as an Object of Geographical Inquiry

"[G]eographers could work much more closely with the different groups of people who produce media texts and those who buy, read, enjoy, worry about and are angered by the enormous range of media products they encounter in everyday life"

(Burgess 1990, p.140)

In 1990, in a paper written with the explicit intention of encouraging a more sustained and thoroughgoing treatment of contemporary mass media forms within geographical research Jacquie Burgess laments the way that geographers "consistently fail" (p.141) to acknowledge the importance of the media industry to their work despite the highly ubiquitous nature of its output within everyday life.

While it is clearly something of a truism to assert that media forms occupy a central place within the fabric of contemporary social life (Tolson 1996), a cursory glimpse at industry and government data regularly collected on this matter confirms that the United Kingdom does indeed consume a quite staggering array of media texts. For instance, recent calculations reveal a nation that, everyday, consumes on average over 3 hours of output from television's increasingly expansive broadcasting networks (Advertising Association 1998); makes just under 350,000 admissions to the nation's 2,300 cinema screens (PSI 1996); spends in excess of 3 million pounds on the purchase and rental of pre-recorded video tapes (BVA 1996); has a compact disc, LP and singles' market worth an estimated 1 1/2 billion pounds a year (Advertising Association 1996); makes nearly 14 million purchases from the nation's 12 daily and Sunday newspaper titles (Advertising Association 1996). This is a nation that now receives an estimated 26 million free newspapers (NRS...
1997) and over 100 million pounds worth of direct mail each month (Advertising Association 1996); purchases another 14 million regional newspapers over the same period (NRS 1997); and reads a plethora of lifestyle magazines of which the extended circulation of the most popular can find a readership of up to 3 million an issue (NRS 1997). For Burgess (1990), the problem for geographers is coping with the "sheer volume of material" (p.141), not whether such media forms have relevance to the work of geographers. As she declares, "media texts of many different kinds are, in fact, saturated with geographical messages" (p.141):

"Consider, for example, the coverage in the press and television of issues relating to environmental pollution, water quality, natural disasters, nature, conservation, development pressures in the countryside, the design of cities, green politics and long-term climatic changes. Think of the extent to which advertisements use particular landscapes to sell their products or the rise and manipulation of people's desires to purchase 'environmentally friendly' goods. Reflect on the kinds of settings used in film and television to lend realism to the fictions of their narratives"

(Burgess 1990, p.141)

Burgess' call for a much broader engagement with these texts must have been a welcome rallying point for the small number of Geographers who in spite of their efforts had been unable to inspire the broader geographical community into taking the media more seriously. By 1990, a rather modest tradition of research spanning the previous three and half decades can be found either arguing for, hinting at, or pursuing a similar agenda in various theoretical and empirical guises (e.g. Manvell 1956; Knight 1957; Harris 1964; Sherman 1967; Gold 1974; Clark and Allen 1977; Brooker-Gross 1983; Gold 1984; Burgess and Gold 1985; Clarke and Bradford 1989). Indeed, some ten
years before Burgess was to write her 'agenda for the 1990s', Jim Walmsley, an eminent behavioural geographer of the time can be found arguing that,

"The time is long overdue for human geographers to study carefully the nature and impact of the mass media and to join with other social scientists in asking the question 'who says what to whom, how and with what effect?'"

(Walmsley 1980, p.348)

Today, all this has changed. It is now possible to find a growing body geographical research charting the nature of popular culture within these rapidly developing and proliferating mass media forms in increasingly subtle and innovative ways. There is a significant body of research emerging at the intersection of film theory and geography including two edited collections (Aitken and Zonn 1994; Clarke 1997) and a plethora of papers (e.g. Aitken 1991; Aitken and Zonn 1993; Godfrey 1993; Rose 1994; Benton 1995; Gandy 1996; Lukinbeal 1998) and reviews (e.g. Clarke 1994; Kennedy and Lukinbeal 1997). Furthermore, a fascination with the texts of film has been matched by an enthusiasm for the discourses of advertising (e.g. Fleming and Roth 1991; Goss 1993; Leslie 1993; Jackson and Taylor 1996), popular music (e.g. Moss 1992; Kong 1995; Halfacree and Kitchen 1996), television (e.g. Adams 1992; Clarke and Bradford 1992; Clarke 1995), newspapers (e.g. Hoare 1991; Parisi and Holcomb 1994), magazines (e.g. Sharp 1993; 1996) and cartoons (e.g. Dodds 1996).

It is of no surprise to find that geographical research began to take up the concerns of Burgess over the 1990s. In one sense, Burgess' paper reflected the urgency of a reinvigorated cultural geography that was marked by a common interest in questions of representation (e.g. Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Barnes and Duncan 1992; Duncan
and Ley 1993). In another, it reflected a frustration that a significant amount of the intellectual endeavour driving this turn towards culture had been built around a tradition of landscape research with a penchant for literary and artistic endeavour (e.g. Rees 1982; Porteous 1985; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988). As Burgess suggests:

"Research on the meanings conveyed in representations of place, landscapes and nature, largely the preserve of the 'new' cultural geographers ... have concentrated on landscape meanings and senses of place produced in literature and paintings ... The production and consumption of meaning in the mass media and advertising have not yet attracted much attention" (Burgess 1990, p.141)

While Burgess' separation of art and literature from the discourses of mass media and advertising are debatable, (see, for instance, Daniels 1993 on the appropriation and re-circulation of Constable paintings by the mass media), the broader point she was making was clear, and had been for some time: "[j]udging from the published record", Burgess writes with John Gold in 1985, "geographers emerge as profoundly elitist in their interests" (Burgess and Gold 1985, p.15). Burgess wanted to unpack the geographical relations of the everyday, rather ordinary, and often mundane, media texts pervading contemporary social life: the newspaper article, the television broadcast and the advert, as opposed to the painting, the poem and the literary novel. In the same collection of discussions this point was echoed by Youngs, who noted in his analysis of television landscape documentaries that,

"Studies of the feelings that the English have for their landscape and it's representation in culture have been a strong tradition within British geography... Nevertheless the dominant orientation has been towards 'higher culture' - mainly literature and art - to the neglect of studies that concern themselves with what
the mass of the population read and view - popular culture.”

(Youngs 1985, p.144)

The field of inquiry that Burgess and others had begun envisaging was marked by a quite different intellectual trajectory within cultural geography. In particular, it owed a considerable debt to the development of British cultural studies in the 1960s and 1970s. Championed by 'left wing' thinkers such as Stuart Hall, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, history points to the development of cultural studies as profoundly influential over a much broader turn towards the cultural across the social sciences and humanities (Chaney 1994), within which the possibilities of research into such popular media forms became more widely realised and legitimised.

This is not to suggest that cultural studies suddenly gave media research an interdisciplinary edge. That was there from the start. Through the endeavour of sociology, social psychology, literary theory and philosophy, media studies owes its depth and variety to a rich interdisciplinary history spanning the last 80 years. Rather, it is to suggest that through this wider ascendancy of cultural studies the potential for such endeavour within geographical research was largely defined. A much deeper and broader interrogation of media forms in the years that followed Burgess’ paper was a product of the genuine possibilities that this movement of ideas had opened up for geographers.
1.2 The Cultural Turn, the Rural and the Popular Media

In spite of writers such as Jackson (1989) suggesting that, "contemporary popular culture is predominantly urban in character, a reflection of the metropolitan experience" (p.78), rural studies has increasingly begun to highlight and explore the relationships between popular media form and the dynamics of contemporary rural change and identity. In fact, when writers like Jacquie Burgess began opening up a space for greater critical reflection on the popular media in the 1980s, they were also often gesturing at a range of rural identities within its texts (see for instance Burgess 1982a, 1982b, 1987; Burgess and Unwin 1984; Higson 1987; Youngs 1985). While the possibilities of this work were never really developed at the time, as rural studies became increasingly embroiled in the broader academic turn towards the cultural, the potential for exploring the nature and wider social significance of these forms has been gradually articulated. Reflecting on recent theoretical and empirical developments in the field, Paul Cloke (1997) has remarked, for instance, that,

"There is now a rather furious engagement with a range of current representational texts (contemporary novels, country magazines, films, television dramas, country furnishings, advertisements, country music, and so on) which reproduce constructions of rurality in popular culture"

(Cloke 1997 p.272)

Making a space for greater critical reflection upon popular media forms has been closely allied to a much broader reconfiguration of the rural studies object of study, the rural. Drawing on the theoretical claims of postmodernism and poststructuralism many have gestured at the socially and culturally constructed nature of rurality (e.g. Mormont 1990; Murdoch and Pratt 1993; Halfacree
1993; Lawrence 1997). To refer to the rural in this way is to position the countryside firmly within the realm of social signification. It is to claim that the rural, rather than being some essential, static and unified centre of meaning existing in advance of its appropriation, elaboration and investigation, is instead, an assemblage of signs constantly made, and remade, in thought and practice. It is in this vein, for instance, Murdoch and Pratt, drawing on the work of actor-network theorist Bruno Latour, have suggested that,

"rather than trying to pin down a definition of rurality or the rural, we should explore the ways in which rurality is constructed and deployed in a variety of contexts"

(Murdoch and Pratt 1993, P.423)

In the spirit of Urry's (1990) notion of the 'post-tourist' they coin this shift in focus the study of the 'post-rural'. For Murdoch and Pratt, a post-rural mode of inquiry would inspect the ways in which the rural is constructed with particular identities and power effects across different discursive realms (be they symbolic or material, academic or lay). It would foster "a sensitivity to the production of meaning that makes possible particular rural experiences" (p.425), exploring a whole range of thoughts and practices that may be routed through the contested and unstable sign 'rural'.

While the term 'post-rural' has not been widely adopted in rural studies, an interrogation of the production of meaning across a range of discursive realms captures the spirit of a field of inquiry increasingly engaged with the insights, and possible applications of, contemporary cultural theory. As the sign 'rural' becomes increasingly freed from its referential moorings (Halfacree 1993)
popular media texts are increasingly seen as an important site through which rural identities are (re)made and (re)experienced. They are regarded by some as a central process by which rural identities unfold, both abstractly in thought and materially in practice. So for instance, writing at the intersection of cultural and rural geography David Crouch has suggested:

"There is considerable scope for exploring the connections between popular culture, the image of the rural and what people actually make of the rural" (Crouch 1992, p.239)

Similarly, Halfacree (1993) has cited the importance of the mass media in shaping peoples' everyday understandings, or 'social representations' of rurality while Phillips (1994), drawing on the work of Habermas, has argued that studies of contemporary rural society need to explore the connection between the unofficial-private and official-public spheres of social life, of which the mass media forms an indicative part. From the perspective of discourse theory much the same point has been made by Jones (1995) who argues that rural geographers should be interrogating the nature of, and relationship between, a wide variety of discourses of rurality, and cites within his discussion the potential importance of popular discourses of rurality - "television, press articles, advertising copy and image" (p.38) - in forging out both professional and lay understandings of rurality. More recently, Lawrence (1997) has suggested that the mass media will play a role in shaping experiences of material rural space far exceeding "the impacts of state, industrial and economic pronouncements" (p.5), and argues that,
"critical rural studies are those which will have to understand from the outset that an assortment of communicative forces are brought to bear on the creation of varied representations of the rural" (Lawrence 1997, p.5, emphasis added)

As a terrain of empirical inquiry, popular media texts have been used to provide fresh insight into the processes at work in material spaces which, through the histories of academic thought and endeavour, and the lay discourses that underpin these (Halfacree 1993), have already been socially constructed as rural. In others words, the ongoing encounter with poststructuralism and postmodernism, and the engagement with these texts that follows this, has often been worked into existing frames of study, what might be broadly termed as the processes of material rural change.

Many, for example, have speculated on, and to some extent explored, the way popular media forms encourage particular leisure and tourist pursuits in the countryside (e.g. Harrison 1991; Cloke 1993; Squire 1993; Tooke and Baker 1996; Butler 1998; Hopkins 1998; Mordue 1999), service the processes of rural in-migration at a national and international level (e.g. Buller and Hoggart 1994; Cloke et al 1995; Boyle and Halfacree 1998), and within this, the symbolic and material appropriation of the British countryside by the service classes (e.g. Thrift 1989; Phillips 1993; Hoggart 1997). Connections have also been made between popular media texts and rural change from varying degrees from the perspective of gender (e.g. Agg and Phillips, 1998) and sexuality (e.g. Bell and Valentine, 1995). A number of discussions have also drawn attention to the way that popular media texts may be bound up with the processes of rural social conflict and
deprivation (e.g. Cloke and Milbourne 1992; Phillips 1994; Bell 1997; Cloke et al 1998a, 1998b).

Much of this work, however, has involved only cursory readings of what might be working through these texts, the major exceptions being Agg and Phillip's (1998) discussion of Magazine Countrylife and Bell's (1997) exploration of rural horror, both constituting part of a moderate tradition of research seeking to unpack how rural identities are constructed through media genres of contemporary popular culture. Other notable contributions include Young's (1985) discussion of the landscape documentary, Laing's (1992) historical analysis of the Radio Series The Archers, Brandth's (1995) work on construction of rural gender relations in advertising, and Jones' (1997) discussion of popular literary constructions of rural childhoods.

The most marginal element of this emergent interest, however, is work seeking to explore the forces at play in the creation of these texts. While some of this research implicitly gestures at the logic behind the creation of these texts, and while some have tentatively explored the relations at work in the production of popular media texts (e.g. Burgess 1982a; Youngs 1985; Burgess and Unwin 1984; Burgess 1987; Laing 1992), a substantive engagement with a production dimension to popular discourses of rurality has thus far remained undeveloped.
1.3 Academic Readings of Rurality in the Popular Media

As the preceding section highlights, rural research has gone some way towards opening up a space for research into popular media forms circulating within contemporary social life. It has developed this agenda through a wider discussion taking place within rural geography about the socially and culturally constructed nature of rurality, and has gone some way to explicating the nature and wider social significance of these forms.

What is immediately striking about this work is the way that, with minor exception, these popular texts are thought to foster an 'idyllic' construction of rural identities, an idea that has had a pervasive role in the way academic research seeks to engage with the cultural construction of the countryside more generally (e.g. Newby 1980; Mingay 1989; Short 1991). While writers such as Cloke and Milbourne (1992) have written of its speculative nature and the need to explore "the degree to which it is important to representations of the rural" (p.359), rural research has readily drawn on this idea to capture the meaning of these popular cultural constructions. So for instance Youngs, has suggested that,

"'A Horseman Riding By’, along with other similar programmes and advertisements for 'Country Thick Vegetable Soup' Country Life Margarine' and Farmhouse Cheese’ appeal to a rural nostalgia - the idyllic countrylife is a backdrop to many TV commercials”

(Youngs 1985, p.145)

Referring to a number of popular constructions of rurality to illustrate this same point, Bunce (1994) has written on the emergence of a countryside ideal in Anglo-American culture, and suggests, in one great sweep that,
"with the arrival of new publishing technology and especially of electric media - radio, film, and television - in this century, the countryside ideal has been absorbed readily into mass culture"

(Bunce 1994, p.38)

He writes, for instance, of the way the Radio series The Archers depicts "the last remnants of a happier way of life" where "all classes co-exist in tolerant harmony" (p.55). He reflects too on the "nostalgic veneer" (p.49) surrounding the long running BBC TV drama All Creatures Great and Small, whose "underlying attraction" apparently rested on its portrayal of the "quaint remnants of pre-industrial ways of living" based around "an old social order" and the construction of a "benign rural class system" (p.50).

Similar conclusions are drawn elsewhere. Urry (1990) has written of "the proliferation of new magazines which help construct ever more redolent signs of a fast-disappearing countryside" (p.96) while from a slightly different tact, Bell and Valentine (1995) have illustrated the way the construction of "hegemonic sexualities" in the popular rural media, such as All Creatures Great and Small, Heartbeat and Emmerdale are often related to bucolic images of "simplicity and safety" (p.115). In his discussion of widely circulated constructions of rural childhoods in popular literature Jones (1997) also highlights the importance of an idyllic construction of rurality to the formation of these identities. Similarly, in an earlier discussion of different circuits of rural discourse within social life Jones’ (1995) suggests that "popular discourse plays an important part in the creation and dissemination of the idea of the rural idyll" (p.39). He uses as an exemplar the Yorkshire Television adaptation
of H.E. Bate's Larkin family series of books, *The Darling Buds of May*:

"In the TV series *The Darling Buds of May* the opening scene shows the taxman from London, the apotheosis of drab modernity come to call on the anarchic voluptuous Larkin Family and what follows is his gradual seduction by the rural idyll into which he is slowly drawn, never to return to his office. The phenomenal success of this will series will ensure that these particular visions of the rural-romantic freedom set in a picturesque village England - will be attractive to future programme designers".

(Ibid, P.39)

Central to the existing insights of much of this work is the way that idyllic media images are used to explain wider processes of rural change. One common theme at work here is the idea that idyllic constructions of rurality are produced by and for the middle class, thereby reproducing their own relations of power over the countryside. Writing in the context of rural housing, Hoggart, for instance, has suggested that,

"The strength of rural mythologies undoubtedly helps to sustain demand for rural houses. Hence, it might be argued that through their role in the media (Bourdieu, 1984), the service class perpetuate their (economic and cultural) accumulation"

(Hoggart 1997, pp.257-258)

Similarly, Cloke et al (1995) have suggested that through the "widespread peddling of the image of the countryside as some bucolic idyll" by the service class working in the media "the culture (and arguably thereby the power) of the service has become hegemonic" (p.233), while Burgess has argued that,

"The myth of the countryside - the rural idyll of *One Man and his Dog* and many other television documentaries also serve an ideological function in that predominantly middle class values for contemplative
appreciation of traditional ways of life, and natural landscapes, unspoiled by crowds of unappreciative trippers, are to the forefront"  
(Burgess 1987, p.6)

In an earlier empirical discussion Burgess (1982b) has written of the way these constructions of the countryside are often appropriated by local authorities attempting to attract business and executives to areas. "This cloying imagery", she suggests, is built around promoting regions as sites of quality lifestyles, but in doing so "reduces places to an undifferentiated environment of greenery and folkways"(p.87).

While Burgess is not convinced that executives will be necessarily persuaded by the "pretty pictures" (p.96) at work in these place promotions, Thrift (1989) has few doubts, asserting that the "potent brew of rural images" (p.26) at work within books, magazines and other cultural commodities, are quickly appropriated within the aspirations, and wider social practices, of an emerging service class. Moreover, as Cloke et al (1995) have suggested, even if these idyllic images signify the cultural appropriation of the countryside by a powerful service class, they will also be readily "bought and accepted by people from a wide range of backgrounds" (p.233). They may also be sources of rural social conflict. According to Cloke et al (1998a) the media is implicated in creating "different scales of rural idyll" (1998, p.138) which define particular cultural competencies and expectations, and which potentially service discord across the processes of rural change.

Another key theme working through these connections between text and practice is the idea that idyllic images
of the countryside act as the antidote to, or antithesis
of, the urban experience. As Bull et al can be found
suggesting:

"The popular image of the countryside portrays an
environment which is superior in nearly every respect
to that of the town and city, and this image is
reinforced continually by advertisers attempting to
sell products ranging from chocolate bars to motor
vehicles. It is not surprising that large numbers of
urban dwellers are attracted to the countryside in
search of the good life"

(Bull et al 1984, p.11)

In a similar vein Bell (1997) has, more recently, coded up
large chunks of popular cultural form, "from Thomas Hardy
and Edward Carpenter to Heartbeat and the Archers" (p.95)
as idyllic constructions of rurality which offer escapist
texts for urban viewers. Similarly, Boyle and Halfacree
(1998) draw attention to the way that "mass media and
marketing agencies" might be critical in spreading a
"generalised belief" that "pits the 'rural' against the
'urban'”, servicing "idyllic" representations of rurality
(p.308) which in turn initiate broader processes of rural
in-migration.

So too are connections made between idyllic place
imagery and leisure pursuits in the countryside.
Relationships have been drawn between media images and
visitors to the countryside by Butler (1998), who writes
of the "great effectiveness" of "evocative images of rural
areas" contained within such television texts as
Heartbeat, Pride and Prejudice and Wycliffe (p.219).
Similarly, Mordue (1999) has written of the way the
culture industry "consistently perpetuates images of an
English Rural Idyll" (p.631) citing television drama's
such as Heartbeat and All Creatures Great and Small as
indicative examples. Writing in a Canadian context
Hopkins (1998) has also drawn attention to the way that the "touristic countryside" is replete with "country ideals which aggrandise myths of rurality" (p.65) through, among other things, the texts of film, television, books and advertisements.

There are some minor exceptions to this idyllic reading of popular media texts. For instance, while Bell (1997) has readily adopted Bunce’s (1994) notion of the ‘armchair countryside’ as a way of unifying large sections of the media under the heading ‘idyllic’, his substantive focus of discussion is on North American rural horror films – which he humorously terms ‘behind the sofa countryside’ – and in this a quite different reading of rurality emerges. In particular, he elaborates quite specifically on the way rural settings not only act as a metaphor for isolation and evil, but also spaces within which social identities are constructed in quite specific ways: country folk are invariably portrayed as backward and evil, urban incomers as vulnerable and witless.

Beyond these genre level differences, some insights have shown the way that less than idyllic rural identities may be at work in texts often thought of as highly positive constructions of the countryside. Consider the popular BBC radio drama The Archers which, according to Bunce (1994), is simply an idyllic representation of rurality. An analysis by Laing (1992), however, reveals significant variations in its meaning over time, noting for instance the way the series has often, though not exclusively, had a strong realist focus which may sit somewhat uncomfortably with positive notions of rurality. Similarly, Phillips (1994) has noted the way the community of Ambridge may be anything but conflict free, writing of
the divisions that are frequently constructed between locals and incomers. This alternative reading of popular media texts is, in fact, exemplified very well by a recent commentary in The Guardian:

"The overwhelming majority of the British public get a chocolate box view of rural communities from popular soap operas set in the countryside complains Michael Capes, chairman of the new Rural Services Partnership. The main culprit, apparently, is The Archers. This Capes must have had several liqueur chocolates too many if he can't see the difference between a sugary idyll and Dorsetshire's very own Mayhem Parva. Remember Cameron Fraser, the local tycoon who vamoosed shortly before being exposed as an embezzler? Or his successor, Simon Pemberton who made an equally quick getaway after beating up the ghastly Shula Hebden? Or Gibson, the drug dealer?...In the past few years Ambridge has witnessed a racist attack on Usha Gupta; an armed robbery at the sub-post office; a near fatal assault on George Barford...Michael Capes says he has written to the producers 'challenging them to get real'. How much reality does he think bewildered Radio 4 listeners can bear?"

(Wheen, June 1998)

Finally, in his discussion of the construction of rural childhoods in popular literature, Jones also suggests that, while many of its texts are "icons within discourses of childhood idyll" (p.175) they do occasionally step out of these worlds, portraying "fleeting glimpses of other sorts of country childhoods" (p.175), what he terms "contestations" (p.176) to these imagined idylls.
1.4 Popular Cultural Form and the Case of Television Drama

While the insights of this current work have begun to show how popular media texts construct rural identities in a number of important ways, rural research arguably has some way to go before it grasps the range and complexity of these forms. Even though this is an emergent field, there is still a marked lack of engagement with many popular media constructions of rurality circulating within contemporary social life.

It is true that some detailed analyses have begun to emerge about what may be at stake in particular texts, but too often the reading appears a marginal enterprise. Rather than being studied as objects of inquiry in their own right through which a range of meanings, experiences and practices may be enacted, popular media texts are typically drafted in as an explanatory factor within the dynamics of wider social-spatial processes. Cursory readings of texts would appear to suffice in this respect, because the issue in hand is not really on the nature and significance of media constructions of rurality, but on explicating a particular aspect of material rural change, such as tourism, migration or class colonisation.

It might also be suggested that there is an implicit feeling among academic scholarship that popular media forms do not bear much scrutiny; that their significance is found more in the ubiquitous reach of a few easily digested messages, than their capacity to touch people in a variety of complex ways. Compare much of this work, for instance, to the endeavour of landscape research, where penetrating critic driven analysis of artistic and literary form very much defines its enterprise. Just as it
could be asked of this research why it fails to relate its claims to wider social thought and practice, so too could it be asked of much work gesturing at the importance of popular media why it has so far failed to interrogate its output.

The point being made, then, is that an inclination to embrace ideas of a social constructed rurality has not yet been matched by a sustained reflection on a wide ranging number of popular media texts that are potentially central to its reproduction. And yet, cultural studies has consistently emphasised over many years that these texts contain a diverse complex articulation of signs capable of generating a variety of different meanings and practices. If rural research is going to fully realise the potential meaning and wider social significance of these widely circulated forms, it is vital that more thoroughgoing treatments of popular cultural output are developed.

This thesis intends to examine some of the possibilities that current work has begun to open up in the context of popular medium that, to date, has merited the most cursory of analyses among rural researchers: television. An object of study whose schedules in the United Kingdom have, in recent years, been increasingly dominated by a number of highly successful broadcasts that appear to consistently draw upon common signifiers of rurality through their content and form. As Figure 1.1 demonstrates, these texts command the attention of vast audiences on a regular basis and work across a broad range of texts and genres: from docu-dramas such as BBC TV's *The Village*, and magazine programmes such as BBC TV's *Countryside File*, through to soap operas such as YTTV's *Emmerdale*, and television dramas such as Carlton's *Peak Practice*. In this latter
Figure 1.1 Average Audience Projections for Rural* Productions on British Television 1995-1998**

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<td>Heartbeat</td>
<td>ITV</td>
<td>Series Drama</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>16.9</td>
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<td>15.8</td>
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<td>Peak Practice</td>
<td>ITV</td>
<td>Series Drama</td>
<td>13.7</td>
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<td>Ballykissangel</td>
<td>BBC1</td>
<td>Series Drama</td>
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<td>12.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emmerdale</td>
<td>ITV</td>
<td>Soap (Serial Drama)</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>12.6</td>
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<td>BBC1</td>
<td>Series Drama</td>
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<td>10.4</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dangerfield</td>
<td>BBC1</td>
<td>Series Drama</td>
<td>9.0</td>
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<td>Wycliffe</td>
<td>ITV</td>
<td>Series Drama</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Lakes</td>
<td>BBC1</td>
<td>Series Drama</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last of the Summer Wine</td>
<td>BBC1</td>
<td>Comedy Drama</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Vet</td>
<td>BBC1</td>
<td>Series Drama</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah's Ark</td>
<td>ITV</td>
<td>Series Drama</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicar of Dibley</td>
<td>BBC1</td>
<td>Sit-Com</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countryfile</td>
<td>BBC1</td>
<td>Current Affairs</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Village</td>
<td>BBC2</td>
<td>Docu-Drama</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These productions are taken to be rural on the basis that texts appeared to regularly draw upon one or more of the following signs: extensive open landscapes; small nucleated settlements; flora; fauna; natural commodities. For a fuller account of these definitions see Chapter 3.

** All figures are in millions. Source: British Audience Research Board 'This Weeks Viewing Summary' (1995; 1996; 1997; 1998). Figures rounded to the nearest 100,000. Data comprises listings of top 20 programmes. Episodes falling outside the top twenty are not included.

In respect, the genre of television drama might be said to operate at the popular end of this most popular and everyday of mediums. In a television market place where competition for audiences is becoming increasingly fierce, British rural television drama continues to be marked out as a pervasive cultural form, with unprecedented success in recent years. These texts are without peer in terms of
their capacity to circulate social identities of the countryside to such a significant proportion of the nation. Within cultural studies, moreover, it has been consistently argued that dramatic constructions, despite their widespread denigration, are “crucial to the ongoing process of national and cultural self-definition” (Goldsmiths media group 2000 P.45). It seems reasonable to ask, therefore, why rural research has yet to adequately explore, beyond cursory reference to their apparently ‘idyllic’ nature, such a dominant cultural form through which a variety of conceptions of countryside may be shaped. This, then, is the first broad aim of this thesis:

To explore the ways in which discourses of rurality may be constructed thorough the texts of British rural television drama
1.5 Texts in Context

Engaging more closely with the subtlety and potential breadth of meanings that may be at work in these dramatic texts is not, however, an end in itself. In recent cultural studies, textual analysis has been heavily criticised for its critic-driven reading of media forms, providing neat representational structures that iron-out the messiness of how these forms are produced and read. As Thompson (1990) has suggested, any theory of communication that attempts to divorce itself from the specific contexts in which media forms are produced and read are operating under a 'fallacy of "internalism", the notion that,

"one can read off the characteristics of symbolic forms by attending to the symbolic forms alone without reference to the socio-historical conditions and everyday process within which, and by means of which, these symbolic forms are produced and received"

(Thompson 1990, p.291)

Many of those working within the terrain of media studies have consistently drawn attention to the need to connect textual analysis of media forms to the wider circuits of cultural production and reception. A common way this is conceptualised is through Johnson's (1986) idea of a 'circuit of culture' depicted in Figure 1.2. The circuit of culture places the analysis of media texts within their broader communicative contexts incorporating four distinct moments for consideration: production; texts; reception and lived cultures. This process oscillates between the public and private, the abstract and concrete, as each determinate moment on the circuit is carved out of the moment preceding it.
Much of this endeavour into the wider cultural circuit has been at the interface of text and reading, allied to an interrogation of the conditions that underpin a reading of the text. Occasionally this has involved autoethnography on the part of the critic, unpacking the wider social discourses that he or she is defined by, and draws upon, to make a particular reading (e.g. Fiske 1990). More typically, it has involved exploring the social conditions upon which the readings of others occurs, a process that has led cultural studies to conceiving of the 'active' audience.

Although the idea of the active audience is not an entirely new one (Curran 1990) it has its modern roots in British cultural studies, and is often regarded as a 'revisionist' perspective to audience research, which had, until that time, often been regarded as conceiving of viewers as passive recipients of a pre-ordained message. From the early to mid twentieth century, for instance, a significant body of interdisciplinary work is to be found...
speculating over the effects that media forms may have on the unsuspecting minds of their audiences: from the highly functionalist brand of American sociology and social psychology on media effects (e.g. Lazarsfield and Merton 1948) to the mass society thesis of the Marxist sociologists, social psychologists and philosophers of the 'Frankfurt School' (e.g. Adorno 1991). Marked by a period of great historical conflict and change these earlier theorisations were the catalyst of a body of communication theory that has held considerable sway since.

As Fiske (1982) has clearly shown, models such as Shannon and Weaver's (1949) Mathematical Theory of Communication depicted in Figure 1.3 capture the spirit of much this work operating within social-scientific discussions of the media. In such formulations the mass communication process is characterised as an entirely linear, unidirectional process through which an all powerful, faceless 'source' originates a 'message'. This message is then catapulted out to an equally anonymous audience, who in terms of effective communication will make sense of the message in an identical fashion. This

**Figure 1.3 Shannon and Weaver's Mathematical Model of Communication**

![Diagram of Shannon and Weaver's Mathematical Model of Communication](image)
principle has since be tagged the 'hypodermic' model of communication (Halloran 1970), in that it sees the media process as having a syringe like effect over receivers, injecting ideas into the mind that govern, in turn, desirable and undesirable social behaviour.

Such conceptions of the media have been significantly reworked in modern television criticism. A central theme at work in this respect is the idea that, in pursuing the nature of particular media forms, and the broader connections between cultural text and social practice, the signifiers deployed within a particular media text will themselves be open to alternative readings. That they carry with them what is commonly termed a 'polysemic' (Condit 1989) or 'heteroglossic' (Fiske 1989) potential. This idea has been ferociously pursued by proponents of audience orientated criticism (e.g. Morley 1980; Radway 1984; Morley 1986; Fiske 1987). According to many, media texts may be read and appropriated in a variety of ways. They may depend, for instance, on the social characteristics of the particular viewer, the constructions of different self-identities while viewing a text, the capacity of audience to read the meanings of supposedly discrete media texts together, and the broader social-spatial relations of the viewing experience.

Rural geographers have begun to gesture at some of these issues at theoretical level. For instance, Cloke et al (1998a) have warned against a cultural determinism, wherein particular cultures of rurality working at the national, regional and local level will be automatically swallowed, and subsumed into wider social practices, by individuals. Similarly, Halfacree (1995) has written of the way that hegemonic constructions of rurality are often
contested through lay discourses, while Crouch has argued quite directly in this respect that,

"Symbols of the rural do not work all the same way. People make their own sense of the rural reinterpreting dominant images through their own cultural practices" (Crouch 1992, p.238)

At an empirical level, however, this point has never really been taken up. Rural research has tended to bypass the possibility of multiple readings, linking the signifiers of a text to their corresponding meaning, both in its detailed analyses, and in its cursory efforts to relate textual form to a particular concern (e.g. media = rural idyll to critic = rural idyll to audience = explanatory factor in rural in-migration). Reflect again, for instance, on the suggestion by Jones (1995), that the opening scene of the *Darling Buds of May* is a vision of "romantic freedom set in a picturesque village England" in which a taxman from London is "seduced into the rural idyll by the anarchic voluptuous Larkin Family" (p.39). This could quite reasonably read another way: the cunning and devious rural locals taking advantage of the weakness and foolishness of the incomer.

It is the case, therefore, that a rural text is open to a variety of readings, and in undertaking the first aim of this inquiry the account provided will be an inevitability partial one. Just as Fiske (1990) has demonstrated, in presenting an account of a text the author must critically reflect on the conditions under which a reading is made. Reading a text is not an unproblematic, value free process. The claims that are made of it, the meanings that are demanded of it, are always immersed within a particular set of discourses and agendas. In constructing an account of television drama I will therefore need to
consciously reflect on the discourses that I believe are at work in the reading process.

At the same time, care has to be taken not to erase the possibility that I, the critic, will not be share some of the conditions under which reading occurs among wider audiences. In his discussion of televisual form and audiences, Fiske (1987) for example, has argued that for every viewer encounter with a text, a unique reading will occur. But this radically polysemic vision of television Fiske propounds is surely only one half of the story. The television text’s ability to be meaningfully read by a viewer is dependent on a wider register of discourses on which he or she draws, and within which others are also embroiled. It is clear that the critic will never capture the polysemy at work in the text however he or she tries, but I would argue that neither are singular accounts exclusively outside of the orbit of others.

Similarly, care must be exercised in understating the potential role of the producer in servicing many of the readings that audiences (and I include within this the critic), can make of a text. The current theoretical trajectory of cultural studies and its celebration of the ‘active’ audience could be said to invite increasingly voluntaristic interpretations of media texts that appear to demand no attention to the work of those who create them (Murdock 1989). Increasingly predicated on the insights of poststructuralism, the active audience emphasises the politics of dispersing rather than containing meaning. It constantly unsettles the sense in which meanings circulating in, around and beyond media texts are seen to hold, placing the balance of power
between producer and viewer firmly in favour of the latter.

Recent work in rural geography by Doel (1994) reveals what a poststructuralist view of television and rurality might, in fact, look like. Here Doel positions the rural as a highly fluid, unstable and contested movement of signs that can never be fully grasped, goading the reader to "find a text if you can" (p.145). This is a fitting phrase indeed for the radically polysemic vision of texts that poststructuralism encourages. A terrain of inquiry that would resist settling on a particular reading of space; that would eschew any notions of correspondence between the readings of media producers and audiences. But as Nicholas Garnham has argued:

"By focusing on consumption and reception, and on interpretation, cultural studies has exaggerated the freedoms of daily life. Yes, people are not in any simple way manipulated. Yes, people can and often do interpret and use for their own purposes the cultural material, the texts, that the system of cultural production and distribution offers them. Yes, it is important to recognise the affective investment people make in such practices and the pleasures they derive from them. But does anyone who has produced a text or a symbolic form believe that interpretation is entirely random or that pleasures cannot be used to manipulative ends? If the process of interpretation were entirely random, and, therefore, we had to give up entirely the notion of intentionality in communication, the human species would have dropped the actively long ago"

(Garnham 1997 P.61)

The sense of unstructured polysemy that poststructuralism evokes, appears to emphasise the text/reader encounter in such a way that the role of the media producer seems to vanish entirely. The discourses of television appear particularly prone towards this kind of theorising not least because the television text is based,
in main, on denying its own conditions of existence in a way that many other discursive formations working in relation to these texts do not. For instance, whereas the discourses of audiences - the communicative texts of everyday thought and speech - are embodied through the bearers of these discourses, there is a sense in which the television text seems to just appear from nowhere.

There is also another potential reason for the neglected role of television producer, although it is not one that would sit comfortably with the fragmented subjects of poststructuralism. It concerns the sense in which authorship, might be regarded as something intuitive, inspirational, individual, creative, spontaneous: ideas that seem incompatible with many everyday popular forms. The everyday television text, for instance, appears to be part of a vast, custom built exercise in creative efficiency. More like an artist painting by numbers than a site of creative expression and intention. It seems to be about formulas (Nelson 1997; Kellner 1997). And it seems to be about repetition: the news slot, the drama slot, the sports slot, and so forth. In spite of this sense of authorless production, I am very much in sympathy with Stuart Hall’s (1980) warning that the work of media producers in delimiting textual meanings should not be dismissed lightly:

"Unless they are widely aberrant, encoding will have the effect of constructing some of the limits and parameters within which decodings will operate. If there were no limits audiences could simply read whatever they liked into any message. No doubt some total misunderstandings of this kind do exist. But the vast range must contain some degree of reciprocity between encoding and decoding moments, otherwise we could not speak of an effective communicative exchange at all"

(Hall 1980, pp.135-136, emphasis in original)
Ignoring this reciprocity risks dismissing out of hand a key power relationship at work in the circulation of popular media forms. As Hall has gone on to assert, reflecting on the processes of encoding and decoding:

"I don't want a model which has no power in it. I don't want a model which is determinist, but I don't want a model without determination. I therefore don't think that audiences are in the same positions of power with those who signify the world to them."

(Hall quoted in Cruz and Lewis 1994, p.261)

In media research a number of studies have sought to engage with a production dimension to the media. This work has tended to elevate the generalities of media production and the scope of texts available, over the situated thoughts and practices working within these structures and producing particular output. Practitioners of a political economy perspective within cultural studies, for instance, have consistently sought to elucidate the relationship between the creation of symbolic forms and the wider organisation of the media industry (e.g. Golding and Murdock 1973; Murdock 1982; Miege 1989; Murdock 1990; Garnham 1992; Golding and Murdock 1973). While there is a body of research that has sought to engage with the more direct practices of media producers, most notably within the study of television news (e.g. Schlesinger 1978; Tuchman 1978; Golding and Elliott 1979; Hartley 1982; Tunstall 1993 1996), it is the former tradition that predominates.

Contemporary rural research could usefully build on the tentative work on media production by writers such as Burgess and Youngs and start to interrogate the thoughts, practices and structures that circulate around the
business of creating these texts and which shape their content and form. It could explore the institutional context to which these constructions relate, such as organisational structures and goals of the television industry, and the vast range of technical, artistic, lay discourses that may be brought to bear upon the construction of texts through the work of a small number of media producers employed within specific production contexts: from the writing of an initial proposal for a series, through to the processes of script and production design, direction and editing. If the relations of power at work in the text-audience encounter of rurality are to be adequately understood, rural research must actively reflect upon the myriad of processes that are constantly working to shape the reading of these texts in particular ways. This, then, is the second broad aim of the thesis:

To explore how and why the relations of media production attempt to construct discourses of rurality through the texts of television drama.
1.5 Summary

This discussion began by briefly outlining the way that geographers have increasingly attempted to explore the connections between geography and the popular media as part of a broader turn towards the cultural within human geography. Rural geography has been shown to be bound up with this turn, and discussion about the culturally constructed nature of rurality among some rural geographers has led to tentative steps being made towards exploring the nature of popular media forms within contemporary social life. This thesis intends to examine in detail some of the ways in which ideas of rurality might be read from one widely circulated site of contemporary popular discourse that as yet has been subject to the most cursory of readings by rural studies: television drama.

However, discussion has shown how such critic driven endeavour must also be set alongside the wider circuit of culture within which they are produced and read. It has argued that, without recourse to wider audience readings, the account this thesis will present will inevitably be a partial one. It went on to argue, however, that the radically polysemic vision of texts that audience orientated criticism consistently creates should not dismiss lightly the possibility that producers can delimit at least some of the readings that may be at work in these texts. It is in this context that the second thesis aim was set, an interrogation of the way in which media producers might attempt to construct discourses of rurality through the texts under scrutiny. This thesis, then, works at the intersection of text and producers on the circuit of culture. To begin to explore this
intersection, the ideas outlined so far will need considerable theoretical elaboration and refinement. It is to these that discussion now turns.
2.1 Introduction

In the close of the previous discussion a general framework was briefly outlined through which the constitutive elements of the communication process could be understood. As suggested, the aim of this thesis is to explore two aspects of this circuit. First, to undertake a close textual analysis of series television drama and the constructions of the countryside that may be produced through it. Second, to explore how and why the relations of media production attempt to construct discourses of rurality through these texts. The purpose of this chapter is to explore in greater detail some of the theoretical issues at stake in pursuing these aims.

This discussion is divided into two sections. The objective of the first section is to outline a way in which television and other cultural texts have been commonly theorised and approached, known as semiotics. Television criticism has a broad repertoire of theories and techniques to contemplate the nature of televisual forms and this section is by no means exhaustive of what is at stake (for a broader introduction see for instance Allen 1992 or Newcombe 1994). What this section does is demonstrate a way of thinking about the construction of meaning in media texts as a basis for interpreting the construction of rurality in series television drama.

In the second half of discussion, the possibility of a critic driven analysis following semiotic principles is set against the insights of the wider circuit of cultural production. It charts the way mass communication research has interpreted the relations between producers, texts and audiences over time, exploring how it has increasingly
developed ideas of an active audience which controls the meanings of texts. While acknowledging the important insights and challenges presented by this work, discussion concludes by reclaiming the possibility of a study that theorises media constructions of rurality from the point of view of the critic and the media producer.


2.2 Semiotic Textual Analysis

This section outlines the main tenets of a semiotic approach to media forms. It begins by tracing the move away from viewing texts as a manifest set of meanings that could be enumerated by the objective critic, to one that considers the construction of meaning as a relational process developed out of a system of signification. Discussion then considers the theoretical tradition of these relational ideas in structural linguistics. It goes on to consider how these ideas have been utilised within the study of television and, in particular, the way semiologists' theorise media texts at two principal levels of signification: denotation and connotation. The principal themes are then summarised and the limits of a semiotic perspective addressed.

2.2.1 From Elements to Relations in Textual Analysis

"The subject matter of semiotics it is often credited is the exchange of any messages, whatsoever, in a word, communication”

(Sebeok 1986, quoted in Leeds-Hurwitz 1993 p.36,)

Central to the development of modern media criticism is a mode of textual analysis known as semiotics. Semiotics is commonly described as the study or science of signs and is born out of a much broader tradition of structural inquiry that came to the fore in the humanities and social sciences during the 1960s and 1970s. The introduction of a semiotic perspective to television brought with it some radically different premises to established canon of media criticism about the nature of media texts and how they should be approached.
Until then, the analysis of media texts was overwhelmingly dominated by empiricist accounts of form in which the properties of a television text were approached as if they contained within them an almost immanent, pre-given quality. Media research of this sort was characteristically built around a mode of content analysis that purported to objectively describe the nature of media texts by enumerating the elements that lay before the critic. In Berelson's much cited phrase, content analysis involved "the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson 1966, p.263). Considered in this way, the question of what meanings the text conveys is quite straightforward. Television simply transfers a three-dimensional world on to a two-dimensional plane and a basic survey of the elements recorded in the image will reveal what it is the image corresponds to.

According to many working within the field of cultural studies, and inspired by the insights of semiotics, this view is fundamentally mistaken. There is neither anything particularly natural about the meaning of a television image, nor the concrete world it is thought by many to represent. The television text 'in here' does not rely for its meanings on mirroring a self apparent, objective, reality 'out-there' (what Fiske 1987 terms the 'transparency fallacy', Duncan and Ley 1993 the 'mimetic fallacy'). Rather, each element of the text, just like each element within the concrete world, is a sign, and each sign is dependent for its meaning on wider social convention.

What is important to note about this basic assertion is that it bears many of the hallmarks of a more general
assault on empiricist approaches across the social sciences and humanities. It reflects the growing suspicion among many fields of academic discourse that knowledge attesting to the un-problematic representation of social life conceals the socially constructed basis upon which that knowledge stands. In terms of this study there is symmetry between points made here about the nature of media texts and those made in the introductory chapter over current developments in the field of rural geography. As it was put there, for some, the rural isn’t simply an essential, static and unified centre of meaning existing in advance of its appropriation, elaboration and investigation. It has to be constantly made, and remade, in thought and practice. It is in this vein, for instance, that Halfacree (1993) suggests that many empiricist attempts to define rurality have been based around "trying to fit a definition to what we already intuitively consider to be rural" (p.24, emphasis in original).

Putting these insights of media and rural research together, empiricist approaches to the construction of rurality within media texts would seem somewhat problematical. Rurality is not, in short, an observable and measurable essence that can be simply read from the text. However, it is worth noting at this stage that such a critique of empiricism does not necessarily preclude the potential uses of quantification as methodological tool for this research. It could be suggested that providing that what is observed and measured is not assumed to contain within it an objective, pre-given meaning, it is possible to envisage a trajectory of inquiry that considers how prevalent certain audio-visual elements - which replicate widely shared ideas about rurality - are within the texts of television drama. Halfacree makes much
the same point in developing a theory of rural social representation. Whereas he initially laments the use of empiricist representations of rurality that are not aware of their own constructedness, he goes on to note that such assessments may actually be rethought of as social representations of rurality:

"As most of daily life is carried on at the empirical level (Tuan 1989) the world of surface appearance may be expected to predominate within representations of rurality. The definitional wheel may thus appear to have turned full circle, taking us back to regarding the rural as descriptive category, although this time with ... an explicit engagement with the 'commonsense' underlying these descriptions"  
(Halfacree 1993, p.33-34)

Nevertheless, as this discussion will begin to demonstrate, approaching the television as if its socially constructed meanings can be simply read from the discrete elements on display, and then enumerated into neat representational structures is not without its problems. According to the insights of semiotics, meaning is not simply about the describing signs in situ, it is about analysing the relations between elements. For semiologists, while each element displayed within the text is a sign, each of these signs is dependent for it meaning on a broader system of signification of which it is part. As Umberto Eco, a key proponent of semiotics, suggests "every act of communication to or between human beings... presupposes a signification system as its necessary condition" (1976, p.9).

One of the central pre-occupations of semiotics is to reveal how meanings are generated through systems of signification, rather than what meanings are generated (Seiter 1992) In practice, however, much of the endeavour in media studies that could be described as 'semiotic'
tackles both these questions. It takes its lead from the insights of American philosopher Charles S. Peirce and Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, whose works became widely read in academic circles in the 1930s and 1960s respectively. According to Lechte (1994) their insights provided considerable inspiration for a much broader terrain of structural inquiry across anthropology, psychoanalysis, sociology, literary and media criticism. In order to understand the general principles underpinning semiotic inquiry in modern television criticism, and how it might provide insight for this study, it is useful to reflect on what it was that writers like Peirce and Saussure were actually arguing. In spite of their different intellectual backgrounds both developed broadly similar propositions about the relationship between signs and meaning, although the terminology they used was often quite different. For the purposes of clarity, the following section concerns itself exclusively with the work and insights of Saussure.

2.2.2 Saussure, Structural Linguistics and Semiology

For Saussure, working in the early years of this century, the study of language was too preoccupied with a diachronic mode of inquiry (i.e. the historical development of a language) when it should be studied synchronically (i.e. at a particular point in time). In particular, Saussure regarded language as a system of signs displaying a particular structure (which he termed the ‘langue’) through which individual acts of language (which he termed the ‘parole’) could emerge. The key issue for Saussure, therefore, was to discern the underlying structures that governed the use of a language (Eagleton 1983).
In this respect, Saussure ascribed systems of language with a number of basic characteristics. Three points appear particularly salient for this discussion. First, each sign was constituted with two basic elements: a signifier (such as the ink marks on this page, or the pattern of sound uttered by a voice) and a signified (the concept or meaning these signifiers generate in the mind) (ibid 1983). So for instance, the signifier ‘r-u-r-a-l’ generates in the English speaking mind the concept of ‘rural’. Second, the linguistic sign is arbitrary. There is no natural correspondence between a signifier and a signified. Signifiers are a matter of their collective use within a particular language community (compare for example, the signifier ‘rural’ with ‘rurale’ in French). Third, language is held together through a system of differences. Signs do not have meaning ‘in themselves’, they are always defined in relation to other signs. In this respect, the meaning of a sign is always in some sense absent from the sign (Eagleton 1983).

According to Saussure, the relational properties of language work on two principal levels (Hawkes 1983). First, a ‘syntagmatic’ level, referring to the way that meaning is produced by placing different signs in relation to each other. ‘The rural way of life’, for instance, is a syntagmatic chain of words whose capacity to mean is in part defined by how the words are read together. These syntagmatic chains are subject to the grammatical conventions of the language (e.g. nouns, verbs and articles) which must be respected if the structure is to retain its meaning (‘the life way of rural’ is nonsensical, for instance). And second, a paradigmatic level, referring to the way that signs present within the chain are drawn from, and defined by, a wider class of signifiers absent
from the chain. So for instance, 'rural' in this chain carries particular meanings because it is not 'urban' or 'suburban'; 'life' because it is not 'death' or 'strife'. These paradigmatic choices could be replaced by these alternative signs, although the meaning would alter significantly: the urban way of life, the rural way of strife, the urban way of death, and so forth. This point is expressed diagrammatically in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1 Paradigms and Syntagms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paradigms (selection)</th>
<th>Syntagms (combination)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The rural way of life</td>
<td>urban death strife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While Saussure only concerned himself with the study of linguistic structures, he saw in these basic principles the potential for a more general science of signs:

"A science that studies the life of signs within society is conceivable; it would be part of a social psychology and consequently of general psychology; I shall call it semiology (from the greek semeion 'sign'). Semiology would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them. Since the science does not exist, no one can say what it would be; but it has a right to existence, a place staked out in advance."  
(Saussure quoted in Hawkes 1983 p.123)

Since Saussure wrote this a series of writers have come to stake out a place under the sign of semiotics. In particular, its development owes a considerable debt to the work of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco, who brought the insights of Saussure and Peirce into the academic
mainstream from the late 1950s onwards (e.g. Barthes 1977, Eco 1976). Through this work semiotics has often taken forward the insights of Saussure's emphasis on synchronic analysis by attempting to discern the underlying structures at work within a range of cultural texts. As the following section will now demonstrate, television research has been one of the key beneficiaries of the development and application of these ideas.

2.2.3 Television and Semiotic Analyses of Texts

For many of those working within the emergent field of television criticism, semiotics provided a framework by which the social meanings of the popular media could be interrogated and understood in far greater detail than had previously been undertaken. An engagement with the ideas of semiotics was not, therefore, just a theoretical exercise that followed Saussure's exclusive concern with how meanings are generated (i.e. discerning the structures or 'langue' of television). It was concerned with what meanings were produced through these structures (i.e. exploring the particular instances of these structures, or the 'paroles' of television).

By developing this semiotic style of analysis media research quickly moved away from thinking of its output as simply 'messages' to be enumerated, grasping them instead as a rich configuration of signifiers whose meanings were teased out through analytical and rigorous inquiry (Marris and Thornham 1996). Indeed, although the terminology of the field has a more general currency in media studies, semiotic inquiry is often associated with a highly critic-driven mode of analysis. It pays painstaking attention to the signifying qualities of television images, either on
their own or in relation to each other, and generates what Seiter (1992) describes as "an enormous (some would say preposterous) amount of analytical text" (p.54). By working on the principle that signifiers deployed in texts have commonly shared signifieds attached to them, semiologists of television can afford themselves a certain license to read off the meaning of the text with little recourse to its wider conditions of reception. They can assume that their readings are the ones consciously or sub-consciously shared by the wider audience (Seiter 1992).

To understand how television criticism can apply the insights of semiotics to its object of study it is useful to consider how signifiers of television are conventionally described. In this respect it is useful to divide these signifiers into three broad categories of analysis. The first of this is known as mise en scene, a term widely used in film and television criticism, and which means simply 'put into the scene' (Bordwell 1985). *Mise en scene* refers to the visual content of an image: all those signifiers that can be observed within an image's frame including objects, character props and costumes, as well as actors, movement and lighting. The second category, audio content, is less straightforward. According to Percheron (1980) audio signifiers can be divided into two broad classes: diegetic and extra-diegetic. Diegetic audio refers to sounds which originate from within the storytelling world (i.e. dialogue, sound effects, and non-incidental music), extra-diegetic to sounds that work in relation to the storytelling world from the outside (i.e. voice-overs, and incidental music). *Mise en shot*, the third and final category, is another term commonly used in film and television criticism and
refers to the wide ranging number of camera shots, angles and movements that television and film has developed to observe mise en scene (Bordwell 1993).

The critical endeavour for semiologists is how these signifiers working in and around the television image establish the basis for meanings through the interrelated processes of selection and combination. Like Saussure and his structural linguistics, semiologists are interested in the 'paradigmatic' and 'syntagmatic' dimensions of the language. In televisual terms, paradigmatic choices refer to what visual and audio signifiers are made available to the audience within the parameters of the text, as well as the choice of camera shot used to observe these elements. Syntagmatic choices refer to the way that these paradigmatic elements are configured in relation to each other both spatially (i.e. the way that audio and visual signifiers are positioned together and framed within an image) and temporally (i.e. how these signifiers, and the way they are framed, are placed in relation to other images through the process of editing). These paradigmatic and syntagmatic elements of television generate their meaning relationally: the elements of the text work in concert, both spatially and temporally, to produce particular textual forms and thereby readings in the audience, while at the same time are drawn from, and defined by, the wider class of signifiers absent from these chains.

Exploring the paradigmatic and syntagmatic bases of television within particular contexts can mean that semiotic analyses has often found itself embroiled in a politics of signification, and provides this study with a framework by which constructions of rurality within
British television drama could be understood. In particular, semiotics often demonstrates the way that these signs work together in particular context driven groups called 'codes'. The idea of the code has a long tradition within terrain media research (e.g. Fiske and Hartley 1978; Fiske 1982, 1987). According to Leeds-Hurwitz (1993) its strength lies in ability to "place each sign in its proper context, that being the larger set of signs in which it is embedded" (p.51). Following the early work of Barthes (see Barthes 1977 for an overview), it is common for semiotics to make an analytical distinction between two types of code in an image: the denotative and connotative. As Coward and Ellis explain:

"There are ... two systems of meaning: the denotative and the connotative, the 'object-language'...and the myth which attaches itself to it, which takes advantage of the form of this denotative language to insinuate itself. In Barthes's famous example, there is a magazine cover, showing a black soldier saluting the French flag [SEE FIGURE 2.2]. The photo has one fully adequate denotative meaning ('Here's a black soldier saluting the French flag'), but this meaning is invaded by a second sense, which is precisely its intended sense: the connotative meaning which springs from a mixture of colonialist nationalism and militarism. It says - at the time of the Algerian war of independence - 'colonialism must be right: there are negroes perfectly willing to defend it to the death'.”

(Coward and Ellis 1977 pp27.8)

In the first instance then, a text's denotative order of signification expresses the seemingly literal, self evident, meaning of a signifier. It conveys the way in which signifiers have attached to them signifieds that appear to have almost natural, unquestionable qualities. As Stuart Hall has suggested, certain conventions are often,
Figure 2.2. Barthes’ Denotation and Connotation

"so widely distributed in a specific language community or culture, and be learned at so early an age that they appear not to be constructed...but to be 'naturally' given". (Hall 1980 p.132)

So for instance, consider the image in Figure 2.3. According to the semiologist through the display of the visual elements this image might have the denotative meaning of 'women sitting with coffee cup against a backdrop of countryside'. This is, to be sure, an arbitrary meaning, even though it may be a highly conventional one. There is nothing particularly given about the meaning of the signifiers projected within this image. The denotative reading is generated here because it replicates a deeply ingrained visual convention over what a 'women sitting with coffee cup against a backdrop of countryside' could look like.

Figure 2.3 Denotation and Connotation

According to semiologists, the connotative reading of a text’s meaning is where denoted signs become signifiers for a second order of signification. As Hall puts it:

"The level of connotation...is the point where already coded signs...[i.e. denotative signs]... intersect with the deep semantic codes of culture and take on additional, more active ideological dimensions...” (Ibid p.133 emphasises in original)
That is to say, semiologists suggest that connotation refers to the wider cultural associations that are attached to the denotative level. Moreover, according to Hall, whereas the denotative level of television,

"is fixed by certain, very complex (but limited or 'closed') codes...its connotative level, though also bounded, is more open, subject to more active transformations, which exploit its polysemic values" (Ibid p.134 emphasises in original)

In other words, while the denotative meanings of an image are culturally stable ones, its connotative dimensions are marked out by their potential diversity. In other words, connotation takes the insights of Saussure and extends them one stage further: if the relationship between signifier and signified is an arbitrary one, it follows that any one signifier of a text may be open to a range of interpretations (Hall 1982). For the critic, connotative inquiry demands a far more interpretative and open mode of investigation than at the denotative level. So for instance, upon closer reflection of the image in Figure 2.3 it might be suggested by a semiologist that the denoted meaning here is used as some second order of signification, such as 'countryside as a space of quiet contemplation', 'countryside as a space which allows people to reflect', 'countryside as a space where special bonds are created between people and land'. This relationship is depicted in Figure 2.4.

The example given here has focused exclusively on certain elements of mise en scene to explain this basic distinction, although it is important to reiterate that these for semiologists these two levels of signification are built around the whole range of signifiers brought to bear upon the television image. These include movement,
sound, lighting, the duration of the shot, as well as the type of shot chosen to frame the image. For example, the denoted sounds of instrumental music might be said work in conjunction with action to connote particular moods and emotional states, as does lighting. Soft lighting, for instance, is often used to emphasise romance and warmth, low lighting to emphasise mystery and suspense. Similarly, the duration of shots can connote different degrees of tension as well as how time is seen to pass, while the type of shot chosen to frame an image can, among many other things, radically alter how a particular character is conveyed. The close-up camera shot, for example, is often used to connote empathy with a character, whereas a low-angled camera shot looking up to a character may be used to connote stature and power.

2.2.4 Summary

The suggestion so far is that television displays a rich configuration of signifiers organised along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic bases of its texts. According
to semiologists, the readings that audiences make of these signifiers are governed by wider social convention at two principal levels of signification: denotation and connotation.

Semiotic inquiry has been an important development in the field of television research. As this discussion has suggested, analysing the nature of media content was traditionally developed around highly empiricist accounts of the particular text under question. Under this logic, the meaning of the text was somehow contained within the intrinsic properties of the elements recorded, with the aim of content analysis being to count the elements apparently manifest in the text. This perspective has been strongly undermined by the import of a semiotic perspective to television. A semiotic account of the text retains the systematic, critic-driven tone of traditional content analyses but it does so in way that emphasises the constructed nature of the forms under question. As has been shown, for a semiologist of media constructions of the countryside, the issue is not about measuring a text against an objective, pre-ordained, meaning of rurality. It is not about considering the fidelity of a representation to the world ‘out there’. Rather, it is about revealing how the television image replicates particular conventions upon which a sense of space is constructed. The meaning of media texts is about the process of social construction rather than some natural and self-evident link between signifier and signified. Such a perspective has already been tentatively used to reclaim the possibility of a quantitative analysis of rural images. However, this is where the similarity ends. As a mode of analysis semiotics does not concern itself with the meaning of elements in situ. They emphasise a far
more interpretative, qualitative assessment of texts in which the elements produce their meaning in relation to each other along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axis of the image. According to the logic of semiotic endeavour, analysing constructions of rurality through television drama would be based on a thoroughgoing treatment of the interrelated aspects of mise en shot, mise en scene and sound working within, and between, different images.

Nonetheless, despite the potential subtlety of this type of analysis, semiotics is not without its problems. Three issues appear particularly salient in this respect. First, semiotics tends to focus their emphasis on one, or at most, a handful of images. In pursuing the subtleties of the television image the broader narrative strands of a television text potentially get lost, or at least certainly obscured, along the way. Semiotics is often more at home pouring over the miniature of an advertising image or the subtleties of a restaurant menu (see for instance Barthes 1957). Applied to television analysis semiotic endeavour can potentially rob the text of its wider sense of form. As this thesis will go on to show in chapter 3, however, there is no intrinsic reason why semiotics principle cannot be used to grasp these wider dynamics of the text.

Second, while the relational vision of textual elements presented by semiotics provides this thesis with a useful starting point by which to begin approaching the analysis of media constructions of rurality, it is debatable how far the two levels of signification, denotation and connotation, can be operationalised by the critic. While it is useful to think that one set of signifieds (such as a 'women sitting with coffee cup against a back drop of
countryside' in Figure 2.3 earlier) might, in turn, act as signifiers for others, (such as 'countryside as a space of quiet contemplation'), the idea that one reading can be asserted as any more literal than another, however, appears quite problematic. As Halfacree's (1993; 1995) empirical analyses of representations of the countryside has shown, for instance, the countryside is socially constructed in a variety of ways. What constitutes rurality is anything but self-evident. It can vary from one reading to the next. Distinguishing between the apparently literal meanings of signifiers and their more contested connotative associations is as arbitrary as the process of signification itself. As Nichols has argued, it is difficult see how the critic can uphold such a distinction:

"We may try to single out the more from the less expressive aspects of an image but there is no ultimately binding rationale, no court of appeal to uphold the choice.

(Nichols 1981 P.47)

Rather than try to uphold this distinction it is arguably better, therefore, to think instead of all readings made of signifiers as being connotations, which may act, in turn, as signifiers for other connotations.

Third, one of the major drawbacks of semiotics is its failure to connect insight to the wider circuit of cultural production. In its painstaking effort to construct the various meanings of a media text analysis semiotics can often appear a hermeneutically sealed mode of enquiry that does not engage with the very sites of cultural production through which the shape and meaning of the text is constituted. This is the concern of the following section.
2.3 Reading Texts in Context

The aim of this section is to show how media texts have been theorised in relation to the wider moments of media production and reception, and then to consider what this implies for the aims of this thesis. Examining these wider relations is in no sense new, although the terms of the debate and the level of engagement have significantly changed. Discussion begins by outlining mass communication research that has emphasised the passivity of the audience in relation to determinacies of text and production. It then goes on to consider a significant development in social-scientific inquiry in the 1960s and 1970s which sought to acknowledge audiences as active users of texts. Discussion then turns to the ideas of cultural studies, a field of inquiry that has gradually moved from regarding production-text relations as an antagonist process of accepting and subverting the readings of producers, to one in which the semiotic power of audiences is increasingly elevated. It concludes by exploring the implications of these insights in relation to the goals of this study.

2.3.1 The Audience as Passive

As suggested in the introduction, some of the earliest insights into the nature and effect of systems of mass communication had at work in them a conception of the producer-audience relations, one that emphasised their ‘hypodermic’ relationship. In American social-scientific inquiry, these insights were based on detailed empirical research, often funded by media institutions (Marris and Thornham 1996) and which interrogated the short term effects of systems of mass communications over the viewer. Typically this involved dis-aggregating media texts in
distinctive functions such Lazarsfield and Merton’s (1948) idea of ‘monopolization’, referring to the media’s ability to dominate and define the social agenda, and ‘narcotizing’, concerning its capacity to render the audience politically apathetic.

Working alongside these ideas were a more overtly theoretical set of claims about the power of the mass media over audiences, developed by the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, and commonly referred to as the ‘Frankfurt school’ (e.g. Adorno 1991). Set within a broadly marxist tradition of ideas, this body of work argued that mass symbolic forms, were integrated into, determined by, and constitutive of, the capitalist mode of production. They were commodities within in a larger culture industry that reconciled the passive masses to the prevailing social order. These ideas, forming what is known as the ‘mass society’ thesis, found a wider audience from the 1960s onwards and are still highly influential today within studies of the media (e.g. Garnham 1990).

Media research continued to have a predilection for exploring the short-term effects of the mass media right up until the 1970s, particularly within the realm of psychology (e.g. Drabman and Thomas 1974; Thomas et al 1977). In one oft-cited piece of empirical research by Eysenck and Nias (1978), for instance, a sample of males and females of various ages were placed in ‘laboratory’ conditions and observed for their reactions to scenes of media violence. Nevertheless, as social scientific inquiry extended its empirical work many of the traditional assumptions about media effects have been were gradually reworked. In particular, what is often referred to as the ‘pluralist tradition’ of media studies (Boyd-Barrett 1995)
had for some time been raising significant doubts about the idea of direct effects over the audience. Researchers increasingly started writing of social-cognitive factors that filtered the effects of the texts, using phrases such as "mediating factors" (Klapper 1960) to capture a more limited idea of textual power.

Moreover, other social-scientific endeavour in the late 1960s and 1970s attempted to rethink its emphasis on short-term effects. Particularly notable here are the ideas associated with the work of George Gerbner, who at this time began developing a theory of 'media cultivation': the notion that media texts incrementally shape people's values, belief, priorities and action over time (e.g. Gerbner 1969, 1970, 1980). What is interesting to note about this work is that, rather than studying situated audiences, it often preoccupies itself with close textual analysis, gradually teasing out the values that television output will encourage in the audience. Ideas about media cultivation have come in for a great deal of criticism, not least in the way it emphasises a homogeneous notion of audiences, distinguishing only between light and heavy modes of viewing (Newbold 1998).

2.3.2 The Uses and Gratification Perspective

Probably the most significant turning point in the idea of media effects, one that makes a significant break from ideas about short-term and long-term media effects is that associated with the 'uses and gratification' perspective. While this perspective emerged as a force at the same time as the cultivation thesis, it holds fundamentally different assumptions about the nature of the text-audience relationship. In a much-cited assertion, James
Halloran, a key proponent of this perspective, suggests that television theorists:

“[M]ust get away from the habit of thinking in terms of what the media do to people and substitute for it the idea of what people do with the media”

(Halloran 1970 p.34)

In this neat turn of phrase, Halloran captures the spirit of the uses and gratification perspective and the way that it shifted the terms of the media effects debate effectively on its head. The hallmark of this approach is the way that it reduces individuals decodings of media texts down to matters of “individual differences of personality and psychology” (Morley 1989, p.17). According to these theorists, individuals have pre-existing, psychodynamic needs that are satisfied by seeking out certain gratifications from the television text. Characteristic of this approach is for theorists to generate typologies of needs that are fulfilled by the television in general, or in relation to particular texts. For instance, in one famous study McQuail et al (1972) articulate four broad areas of need fulfilled by the media: diversion (e.g. providing escapism), personal relationships (e.g. offering companionship), personal identity (e.g. comparing one’s life with media scenarios), and finally, surveillance (e.g. supply information about a certain aspect of the world).

The uses and gratification perspective represented a significant departure from ideas of the passive audience, although it is not without its problems. In its rush to describe the different uses of the text, this perspective consistently fails to explore the conditions that determine these needs in the first place. As far as this perspective is concerned, individuals just seem to have a
need that they then service by watching a television text, such as a rural drama. In its efforts to create towering descriptions of all the uses and gratifications a text could possibly supply, the question this perspective single-handedly fails to adequately answer is: why? Why does the desire stir inside the individual in the first instance?

It could be argued therefore, that proponents of uses and gratifications emphasise the autonomy of the audience but do not then connect its insights to the particular conditions under which individuals' live, and through which these processes will be structured (Ang 1996). Such concerns are characteristic of the second broad tradition of audience research, the cultural studies perspective, which in different ways has sought a more comprehensive engagement with audience background, identities and tactics of viewing. This perspective is the object of the following sections of discussion.

2.3.3 The Cultural Studies Tradition

In general terms, and particularly at its inception, the cultural studies project has sought to trace the contours the production and reception along the contours of power and resistance. The tone of this work is explicitly politicised, its impulse to locate,

"the text/viewer encounter within a firm socio-cultural context...conceiv[ing] of viewers as more than just passive receivers of already fixed messages or mere textual constructions...[and]...open up the possibility of thinking about the television viewing as area of cultural struggle" (Ang 1996, p.20)
In one respect, the emergent field of cultural studies developed the proposition that if texts were a configuration of signifiers that operated according to certain conventions it followed that media producers, determining the selection and combination of signifiers, had it within their means to encourage particular readings among audiences. This process of selecting and combining signifiers was known as 'encoding', while the meanings that they tried to enable was called the 'preferred reading'. By 'preferred' it means that media producers encode within a text reading positions that reflect a 'dominant' or 'hegemonic' discourse on the particular aspect of social life being constructed. Reflecting on these theoretical developments in the field, Hall (1982) suggests that within media institutions:

"[A] particular form of social organisation had evolved which enabled the producers (broadcasters) to employ the means of meaning production at their disposal (the technical equipment) through a certain practical use of them (the combination of elements of signification...) in order to produce a product (a specific meaning)... The specificity of media institutions therefore lay precisely in the way a social practice was organised so as to produce a symbolic product"

(Hall 1982, p.68)

Investing the media producer with the ability to produce a "specific meaning" through a particular form of social organisation and practice invested programme makers with a certain degree of power over the audience at large. Media producers were seen as engaged in the practice of reproducing the conditions under which certain truths about the world can be made, while simultaneously concealing others. Hall suggests that once research accepted the proposition that meaning was "not given but produced" (ibid P.67), that it was a matter of signifying practices constructing the world in certain ways and not
others, then the issue at stake for analysing media production became quite clear:

"Two questions followed from this [proposition]. First, how did a dominant discourse warrant itself as an account, and sustain a limit, ban or proscription over alternative and competing definitions? Second, how did the institutions which were responsible for describing and explaining events in the world - in modern societies, the mass media par excellence - succeed in maintaining a preferred or delimited range of meanings in the dominant systems of communication?"

(Ibid p.67)

These two issues, establishing and maintaining particular ways of seeing the world, are at the centre of cultural studies' attempts to theorise the nature of media production. Such constructions are the product of a range of interweaving discursive realms that are implicitly and explicitly brought to bear upon a text by those at work in media institutions. Producers articulated the world through the discourses within which they are already inscribed:

"Though the production structures of television originate the television discourse, they do not constitute a closed system. They draw topics, treatments, agendas, events, personnel, images of the audience, 'definitions of the situation', from other sources and other discursive formations within the social cultural and political structures of which they are a differentiated part"

Hall (1980 p.140)

However, producers are not passive mediums of discourse. As the two comments above imply, they appear to have agency within this process: they are "responsible for describing and explaining", they "draw on topics, treatments, agendas, events...", they "succeed in maintaining a preferred or delimited range of meanings". This is much the same conclusion that Murdock arrives at
when describing the role of television writer, albeit with slightly different terminology:

"[T]he text is always an expression of general ideologies as actively mediated through the writer's authorial ideology, which is structured in turn by his or her class background, professional career and present situation. Within television, this balance between general and authorial ideologies is highly variable and is ultimately decided by the dynamics of productions in specific situations"

(Murdock 1980, p.132)

What Murdock is suggesting here, therefore, is that while media producers are bearers of a wider myriad of ideas, be they specific to media production or circulating within social life more generally, these are always articulated through individuals who make choices over how texts should be created. The meaning of media texts is a product of the general and the particular, neither occurring simply around the backs of media producers, nor reducible to the work of an autonomous individual.

However, the flipside to this idea of encoding was the idea of decoding. Typically, in fact, while Hall's encoding/decoding framework has a theory of production at work, this model is commonly taken as the standard point of departure for critical research into notions of the active audience. Indeed, just as television was coming into its own as a social phenomena worthy of academic inquiry, writers such a Roland Barthes were prising open a space for much greater theoretical reflection on the polysemic potential of cultural texts.

Exploring this potential was not just a case of the critic recognising a connotative, and therefore polysemic, level of signification in the text. It meant situating readings within empirical accounts of the audience. Unlike
the uses and gratifications perspective which had been developing ideas of the active audience, this work was set on a firm sociological footing. Moreover, its original premises were based on the idea that while viewers were able to decode texts in a variety of ways, but they could not read them as they please. On the contrary, according to this work, audiences are always finding their readings in some sense regulated. Television reading is a 'struggle' over meaning, with individuals being policed as much by their own social positioning as by the determinacies of text and production.

To this end, a number of important interventions into the study of audiences began to take place from this perspective in the early 1980s. In particular, research monographs by media theorists such as David Brunsdon and Charlotte Brunsdon (e.g. Brunsdon and Morley 1978, Morley 1980) began to rethink the notion that audience readings were simply dictated by how they were positioned in relation to the content of the media text. By exploring how media texts could be decoded in a variety of different ways according to the cultural background of the viewer, the notion of the passive and unified viewing subject swept along by the structures of the text was firmly undermined (Ang 1996). It opened up the text to its polysemic potential, and with it came the seeds of a 'new' audience research that now conceptualised the viewing process as a,

"complex cultural practice full of dialogical negotiation and contestations rather than singular occurrence whose meaning can be determined once and for all in the abstract"

(Ibid p.39)
In its early guise, then, cultural studies encouraged the view that the text-audience relationship was a highly antagonistic one, with viewers constructed in relation to the text’s ‘preferred meaning’ (Hall 1980). Viewing, in this sense, was not just about what meaning you activate from the text it was about whether that reading reproduces the preferred meaning. In this vein, Hall speculates that audiences will adopt one of three reading strategies in relation to the text. First, a ‘dominant-hegemonic’ reading, in which viewers do concur with the text’s preferred meaning; a ‘negotiated’ reading in which they identify with the preferred reading at an abstract level, but resist it within given instances; and an ‘oppositional’ reading, in which viewers completely contradict the preferred reading.

In sum, to write of the active audience according to this early work is to suggest that watching television is about degrees of resistance to the text’s dominant ideological premises. One of the common preoccupations to have emerged from this theoretical framework was a explicit concern with class-based readings of texts. For instance, as Morley was to argue in his own pioneering study of the now defunct BBC Television News bulletin Nationwide:

"What is needed...is an approach which links differential interpretations back to the socio-economic structure of society, showing how different ‘culture codes’ will interpret a given message differently, not just at the personal, idiosyncratic level, but in a way systematically related to their socio-economic position."

(Morley 1980 pp.14-15)
Set within this concern, however, was a more specific concern with working class readings. As Nightingale puts it:

"Working-class subcultures were the preferred objects of study. They were seen as the besieged remnants of western culture to be explained; the challenge to the dominant order to be protected."

(Nightingale 1996 p.25)

According to Marris and Thornham (1996) opening up the text to different class-based readings signalled a departure from the determinism of marxist accounts available at that time, such as those of the Frankfurt tradition. It was about taking a marxist perspective to the media into an uncharted terrain of empirical endeavour, in one sense, politicising the role of the mass media by acknowledging its role in reproducing dominant ideologies within social life, in another, granting space for the socially situated audience to have some sense of agency in the reading process.

As this work has matured, however, the theoretical approach and empirical focus of this cultural studies work has gradually changed. In one respect, such endeavour has quickly broadened it analyses out from the class-based inflection of its early insights. While ideas about class and audience readings continued to be important (e.g. Tulloch and Moran 1986; Corner et al 1990) cultural studies increasingly explored how decodings vary across a range of socially marginalised groups. Gross makes the issue at stake plain:

"In a society dominated by centralised sources of information and imagery, in which economic imperatives and pervasive values promote the search for large, common denominator audiences, what is the fate of those groups who for one reason or another find themselves outside of the mainstream?" (Gross 1989, p.189)
Exploring socially marginalised groups extends across a broad and diverse terrain of research from the viewing strategies of homeless men (e.g. Fiske and Dawson 1992) through to the study of children (e.g. Burke et al. 1983; Hodge and Tripp 1986; Palmer 1986), women (e.g. Hobson 1982; Ang 1985; Brunsdon 1997) and sexual minorities (e.g. Gross 1989). It has also increasingly sought to connect media texts to the socio-spatial setting of television viewing, exploring the politics of the domestic living space in relation to watching media texts and more generally to the use of the television-related technology. A key theme here is exploring the reproduction of gender and family relations in the household through such processes as channel choice, programme choice, styles of viewing, amount of viewing and use of video (see Morley 1986; Gray 1987).

Often allied to this broadening of scope has been a move away from thinking about the meaning of television texts in terms of simply agreement or disagreement, towards the pleasures at work in watching television texts - central to which is the terrain of research into ‘fandomology’ (Nightingale 1996; Lewis 1992; Jenkin 1993). In particular, this work has often been concerned with how pleasure is a tactical strategy by which audiences simultaneously rework the preferred meaning of a text and question their own conditions of social existence. So for instance, Gross (1989) has spoken of the way that gay groups adopt a camp reading strategy for reading media texts as way of subverting a dominant heterosexual ideology. As he puts “camp is the... quintessentially gay reading strategy for undermining the hegemonic power of media images” (p.143). Similarly, in the context of fandomology, Jenkins III (1988) has written of the way
that subcultural groups have ‘poached’ the meaning of American drama series Star Trek, “pry[ing] open space for their own cultural concerns within dominant representations” (p.89). As he goes on to argue:

“The fans harvest fields that they did not cultivate and draw upon material not of their making, material already at hand in their cultural environment; yet they make those raw material work for them. They employ images and concepts drawn from mass culture texts to explore their subordinate status, to envision alternatives, to voice their frustration and anger, and to share their new understandings with others” (Jenkins III 1988 p.104)

Pleasure, in this sense, is not about drawing up unproblematic lists of uses and gratifications, but about politicising the practice of reading. It is about examining, in part, how pleasure is the practice of producing “subculturally pertinent readings” (Fiske 1987 P.239) from the text.

It would also be fair to suggest that an increasingly explicit feature of cultural studies research has been to move away from exploring viewing strategies in relation to fixed social categories, (such as a class reading of a text) towards the formulation of social identities through the text (for instance, the construction of gender, race and class identities). Under this logic, the meanings audiences make of a text, are borne from, and constitutive of, a constant shifting of identity in the viewing experience. This shift might be said to represent a move from a ‘sociological conception’ of identity to a ‘postmodern’ one (see Hall 1992). Work by Fiske (e.g. 1987; 1989; Hartley 1999) is indicative of this approach:

“The ‘television audience’ is not a social category like class, or race, or gender - everyone slips in or out of it in a way that makes nonsense of any
categorical boundaries: similarly when in 'it' people constitute themselves quite differently as audience members at different times - I am a different television ‘audience’ when watching the A-Team with my son or Day of Our Lives with my wife. Categories focus our thinking on similarities: people watching television are best modelled according to a multitude of differences...Any one person, or television viewer, forms a number of shifting alliances...she or he enters the social system via differently constituted and shifting social formations: the metaphor of nomadic subjectively is a productive one here. Any one viewer, then, may at different times be a different viewing subject.”

(Fiske 1989 P.56)

Coinciding with this idea of nomadic viewing subjects has been a greater erosion in the stability of meanings surrounding the text. While early cultural studies wrote of the polysemic potential of media texts, it was written out of a dialogue between Marxism and structural semiotics; an engagement that still retained a sense in which texts could be grasped. Under that logic polysemy was about deviation from a meaning already framed by the work of the producer in the text. The rise of the postmodern subject in media studies, however, coincides with a move from a structural to poststructural semiotics, noted in the introduction, where no sense of enduring correspondence between signifier and signified can be staked out in advance. Power over the meaning of the text is devolved to the reader and his or her shifting identities. The producer, the critic, the discernible text, all of these are dissolved.

Finally, and allied to postmodern/poststructural accounts of media processes, many of those working in audience orientated criticism have also emphasised the importance of ‘semiotic excess’ (Hartley 1999), referring to the way in which the meaning of a media text is often
created outside of its immediate terms of reference. A number of themes appear particularly salient to mention here including the tendency of audiences, particularly in the case of continuous dramas, to predict the meaning of a text in advance of its transmission. This process will also be supported by the vast array of secondary texts, such as newspapers and magazines, that constantly speculate upon, and bring new interpretations to, the meaning of a text. This latter process is what Fiske (1987) calls ‘vertical intertextuality’, the practice by which the meaning created in wider cultural texts, outside of the medium, are brought to bear upon its meaning.

Intertextuality also includes ‘horizontal’ processes, whereby the meanings of one television text are brought to bear upon another, such as the way a star in one series brings some of his or her characterisation by appearing in another.

Semiotic excess also includes the way in which viewers, who may rarely watch a text continuously, fill in the gaps they miss with their interpretations. They write their own texts, in other words. What may also be added to these recent conceptions of semiotic excess are longstanding ideas about television as a flow (see Williams 1974), the notion that one texts meaning is part of broader narrative of ‘watching television’, a rapid turnover of images, programmes, advertisements and channel hopping that bear no logical relation to each other, but across which a sense of textual meaning is established.
2.3.4 Production-Text Inquiry in Light of the Active Audience

This section has begun to clarify the way in which the meanings generated from media texts are in a significant sense, defined by the work of the viewer. Through an evolving terrain of theoretical and empirical endeavour that has sought to interpret the meaning and wider social significance of television from the perspective of the audience, this work has increasingly eschewed the idea of exploring the discretely bounded text that can be examined from the ‘inside’ by the critic. In fact, as Boyd-Barrett (1995) has suggested, opening up the text to the multiple reading of audiences has been “the single most distinguishing feature of media study over the last fifteen years” (p.498).

It is clear in light of these insights that a critic driven analysis of media constructions of rurality can only reach so far. It will not, for instance, be able to explore the wider social practices these texts might be bound up with, and the different strategies and identities the viewer may adopt in approaching these media texts. Neither will it be able to connect with the uses and gratifications that such texts may be bound up with. Furthermore, by attempting to capture the meanings of these texts with little recourse the wider relations of reception, research of this kind will not be able to unpack the way in which conceptions of rurality may vary between different social groups, be they at the centre or margins of social life.

This work has made it explicitly clear that texts are not simply monolithic structures automatically swallowed by the viewer, that they are open to a variety of
meanings. In fact, set against these insights, any effort on the part of the critic to construct the various meanings of a media text, however painstaking, can appear a highly disengaged exercise. By building the meaning of the text around his or her insights important differences are likely to be concealed. Whether critic driven analysis attempts to open up the text to all its possible readings or present a closed, unambiguous, analysis, the meaning of the text can never be fully grasped by the critic according to this work.

In achieving the first broad aim of this thesis I therefore wish to acknowledge from the outset that the account I present will not be one of the rational critic objectively reading the text 'from within'. I wish to acknowledge its partiality. The reading of mass media texts that will follow is my own, inevitably limited, intervention organised out of a complex mix of externalised and internalised discourses on which I draw, and through which I am constructed.

At the same time, although resisting the idea of the omnipresent, all knowing, all seeing critic, I do not wish to suggest that my readings will also fail to have some degree of reciprocity with other audiences. The account I will present, and my ability to make it is, as Fiske (1990, p.86) has put it, an “instance of culture in practice”. That is, it is a marker of some of the wider social discourses through which I, and others, can speak of a text’s meaning. As an ‘instance of culture in practice’ this reading may therefore have some symmetry with others. It may have some purchase on how the text may be more widely read. While it will necessarily be a situated, and therefore partial, intervention, the
discourses on which I draw, work through a wider cultural system of signification, which may reproduce at least some of the relations of the viewing experience.

Furthermore, great care has to be taken in downplaying the potential power of media producers to frame the meanings that may be read from these texts. In spite of the important insights of contemporary audience criticism, investing in the circuit of culture also reminds research that media texts are an articulation of different moments that work in relation to each other. While it is quite clear that media producers only generate signifiers that audiences then imbue with particular signifieds, this act of placing signifiers in to a text is significant, for it sets at least some of the limits upon which meanings can be generated in the reading process. Many of those working within terrain of cultural studies have been increasingly making this point. Nicholas Garnham, a key proponent and theorist of a political economic approach to the media has posed the question:

"Where in the contemporary cultural studies' literature or research program are the studies of the cultural producers and of the organisational sites and practices they inhabit and through which they exercise their power?"

(Garnham 1997, p.61)

Similarly, Murdock (1997) has recently argued for close attention to the way the "situated grounded practices" of viewing can be related back to the "wider contexts that surround and shape them" (p.90-91), while Kellner (1997) has called for cultural studies research not to "lose sight of the manipulative and conservative effects of certain types of media culture" (p.116) and that,
“cultural studies has overemphasised reception and textual analysis, while underemphasising the production of culture and its political economy. Indeed, there has been a growing trend in cultural studies toward audience reception studies that neglect both production and textual analysis, thus producing populist celebrations of the text and audience pleasure in its use of cultural artifacts”

(Kellner 1997, p.116)

With their longstanding sympathy for developing a political economic perspective to mass communications research the recent calls of these and other theorists (e.g. Curran 2000a) for greater engagement with these relations is perhaps unsurprising. However, it is interesting to note that some of audience-orientated criticism’s key proponents have also been questioning the overriding tendency of cultural studies endeavour to elevate the semiotic power of the viewer to control the meaning of the text. For instance, in a revealing discussion by Morley (1997), whose work has often been synonymous with refining and elaborating upon ideas of the active audience, he suggests that “much recent media audience work is marred by a facile insistence on the polysemy of media products” (p.124) and that,

“The power of viewers to reinterpret meaning is hardly equivalent to the discursive power of centralised media institutions to construct texts which the viewer then interprets, and to imagine otherwise is simply foolish”

(Morley 1997, P.125)

While Morley cautions that he is not calling for return to the “eternal verities of political economy (or classical sociology)” he is, as he puts it, “happy to agree that some proponents of ‘active audience theory’ may have (mis)taken evidence of audience activity as an index of audience power” (p.121).
While I not wish to infer an inevitable correspondence between the intentions of programme makers and the meanings taken from a text by audiences, equally, I believe that the meanings made by the reader are neither entirely voluntaristic, nor do they occur solely around the backs of media producers. The configurations of signifiers brought to bear upon a media text can work through particular discourses shared by producers and audiences just as much as they may be contested at every stage along the circuit. It is through these negotiations, between the processes of production and reception that a study of media texts must be ultimately played out. In Wolfe’s (1992) words, “neither texts nor audiences hold a monopoly over the production of meaning” (P.273). It may, in this sense, be possible to write of ‘structured polysemy’ (e.g. Condit 1989); a polysemy that resists the notion of a preordained meaning in the text that audiences simply comply to or deviate from, acknowledges the contested nature of televisual signs and the possibility of different readings of the same signifiers, but still puts certain limits on the way that meaning is produced by audiences.

Nonetheless, even though I am enthusiastic about the contribution work into cultural consumption can make towards unravelling the significance of media form in wider social life, I am still inclined to give credence to the view that a small number of people have been invested with the means to fashion their visions, their ‘preferred readings’ of social life and space for the many, and that media research has a significant role to play in interrogating the basis upon which these visions are articulated. I feel very much taken by McGuigan’s (1992)
call for "a critical populism" in this respect, a mode of inquiry which, as he puts it:

"[C]an account for both people's everyday culture and its material construction by powerful forces beyond the immediate comprehension of ordinary people" (p.5)

In following this call, I do not wish to position myself as an 'extra-ordinary' person vis a vis the 'ordinary' person, but someone invested with a special position to begin unpacking some of the powerful forces to which McGuigan refers, in this particular case, an interrogation of media producers and the social construction of the countryside.
2.4 Summary

This chapter has explored some of the issues at stake in approaching the cultural construction of rurality across the circuit of culture. It began by outlining a way of approaching these texts through a semiotic tradition of analysis that focuses inquiry on the production of meaning through a system of signification. Three problems with this mode of inquiry were outlined: its tendency to ignore wider narrative form, the problematic distinction between denotation and connotation, and its failure to connect insight to the wider circuit of culture. Connecting semiotics to a narrative framework of analysis will be considered in the following chapter. With regards to the denotative/connotative distinction it was argued that inquiry would be better served to consider all meanings produced by the critic as connotations rather than trying to set up arbitrary distinctions between more obvious meanings than others.

Failure to explore texts in relation to producers and audiences was considered in the second half of this chapter where the insights of media criticism were shown to have increasingly moved away from the idea of direct media effects towards notions of limited effects, long term cultivation of audience attitudes, and notions of media use and gratification. Moreover, it outlined some of the major threads of a cultural studies tradition that has itself undergone a transformation: from one regarding the production/audience relationship as a struggle over meaning, to one that emphasises audience power.

These insights raise significant questions about the nature and possibilities of research aims this study sets
itself. Whilst acknowledging the importance of polysemy in the reading process, this discussion argued that the critic may hold at least some potential to make claims over the meaning of these texts as they relate to the construction of rurality. Furthermore, while the work of media producers comes with no guarantees in the respect of audience readings, this discussion argued too that care has to be taken in inviting voluntaristic accounts of the viewer that ignore the potential for media producers to set certain limits over the meaning making process.

With these issues, frameworks and arguments in mind, the following study intends to pursue a thoroughgoing analysis of textual constructions of rurality and the broader discourses of media production that circulate around and through them. To do this, this study will need to harness some of the ideas and questions outlined in this chapter into a workable methodological framework. This is the objective of the following chapter.
Chapter 3

Selecting and Approaching Texts
3.1 Introduction

It has already been established in the introductory chapter that this thesis will focus upon the construction of rurality within series television drama. To reiterate, this genre was put forward as the site of some of the most consistently popular rural texts within contemporary mass media discourse. It is acknowledged that emphasising one specific site of media discourse clearly precludes a whole range of other media output that may be significant to the endeavour of rural research. Equally, though, teasing out the complexities at work within a range of texts across a variety of ostensibly different media genres, each with their own unique modes of production, was deemed to be unrealistic within the practical limits of this research project. The decision to focus upon series television drama was therefore partly practical as well as theoretical. It stands at the popular end of popular rural discourse, while also providing this research project with a workable focus for inquiry.

This chapter begins by outlining how particular texts were initially selected for consideration by this project. It begins by outlining the decision to concentrate upon three case study series television dramas and then goes on to show how particular dramas were selected on the basis that they could be read as rural through a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to content and form. Discussion then moves on to consider how a framework for analysing texts was gradually developed and outlines the constitutive elements of this framework. It then reflects on the discourses of rurality this study drew upon to come to understanding of the three dramas. It
closes by outlining how a series of case study texts were chosen for particular consideration by the research.

*NOTE ON TEXT*

In this chapter I make use of visual images from the dramas. Presenting still images in a format such as this makes it difficult to convey the impression of time. On most occasions this is not a problem since I present only single images from particular sequences. Where I wish to illustrate temporal succession I have inserted an arrowhead line to express the connection between images. These images must therefore be read together.
3.2 Selecting Texts

During the autumn of 1995, at the time when this study commenced it was initially decided to identify three cases study texts within this genre for consideration by the research project. On a practical level, focusing upon three texts would allow the research to explore in sufficient detail the process at work in the textual structures of the chosen media output and the relations of production that underpinned them. At the same time, this would allow particular patterns of difference and similarity to be explored across these two levels of inquiry. It was against this backdrop that the study chose to focus upon the three case study dramas of BBC Television's Dangerfield, Carlton Television's Peak Practice and Yorkshire and Tyne-Tees Television's Heartbeat (see Figure 3.1); choices that were made according to four considerations. First, through my lay discourses, these dramas appeared to draw on a range of signifiers that suggested they were 'rural' dramas. Second, subject to a formal survey of textual elements, these personal assumptions appeared to be sound. Third, examination of extra-textual discourses circulating around these dramas also frequently described them as rural. And fourth, these dramas met certain practical requirements with regards to approaching media production. Consider each of these themes in turn.

Figure 3.1 The Three Case-Study Dramas
3.2.1 Assumptions at Work in the Selection of Texts

At the outset of this study, I engaged in a series of unstructured, armchair readings of television texts, in which I made initial judgements about the status of media output as rural, or not. Whilst hesitating to introduce a higher, ‘denotative’ reading of rurality in advance of the subsequent analysis, these three dramas drew on signifiers that allowed my own normative constructions of rurality to be brought to the text. I consistently identified at this unstructured level, images of small and nucleated settlement combined with visions of abundant green flora strung out over sparsely populated landscapes of great extent.

In one sense, these constructions reflected my own biography, my own history of experiences through which I have been incrementally socialised in to ways of understanding something as ‘rural’ or otherwise. I could not step aside from this socialisation process when identifying the texts. My readings were highly visual in their definition of rurality, although I believe this reflected less an exclusively visual geographical imagination on my part, and more my implicit analytical tendency to interpret television visually at this stage of research. In other words, the constructs that I brought to bear upon these texts reflected as much a way of approaching television as a way of reflecting on my personal conceptions of the rural.

Moreover, these initial readings were affected by my positioning within academic discourse. This positioning was not simply a case of my academic identity encouraging me to apply my personal constructs of rurality to the
texts. It was also the case that these conceptions were strongly touched by academic discourses of rurality. While I was informally reading these popular texts in the evening, in the daytime I was engaging with a literature that was thinking through what made the sign ‘rural’ meaningful. These processes were in no sense separate, even though I did not draw on academic discourses in a structured analytical sense to initially read the texts.

3.2.2 Problematical Quantitative Rurality

As I began formulating my possible choices, I decided to relate these two worlds of academic literature and informal reading more explicitly. I tried to think about how I could make certain claims about these texts that would be plausible within a discourse that was increasingly problematising the basis upon which meanings about space were seen to hold. I decided, in consequence, to formally apply a range of academic discourses to these and other images: discourses that had either sought to define the status of material rurality either through apriori definitions of rurality (definitions which, as Halfacree, 1993, has made clear, are themselves formalisations out of the author’s own lay discourses) or through academic constructions of the lay, such as empirical accounts of how people outside of the academic unpack the meaning of rurality.

While no quantitative benchmark exists for determining what makes an image rural this process initially involved a broad numerical analysis of textual content which compared these three dramas with another three dramatic texts I had constructed at that time as ‘urban’. These were: Carlton TV’s The Bill, LWT’s London’s Burning and
BBC TV's Casualty. At that time it was felt that such an analysis would confirm the validity of the apriori hunches in a systematic fashion. I expected that the tentative choices I had made would be shown embracing a range of signifiers that commonly had the signified 'rural' attached to them vis a vis my urban constructs.

The methodological approach taken to achieve this involved developing a basic schedule of signifiers that could be easily applied to a modest quantitative analysis of images. It is in this sense that the schedule decided to focus around academic and lay discourses of rurality that had a clear visual inflection: in media terms an emphasis on the relations of mise en scene. The origin and nature of this schedule involved identifying the general signifiers of rurality that worked within these discourses and then grouping them up into dominant themes from which a workable coding schedule of visual signifiers could be developed.

This schedule was developed along four themes. First, whether the images made use of extensive, sparsely populated landscapes as a backdrop to the unfolding drama, an important marker of rurality according to many writers, past and present. Halfacree’s (1995) empirical work into lay constructions of the rural, for instance, found many respondents “emphasising the open, non built up character of surroundings” (p.4) while others have written of the ‘geographically spaced out’ nature of rural areas (e.g. Moseley 1979; Bell and Cloke 1989). In the same vein, Wibberley (1973) wrote over a quarter of a century ago of the countryside being those areas that “show unmistakeable signs of being dominated by extensive uses of land” (p.259).
Second, whether the images depicted particular settlement types often seen as indicative signifiers of the countryside. Again, work by Halfacree (1995) highlights the importance of “the village” to lay constructions of the rural, as does Matless (1994) who writes of the English countryside being related to settlements which are “relatively small” and “nucleated” and nestling within the wider space of the countryside. More broadly, Lewis (1979) suggests that “the prime concern of the rural social geographer would be those forms of settlement ranging from isolated farmsteads to the market towns serving a tributary area” (p.22).

Third, signifiers of the agricultural. Work by Cherry (1972) and Best and Rogers (1973), include agriculture within their definitions of rural areas, while more recently Jones (1995) has suggested that an emphasis upon the agricultural is a common marker of rurality among peoples lay conceptions of rurality. There are a number of visual signifiers that may be potentially read out from these dramas in this respect, including the construction of extensive landscapes highlighted in the first theme - the ploughed field, fields with crops growing in them, for instance - and the use of farm complexes highlighted in the second. Other signifiers marking out the agricultural might include the display of farm vehicles, such as the tractor, as well as visual signifiers of livestock.

Finally, the construction of nature and the natural, a theme consistently emphasised within both academic and lay discourses of rurality (see Bell 1994; MacNaghten and Urry 1998). Again this theme is partly constituted through the themes outlined above. It includes images with visual displays of flora such as flowers, trees, hedges,
grassland, and fauna, such as birds, cattle, dogs and rabbits. Allied to this are other senses of the natural that might be routed through the display of commodities, ranging from characters dressed in wool-derived products, through to settings with cut flowers on display, and into homes furnished in untreated wood and floral prints.

These four themes were disaggregated into seven principal categories (see Figure 3.2): 'extensive non-built landscapes', (such as open land or enclosed fields); distinguishable in turn from images of 'flora' that are 'non-extensive' in look (such as images hemmed in by trees and bushes); 'fauna' (images of livestock or birds, for instance); 'agricultural machinery' (such as the tractor); 'natural commodities' (for example, the woollen jumper or the florally designed home); and finally 'settlements' (from the farm complex to the market town). Applying this coding schedule to the sample involved 'capturing' individual shots from videotape to computer and analysing them for the presence of each visual signifier. An example of this is displayed in Figure 3.2 using an image taken from the series Dangerfield.

The six dramas were accordingly analysed in this way using a systematic sample of three hours of each drama's transmitted output available at the time this study commenced. The sample involved selecting one frame each 30 seconds of output, excluding introductory and exit sequences. This amounted to a total of 360 shots per programme, with an overall total for the programmes of 2160 shots. Given that television generates 24 frames a second, 1440 frames a minute and 86,400 a hour this sample was undoubtedly small at only 0.42% of the sampling frame. However, considering that many of these frames will be
often similar within individual scenes, with individual texts using only a limited amount of locations, rarely from more than three points of view, this sample was felt to be adequate enough for the purpose at hand.

It is worth noting from the outset that all three of the dramas I had tentatively selected for this study displayed evidence of all visual signifiers within one or more of the images considered (see Figure 3.3). However, this process produced some unexpected results. While no quantitative benchmark for what constitutes a rural programme was trying to be established, it was striking how few of the images selected actually managed to display a single signifier composed in the schedule, let alone a number of these signifiers (see Figure 3.4). Moreover, it is also interesting to observe how remarkably similar the results were between the three dramas, approximately a 75:25 split between images with and without rural signifiers, respectively. Further sampling using the schedule would be an interesting exercise in light of the
Figure 3.3 Signifiers of Rurality

Extensive Non-Built Up Landscapes

Flora (Non-Extensive)

Fauna

Agricultural Machinery

Natural Commodities
consistency between dramas. In spite of the relatively small number of images displaying signifiers of rurality I do believe this process revealed a clear encoding of rurality. This appears particularly so when results are compared with those of the ‘urban’ sample (Figure 3.4) where the number of images with rural signifiers were all under 5%.

**Figure 3.4 Summary of Results from Content Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dangerfield</th>
<th>Heartbeat</th>
<th>Peak Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Rural Signifier Only</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than One Rural Signifier</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total with Rural Signifiers</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with Rural Signifiers</td>
<td><strong>24.7</strong></td>
<td><strong>25.8</strong></td>
<td><strong>27.5</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total without Rural Signifiers</td>
<td>271</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage without Rural Signifiers</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>72.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The Bill**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>London’s Burning</th>
<th>Casualty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Rural Signifier Only</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than One Rural Signifier</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total with Rural Signifiers</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage with Rural Signifiers</td>
<td><strong>3.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>2.2</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total without Rural Signifiers</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage without Rural Signifiers</td>
<td>96.7</td>
<td>97.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2.3 Relational Rurality

While I believed this test substantiated my *apriori* hunches, the importance of taking a more relational view of meaning became quite clear in this process of trying to quantify rurality. It became clear than focusing on images and elements of images, in isolation from each other, was a deeply flawed way of delimiting programmes as rural. To take an example, it became clear while conducting the analysis that attempting to count rural settlements was a highly problematical exercise. If an image, such as Figure 3.5, was surrounded by bricks and mortar, how could this image be necessarily coded up as rural?

*Figure 3.5 The Ambiguous Nature of Images*

The quantitative content analyst counting the elements cannot look either side of the image and then claim for instance, 'this is a village because the settlement is set within a wider terrain of open landscape'. Under the logic of quantitative analysis images such as these had to be interpreted as 'without' a rural signifier. And yet, in the knowledge of the broader text this image was felt to be one of a village setting. Consequently, as this counting process began to reveal the ambiguity of images, it was clear that judging an image as rural often relies on understanding it in relation to other images and the
broader sense of narrative scenario in which it is enmeshed.

Interpreting an image as rural is not solely about the presences of a text at a particular moment of reading. It is about the relations of an image as they work together through time. This process of learning, then, led to an alternative approach to selecting text also being pursued. An approach that would understand the informal interpretations made of these texts in light of the inconclusiveness of the numerical findings. In other words, the move from quantitative content analysis to the ideas of semiotics outlined in Chapter 2. Indeed, thinking about these same texts in terms of textual relationships began to offer a quite different way of rationalising dramas with relatively few visual signifiers of rurality at work within them. There are seven salient points to make here that can be usefully illustrated using a purposive selection of images from the series Heartbeat.

First, it matters little how much of an image accords directly with the signified compared with how certain signifiers implicate the whole image as rural. So for instance, while Figure 3.6 displays an image from Heartbeat dominated, in quantitative terms, by a man driving a vehicle, it is the sense in which this image appears against the backdrop of extensive open landscape that appropriates the whole image as rural.

**Figure 3.6 Intra-Image relations**
Second, images that convey little or no sense of rurality will often be implicated as rural through the convention of three-shot editing (Millerson 1993). The three-shot convention refers to the inter-cutting of wide-shots, mid-shots and close-ups within individual scenes. In a geographical sense, this convention is the means by which the elements of a scene is afforded a broader geographical context, even when the geographical status of some of the texts constituent images are ambiguous. So, for instance, in the sequence depicted in Figure 3.7 a wide-shot of open moorland with a distant bus on it is followed by a close-up of a hand on a radio, and then by a mid-shot of a bus driver.

Figure 3.7 The Three-shot

The spatial logic inferred from this three-shot sequence implicates the radio as being on the bus somewhere on the moors, even if the location of this image itself appears unclear. The wide shot of the open countryside is often called the ‘establishing’ shot, in the way that it establishes a sense of setting, and within these series there may be more than one at work within an individual scene. Commonly, for example, a scene will use a wide-shot of an interior setting inter-cut with mid-shots and close-ups, whilst also being preceded by an exterior image of rurality, thereby placing the interior scene within a broader sense of geography (see Figure 3.8).
3.8 Exterior and Interior Relations in Establishing a Sense of Setting

Third, the process of implying spatial relations between discrete images in the three-shot is heightened through the inferred relationships between people and objects in different images. This includes the use of 'shot/reverse shot' in these three dramas, the standard shot relationship used to experience conversations between characters within scenes (Millerson 1993), (see Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9 The Shot/Reverse shot
The shot-reverse shot involves conversations constantly switching between each of the character’s point of view, (e.g. image one: character ‘x’ speaking, image two: character ‘b’ reaction, and so on). The important point about this shot relationship is the way that each image becomes part of a unified location by inference of a conversation taking place. One element of the conversation may display few, if any, signifiers of rurality in the constructed shot, but still be read as rural because its corresponding reaction shot does.

Fourth, senses of rurality are also heightened within these series by their tendency to ‘inter-cut’ scenes in disparate settings. For instance, one scene with signifiers of rurality depicted within it, may unfold in conjunction with one that does not, to the effect that the settings of both begin to resonate with each other (see Figure 3.10).

![Figure 3.10 Scene Inter-cutting](image)

Fifth, relations will also be implicitly drawn through the movement of bodies within these dramas, bounding different settings together in an overall geographical
unity. In other words, images which display signifiers of rurality will be read in conjunction with those that do not, because the body appears in both. This process is clearly demonstrated in Figure 3.11 in which different settings are read together through the bodily presence of the same character in each individual image. Moreover, the intersection of one body with other bodies, which have themselves occupied different locations, bind space together further still.

Figure 3.11 Bodily Connections and Spatial Inferences

Sixth, sound can often be seen to work in relation to visual images to ground the drama in a sense of rurality. Visual images that convey little or no sense of rurality will often be surrounded by audio signifiers that do. Particularly common here is the use of diegetic soundtracks (i.e. sound that appears to originate in the story world) lacing interior scenes with a sense of ambient nature. While dialogue is taking place, it is common to hear signifiers of birds, cows, sheep, surreptitiously working in the background. Also common to these dramas is way the same musical soundtrack will be associated with different spaces within the drama, thereby inferring particular links between them. So for instance, in Heartbeat, the same music will often appear to be
transmitted from different radios placed within different locations. Moreover, soundtracks of this sort will often originate from within the world, such as the radio, and then revert to an extra-diegetic soundtrack playing over, and thereby helping to draw together, a montage of different spatialities.

Seventh, images and sequences that open, suspend and close these dramas are integral to establishing their overall sense of locality (see Figure 3.12). In principle, the impression of rural locality could be completely concealed within the unfolding action but still be read as rural because of the sequences and images which surround the drama.

Figure 3.12 Introductory and Exit Images
3.2.4 Extra-Textual Discourses Surrounding the Text

The presence of these seven processes within the three dramas, then, provided an analytical way of identifying these texts as rural in light of the findings of the quantitative analysis. Furthermore, this process of identification of the three programmes as rural also appeared to be a valid one when read against the extra-textual comments that surround, and in many respects, frame, the meaning of these dramas within wider popular discourse. By extra-textual comments it is meant that vast range of media commentaries that implicitly bring the meaning of a programme more sharply into focus for its audiences: from the magazine features and newspaper articles that perpetually write around media texts, to the fleeting programme descriptions that are written next to transmission times in the television listings, as well as the voice-overs that introduce and publicise them on television itself (Fiske's 1987 'vertical intertextuality' mentioned earlier).

To explore this proposition a modest textual analysis was conducted on feature articles and schedule
descriptions of one major source of popular discourse surrounding these texts, *The Radio Times* between the months of January and October 1995. As Figure 3.13 demonstrates, elements of these secondary discourses revealed a consistent number of terms, and turns of phrase, that when read in conjunction with these wider circuits of discourse might point to the drama's status as a rural series.

As a pre-cursor to the textual analysis, it is also worth mentioning here that adjectives used to describe these dramas bring quite ambivalent readings of space to their readers. *Heartbeat*’s 'Aidensfield' for instance is the 'sleepy village' in for a 'rude awakening', the space of 'tranquillity' that is 'destroyed'; *Dangerfield* is apparently a scenic and forensic drama that brings together the 'country lane' and 'the corpse'. Moreover, analysis of episodes of the three dramas initially recorded for this study, plus many of the episodes subsequently examined over the course of the study, revealed that voice-overs readily emphasised senses of rurality when introducing the drama (see Figure 3.13).
Figure 3.13 Examples of Signifiers of Rurality Displayed within *The Radio Times* (January to October 1995) and in Introductory Voice-Overs (Various 1995-1997)

**Dangerfield:**

Radio Times:

"Like the recent ITV successes of Heartbeat and Peak Practice it might seem that Dangerfield fits into a certain formula - what might be called the "scenic and forensic" genres of country lanes and corpses".

"Returning medical drama set in rural Warwickshire"

"Marty gets caught in an accidental shooting of a local farmer"

Voice Overs:

"We return to heart of rural Warwickshire where a surprise is in store for Dr Dangerfield"

**Heartbeat:**

Radio Times:

"New series of rural cop drama"

"The rural tranquillity of Aidensfield is destroyed...."

"Sixties rural drama..."

"Village Bobby Nick Rowan....."

"Nick is in for a surprise when an unexpected visitor arrives in the village"

"The sleepy village of Aidensfield is in for a rude awakening when..."

Voice Overs:

"Trouble in store next as we visit the village of Aidensfield in Heartbeat"

"Strange things afoot in the village of Aidensfield. Heartbeat's coming up".

**Peak Practice:**

Radio Times:

"A welcome return to the village of Cardale"

"A new nurse joins the village practice"

"Jacks defends the right of a groups ex psychiatric patients to live in the Cardale, despite fierce opposition from the village"

Voice Overs:

"Can Will save the village practice? Peak Practice coming up next"
3.2.5 Other Methodological Considerations

Constructing the three texts as rural was not the only methodological element that guided the choice of these texts, however. It also involved three major issues relating to media production. First, this choice of texts originated out of different television companies and institutional frameworks: Dangerfield is an example of public service broadcasting (i.e. The BBC); Heartbeat and Peak practice originate from separate independent broadcasting companies (i.e. Yorkshire Television and Carlton respectively). These texts would therefore allow some scope for consideration of institutional differences in the creation of television programmes.

Second, and more practically, each of the dramas was being produced within a geographically practical reach. All three originated out of English production centres, and were recorded within accessible locations. Third, each of the dramas was still in production at time this study commenced, (Dangerfield going into was to produce Series III; Heartbeat Series VI and Peak Practice Series IV) allowing for personnel to be approached, practices to be observed, and texts to be recorded and analysed over the subsequent period of research. Fourth, these dramas were recorded in quite different locations, Heartbeat is recorded in North Yorkshire, Peak Practice in the Peak District, and Dangerfield in Warwickshire providing scope for considering the premise by some that rurality is often constitutive of, and constituted by, notions of regionality (e.g. Cloke and Milbourne 1992; Cosgrove et al 1996; Cloke et al 1998a; Brace 1999).
3.3 Approaching and Reading Texts

It was from this basis that I reflected on a much broader range of texts produced by these dramas. I started recording and watching these dramas from the autumn of 1995 and continued to do so for the next two years. My reading of them has never been static. The account I present in the following chapter is one that I arrived at. In this section I wish to briefly reflect on how I developed this account. I wish to reflect on the discourses I drew on to construct this reading. It begins with an overview of how I developed a structure by which to approach a reading of these texts, and then outlines the specific nature of this framework. Discussion then goes on to outline the discourses of rurality I drew on in developing this account. It closes by highlighting how I chose a selection of case studies to illustrate my findings.

3.3.1 Developing a Structure to Read Televisual Form

I didn't start with an explicit analytical framework by which to approach a reading of those texts. As I begun viewing I was partly under the impression that I was already equipped with the necessary competencies to read the texts of television drama. My own biography was, and remains, inextricably bound up with experiences of watching media texts. Becoming an academic reader of television drama is a challenging exercise in this respect, for it required me to make explicit - make amenable to theorisation - deeply ingrained ways of reading media forms. As Allen (1992) puts it, approaching television requires a practice of making the familiar "critically strange" (p.3). It involves a process of
breaking down, and then reassembling, a way of reading media form that can connect to the critical goals of the researcher whilst simultaneously remaining loyal to the way they may be read by the situated viewer.

This analytical process began to tentatively evolve while I was selecting texts for this study. In that process, as I have shown, I started to notice the importance of relations, as opposed to quantities, in the creation of meaning. It was during this period that I was also attending lectures for the Masters programme in Mass Communication at the University of Leicester, where I benefited immensely from listening to, and talking with, Professor James Halloran who had done so much to prepare the ground for cultural studies and its engagement with, among other things, the insights of semiotics.

A connection was therefore made between my own empirical insights and a relational vision of media form that I was becoming familiar with in academic discourse. This academic experience also pointed me towards, and instructed me in, research that contemplates narrative form. These insights were similar, in turn, to the interpretative structures that I was beginning to develop out of my own lay reading of the dramas, where I started to disaggregate the texts into the themes of story, character and setting. Furthermore, at the very early stages of my research I had managed to gain access to the production teams of the three dramas, an opportunity which I took while I had it, and where I found programme makers to be consistently grasping the meaning of these texts through similar constructs. My discussions with producers therefore helped to frame an approach to these texts. Moreover, during my spare time I was also developing an
interest in script-writing, filming and presenting in my capacity as a volunteer for a community broadcasting unit in Leicester, where ways of reading media texts were complicit with the practices undertaken.

It was in this mix of academic, lay, and professional discourses that I saw the possibility for developing a semiotics of narrative: a framework that could think about television drama as a configuration of elements in relation to each other, but which explored these through constructs such as story, setting and character. Not only did I feel these constructs to be common frameworks by which dramas are read more widely, but also ones which could be usefully related to my substantive concerns. A outline of this framework is provided over the following four sections.

3.3.2 Introducing the Framework for Analysis

The narrative of the world are numberless... Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting,... stained glass windows, cinema, comics, new items, conversation. Moreover, under this infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has there been a people without a narrative...Caring nothing for the division between good and bad literature, narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself.

(Barthes 1977 p.79)

Developing the idea of narrative is, I feel, vital to a semiotics of television. As Fiske (1987) has noted, while narrative structures may vary they constitute a central element to all television texts, whether this is a soap opera or sport broadcast, quiz show or news bulletin. Even the most experimental television constructions have a
narrative design, even if they appear unfamiliar. Semiotics must therefore not lose sight of these wider narrative structures if an adequate understanding of television is to be achieved. They constitute part of what Kellner (1997) describes as, “[t]he familiar lenses through which audiences engage in the activity of decoding texts” (p14). They constitute a set of conventions, expectations and ways of reading a text of which audiences are implicitly aware. Contemplating series television drama is somewhat straightforward in this respect. Series drama operates according to highly familiar narrative logics, despite these being largely acknowledged by the vast majority of its audiences.

In spite of the label ‘series’ being attached to many television drama to distinguish themselves from their generic counterpart, the ‘serial’, the distinction between the two is less straightforward. In principal, a television drama is a series if it contains stories that are instigated and resolved within the confined experience of an individual episode, in contrast to the serial, which are dominated by continuous storylines across a number of episodes (such as soap opera). However, this is not to say that series drama does not have elements that are serial by design. As Nelson (1997) has pointed out, these dramas are often built around a multiple number of storylines arranged in a hierarchical fashion so that one episodic plot dominates screen time but is supplemented by one or more subsidiary plots, often, but not exclusively of a serial nature. This is the primary reason why certain dramas are marked out as ‘series’ dramas, because the main focus of screen time is on a discrete story that begins and ends within a given episode, but it is not the only focus.
Moreover, series dramas are held together by a common scenario, usually defined by geographical and temporal setting and/or an established set of characters (Fiske 1987). In the dramas that are considered in this study, all contain an established cast of characters consistently operating within the same spatial, temporal and social scenario. Different settings may be introduced from episode to episode, but the main spaces for action is broadly consistent. Additional characters may also be added from time to time. Furthermore, actors will occasionally depart from long running series dramas, but this generally means that a replacement actor will be introduced to take on an identical function in narratives (e.g. a policeman replaced by a policeman), and sometimes the same imagined human identity (e.g. an actor playing policeman Mr X is replaced by an actor playing policeman Mr X). Aside from minor changes, therefore, the basic socio-spatial scenario through which stories unfold remains broadly in tact.

It is therefore useful to think of series drama as having three broad key elements. First, the established and consistent storytelling world of the drama purporting to the recurring sets of characters and settings through which, and against which, story events unfold. This can be termed the ‘story world’. Second, series narratives relating to story events that are confined to a particular episode, and which may it should be added, temporarily introduce unfamiliar characters who appear and then disappear once the story has been told. Third, serial narratives, concerning story events that develop over more than one episode, and which are almost exclusively based around the established characters. Consider each of these elements in turn.
3.3.3 The Story World

Contemplating the storytelling world, then, draws attention to those features of the production that, with minor changes is replicated between one episode and the next. Of course, the distinction between this world and individual narrative storylines is an analytical one only. The two are not in any sense separate. The consistency of these elements is attained through the telling of the particular storyline, while a storyline is itself dependent on the storytelling world being in place. But it is useful to distinction to make in the first instance, for it draws attention to how enduring certain notions of rurality will potentially be if they occupy part of these basic serial components.

It is possible, in this respect, to speculate upon two interrelated components of these worlds that may begin to construct the rurality of the drama in particular ways. First, all stories are designed in space (Bordwell 1993). In television, narratives are made up of configurations of signifiers conveyed in and around television texts to the effect that events appear to unfold in a physically and temporally bounded setting. To reiterate a point made earlier, this is not a question of fidelity to an outside 'real' material space (i.e. mimetic). Rather each element of text, just like each element with in the concrete world, will replicate particular conventions upon which a sense of space is constructed. The previous section of this discussion has already made a significant contribution towards this element of inquiry although further interpretations, specifically those which link ideas of setting to notions of idyll, regionality,
Urbanity and temporality are made in the first section of the following chapter.

The second component of the story world relates to the established set of characters who occupy these spaces. The status of character is the focus of much dispute within literary and media criticism (Rimmon-Kenan 1983) although a useful definition provided by Fiske is to regard them as:

"[A] conjuncture of social discourses held in a metaphorical relationship to notions of individuality and embodied in the appearance and mannerisms of an individual actor or actress. Character, then is an embodied ideology, and is used to make sense of the world by the relations of discourses and ideology that it embodies."

(Fiske 1987 p.160)

The important point about Fiske's idea of character is the way that he sees it as an outcome of wider social discourses. Character is a coming together of discourses through the presentation, movement and words of the body in relation to objects and narrative. In particular, coming to an understanding of these discourses involves examining such elements as a character's bodily appearance, associations with commodities, occupational function, dispositions, interests and actions and biography. Through a process of similarity and difference with other characters, the social relations of the storyworld come to be defined, and in so doing particular power relations in these symbolic worlds are often implied (Fiske 1987).

The creation of social identities in rural space is of central concern to contemporary rural research. From the discursive construction of class (e.g. Murdoch and Marsden
1994; Cloke et al 1995) and race (e.g. Kinsman 1993, 1995) to sexuality (Bell and Valentine 1995) and gender (e.g. Whatmore 1991, Hughes 1997), a wide variety of social identities are now seen be constitutive of, and constituted by, the contemporary power relations of material rural spaces. Understanding the construction of character provides a way of understanding how social identities and power such as these are defined in media constructions of rurality. It is to this end that a focus some of these identities among the established cast of characters constitutes the second aspect of the following chapter.

3.3.4 Common Elements of Narrative

The cumulative effect of the serial components outlined above, therefore, is to create the story world: the consistent elements of the production through which individual narratives are constructed. However, as already highlighted, the story world does not stand independent of the telling of a particular narrative, it is constantly brought in to being by the design of storylines, both series and serial in design. This section outlines some the common elements of narrative design and then goes to explain how these apply to the different narrative logics of series and serial narrative.

Whether a particular narrative is series or serial in design, at its heart are events. In fact, a simple working definition of narrative is the design of events in time and space (Bordwell 1993). At a general level 'event' refers quite simply to a 'change' of any nature or description (Rimmon-Kennan 1983): a phone rings, a door slams, the sun disappears behind a cloud, these are all
events' in the general sense. In storytelling terms, a
narrative event refers to a significant change in the
conditions of life for a character or set of characters (a
character is kidnapped, for instance), often called
'Kernals' (Barthes 1966; Chatman 1969) as opposed to a
minor change (such as a character lighting up a cigarette,
or putting on a coat) often called 'catalysts' (Barthes
1966) or 'satellites' (Chatman 1969). According to Mckee
(1997), these changes are always expressed through
conflict, and do so at one or more of three levels: inner
conflict (i.e. the inner dilemmas of a character) personal
conflict (i.e., the dilemmas created through the
relationship between characters) and extra-personal
conflict (i.e. conflict between a character and the wider
social/physical forces of the storytelling world). As
Mckee suggests "nothing moves forward in story except
through conflict" (ibid p.210). The extent to which events
occur through conflict at all levels in a story will, in
turn, shape the complexity of the narrative, as well as
determining the overall traits of a genre (for instance
soap opera overwhelmingly generates events at a personal
level; action-adventure stories at a extra personal
level).

At the heart of story events, and common to all levels
of conflict, are story values. As McKee explains:

"Story values are the universal qualities of human
experience that may shift from positive to negative, or
negative to positive, from one moment to the next. For
example: alive/dead...is a story value, as are love/hate,
freedom/slavery, truth/lie, courage/cowardice,
loyalty/disloyalty, wisdom/stupidity, strength/weakness
excitement/boredom and so on. All such binary qualities
of experience that can reverse their charge at any
moment are story values. They may be moral, good/evil;
ethical, right/wrong; or simply charged with value.
Hope/despair is neither moral nor ethical, but we
The idea of the story value is often set up by narratology as part of a distinction between 'deep' and 'surface' structures, one that has been strongly influenced in modern criticism by the insights of structural anthropologist Levi-Strauss. The distinction works on the basis the observable events of a particular story, the surface level, is an expression of universally shared sets of deeper structures, which Levi-Strauss called 'myths'. These deeper structures constitute enduring binaries such as good/bad, nature/culture around which the surface events of a narrative hang (see Fiske 1987, Turner 1993). While the insights of Levi-Strauss on myth are not without their problems (see for instance Eagleton 1983), the notion that story forms have at their heart an examination of existential human dilemmas I find an attractive one. It certainly provides one powerful explanation for the capacity of story forms to travel so well across time and space. As the discussion will now show, in analytical terms it also draws attention to the possibility that meanings at work in a narrative may shift in time.

3.3.5 Series Narrative and Archplot Narrative Form

As has been suggested, the idea of the 'series' is commonly used to reflect the media output that organises its texts around a discrete sequence of stories called episodes, which are held together by a common scenario, usually defined by geographical and temporal setting and/or an established set of characters. The important point to note here is that the discrete nature of these stories typically rests on the use of a formation of
storytelling known as archplot, a formation that is familiar to other storytelling mediums such as film and the novel. Archplot is often thought of as the 'classical' model for narrative design evident, for instance, in the work of Aristotle (see Halliday 1986) and one that is widely, if only implicitly, recognised and used today (Mckee 1997).

While the terms of this formation have been altered, its principles are to varying degrees explicit in much structural and formalist insight into narrative (e.g. Propp 1968; Greimas 1970; Todorov 1977), insights which have, in turn, been readily applied to moving image research (e.g. Silverstone 1981; Wollen 1982; Giles 1986; Schelifer 1987; Berger 1991). According Mckee, archplots can be summarised as stories that are:

"[B]uilt around an active protagonist who struggles against primarily external forces of antagonism to pursue his or her desire through continuous time within a consistent and causally connected fictional reality to a closed ending of absolute irreversible change" (Ibid 1997 p.45)

In this statement, Mckee highlights six characteristics of archplot, and before going any further it is worth briefly considering each of these in turn. First, a single protagonist. Archplot positions conflict around the dilemmas of one principal, well developed, character, dominating screen time and dictating the course of events in the narrative. These are supported by secondary characters, who occupy significantly less screen time and serve to help or hinder the main protagonist in the resolution of conflict. The series narrative design of television drama often replicates this basic model, although an increasingly common departure from it is to
focus the dilemmas of a story around a multiple number of main protagonists (Nelson 1997).

Second, an active protagonist. In archplot the key protagonist is rarely passive. Conflict is generated by pursuing his or her aim through purposeful and direct action. Third, external conflict. The protagonist in the archplot generally deals with conflict at the personal and extra-personal level. It rarely emphasises the inner dilemmas of a character. Fourth, archplots progress their events through continuous (i.e. linear) time. That is, they start at one point in abstract time and move continuously through events to end at another later point. This does not mean that archplots preclude the use of a 'flashback' (i.e. elements of the narrative which operate prior to current events) as long as they can be understood clearly in relation to an overall, temporally linear, order of events.

Fifth, archplots plots work within an internally consistent reality. This is not the same as suggesting that storytelling worlds have fidelity to some external empirical reality. Rather, it means that archplot narratives, through the progression of events continually set up a self-governing logic upon which the storytelling world exists. This logic guides the audience in to certain expectancies about how that world will accordingly operate. In the archplot, these conventions, however absurd, will never be broken. To take an example, if, in the American cult science-fiction drama Star Trek, members of the 'Starship Enterprise' can be 'beamed down' to a planet, then this becomes a story rule. If this rule is broken, if members of the Starship Enterprise suddenly can't be beamed down to a planet, then a new rule will be
introduced to explain it. In the words of Mckee, archplot creates a consistent reality “true to itself” (P.54)

Sixth, a narrative of this sort shapes its events through a cause-effect relationship. All individual events are inextricably tied to events that both precede and follow it: a murder is committed, a detective is called, which in turn triggers an investigation, and so on. Finally, conflict is resolved: “all questions raised by the story are answered; all emotions evoked are satisfied” (ibid p.47). This is what is commonly known as a ‘closed ending’.

These formal properties, then, are the principles of archplot design. They are the elements that come together through values at the stake in the story. These values, and their expression as ‘events through conflict’ work at varying levels of significance and shape the telling of the narrative as it moves through time. In the archplot design of series narratives, the most significant of these values grasps the overall change in the conditions of a single protagonist’s life from the start of the narrative to the end. This value change is often called the narrative’s ‘controlling idea’ and has, according to Mckee (1997), two elements: the story value (e.g. freedom, slavery, hope, despair etc.) and a ‘cause’, describing why life has undergone change.

Controlling ideas can be either positive, negative or ironic. So, for instance, in the genre of crime the primary value at stake in the narrative is often ‘justice’. A classic positive controlling idea in this sense would be, for instance, ‘justice prevails because the goodies are cleverer than the baddies’; a negative
controlling idea might invert this idea, 'justice doesn't prevail because the baddies are cleverer than the goodies'; while an ironic controlling idea might reverse some of the premises conventionally associated with the protagonists, for instance, 'justice prevails because the goodies are more violent than the baddies'. The controlling idea is revealed in the climatic scenes of a narrative, and as already highlighted, in the archetypal plot this is final and irreversible (e.g. justice prevails, the baddie is dead/imprisoned). In order to reveal the controlling idea the telling of a story will always be expressed in relation to a counter-idea. This is how conflict occurs. So for instance, if the controlling idea is 'justice prevails because the goodies are cleverer than the baddies' then story events will constantly shift between values at stake in the idea (i.e. justice prevails) and it opposite (i.e. justice does not prevail) as the main protagonist pursues his/her goal (i.e. justice will prevail).

In the archetypal plot, this constant shifting between the idea and the counter-idea is conventionally shaped around an equilibrium/dis-equilibrium/equilibrium model of narrative form (see for instance Todorov 1977) and has a number of important qualities. First the archetypal plot must start with an 'inciting incident'; an incident that occurs in the initial scenes of a drama that sends the main protagonist on his/her journey. The inciting incident, in other words, throws the main protagonist's life out of sorts, from a position of equilibrium to a position of dis-equilibrium. The inciting incident has two aspects to it: a set-up (an occurrence) and a pay-off (the implication of the occurrence). These may or may not happen at the same time. So for instance, to continue with
a hypothetical crime narrative, the set up may be witnessing a murder, the pay-off, a detective being called to the scene of the crime. In this particular example, the distinction between the set-up and the pay-off reveals one instance where the controlling idea is already propelling the story: set-up (justice does not prevail) pay-off (justice will prevail). What follows from this inciting incident is a narrative that progressively builds in tension and significance, beat by beat, scene by scene, sequence by sequence and act by act, shifting between these two points as the main protagonist attempts to restore life to balance. These elements are formally depicted in Figure 3.14.

Figure 3.14 Elements of Archplot Design

[Diagram showing the elements of archplot design with labels for controlling idea, new equilibrium, inciting incident, causal and consistent events of progressive significance, and linear continuous time.]
3.3.6 Serial Narrative

Serial narrative design, particularly in its guise as soap opera, has often been one marker of television's distinction from other storytelling mediums, and within the theoretical and empirical endeavour of television research, has become a important site of inquiry (e.g. Buckingham 1987; Geraghty 1991). The continuous narrative shares with the archplot the principle of an internally consistent, causally connected, reality that moves through linear time, and has its heart values which contradict each and bring conflict into play: 'the detective will find love'; 'the detective won't find love', for instance. However, it differs from archplot in a number of ways.

First, while serial plots can have inciting incidents in series drama, they are certainly less clear and necessary for the telling of the narrative. Conflict is built around the biographies of characters: the incremental accumulation of events in the character's life that allow different scenarios to emerge. Second, conflict is more likely to focus on the personal and internal dilemmas of characters (love, depression, happiness, despair and so on), and is less likely to escalate in the manner that archplot does. Conflict is not about progressively building tension in the serial narrative. Rather, it is about the gradual and steady movement between contrary ideas. Third, characters are generally passive in relation to these storylines, and when action does take place it is overwhelmingly reactionary in nature. Fourth, resolution is always deferred and partial. While there may be moments of resolution where conflict appears to be suspended, these moments are generally fleeting, and often raise more questions than they answer: 'the detective finds love',...
will it last? Fifth, time progresses between episodes. While the episodic plot appears to operate in vacuum - no series narrative makes a reference to another in a preceding episode - serial narrative appears to build in time. It stresses the continuity in character actions between the events and dilemmas of one episode and the next. Characters therefore appear to learn between episodes. A long history of minimal events is woven together over a series, often a number of series, providing the background to the action at stake.

3.3.7 Narration

It is worth stressing as a final point in relation to narrative design that according to the insights of many media theorists (especially those working in film theory), audiences will always be potentially positioned, what might term ‘interpellated’, towards these events in certain ways. Events are not just unproblematically there. They are narrated in certain ways to audiences, encouraging them to identify with aspects of the story, and the storytelling world more generally, in certain ways.

Whereas in many television genres, such as news and game shows, this process of narration is achieved through direct address (i.e. by use of a presenter), in series television drama narration is generally implicit, regardless of whether the narrative is series or serial in design. As opposed to verbal narration, television drama commonly narrates its events solely through the look of the camera. That is, through the use of mise en shot. In series drama, as in many other genres and mediums, this is generally achieved through a process of omnipresent camera
narration whereby the audience can observe events that only some characters' are party to, as well as observe an individual event from multiple points of view.

According to MacCabe (1981) the process of omnipresent narration puts the audience in a position of 'dominant specularity', allowing them to feel they are judging the dilemmas of the text from an independent and privileged standpoint. This position is often called the text's metalanguage: its unwritten sense of truth that audiences are encouraged to invest in. To take an absurd example, if in a story there was a General standing on platform at the frontline of a war telling a new batch of soldiers to go to battle because no one was going to die, then the verbal narration would be: "you have nothing to worry about, you're going to survive". If however, the audience had just witnessed images of the last batch of soldiers being butchered to death, then the omnipresent camera would be offering the audience another reading over and above that being communicated in the scene. It would be saying: "don't listen to a word this person says, you're all going to die". This is an example of metalanguage.

In television drama, omnipresent narration is achieved through a system of continuity editing (Millerson 1993), a language of shot transitions that allows the manufactured nature of television narration to go largely unnoticed, whilst guiding the audience to think about the text in similar ways. Continuity editing often makes the narration process invisible. It operates on the basis of erasing its own conditions of production. Through continuity editing attention is never drawn to the camera. It impresses upon the audience that "we are watching a piece of unmediated
reality directly, that the camera does not exist” (Fiske 1987 p.30).

3.3.8 Narrative and Constructions of Rurality

In spite of the basic difference between series and serial narrative design, the basic issue a semiotic perspective must address in terms of narrative constructions of rurality is the same. It is concerned with how these events, borne out of the signifiers of sound, vision and shot, are constitutive of certain readings about the countryside as the narrative unfolds. That is, it is concerned with how rural identities are configured through the particular forms of conflict set in place. Regardless of whether such conflicts occur at the internal, personal and extra personal level, in all its manifestations, conflict will be imbued with particular themes. And these themes will configure characterisations and settings (both established and temporary) in to particular relations with each other in a way that may carry with them explicit or implicit constructions of rural identity. The final chapter in the textual analysis, therefore, explores how these identities are evoked through the relations of conflict in serial and series narrative design. It pays particular attention, however, to the main episodic strands of the drama. That is, those series narrative that dominate the screen time of these texts.

3.3.9 Discourses of Rurality on which this Textual Analysis Draws

Having outlined the framework that will be employed for this study I now wish to reflect, for a moment, on the discourses of rurality I drew upon to make a reading of setting, character and story. Indeed, in grasping the
meaning of these texts my reading had a strong interdiscursive element to it. It constituted a coming together of discourses implicitly and explicitly informing my account as it developed. While the readings I made are not be easily broken down and separated out into different discursive realms, again, the academic, lay and professional all appeared important circuits of discourse from which I developed my thoughts.

As I have highlighted already at the start of this chapter, my initial approach to reading these texts was been closely defined by my own lay discourses of rurality. My substantive engagement with these texts was no different in this respect. I had no desire to try and suppress these lay discourses. I didn’t wish to regard my own socialisation in ideas of rurality as something that got in the way of the ‘real’ reading process, like an academic impediment that the dispassionate, objective, critic has to learn to live with. I wanted to harness these discourses, not downplay them. I saw, and continue to see, in these personal readings, markers of wider lay discourse that bring with them the possibility of having some degree of purchase over how these texts might be more widely read.

From the very earliest stages of my research too, my reading of these texts benefited from frequent lay discussions with family, friends and colleagues, about the ideas of rurality at work in these dramas. The views that were expressed to me reflected varying levels of engagement with the drama and a variety of different reading positions: some were avid fans and wished to impart their detailed views; some were ‘closet’ fans who claimed to have never seen these texts but commented at
great length on them; some were vaguely familiar with these series; some had clearly never watched these dramas but made claims about them in reference to other cultural texts and formulas. While I did not give credence to all their ideas/theories/observations about these productions, they have added insight to my reading of these texts. The impact of these readings I would argue, however, has been fairly minimal over the course of the study. I courted these informal discussions much more at the formative stages of the research process, when endeavour was still provoking lots of reaction from those I knew (particularly, so it seemed, because I studying an everyday cultural object 'academically'). As time went on, the interest from others certainly waned. The major exception to this has been the many lay discussions I have had with my partner about these texts, whose willingness to share her insights has undoubtedly touched my own readings.

At the same time, the way I read these texts was closely related to the academic discourses within which I have been immersed. I began with a broad remit to explore the discourses of rurality at work in these texts, although I had no strong commitment to exploring one particular theme over another within this. My formative reading of the rural studies literature drew my attention to a number of themes that encouraged me look at these texts in particular ways, although two broad themes stood out. First, notions of the rural idyll (a term which, I may add, I was not familiar with before even though it has so much currency in academic research). And second, the idea that the rural, at both a material and imagined level, was constitutive of, and constituted by, particular social identities and power relations (such as incomer/local/
class/gender/childhood). Ideas of idyll, social identity and power seemed to me the critical starting points for thinking about these texts and have continued to be the academic themes framing my analysis. At the same time as this formal engagement with the rural studies literature, exchanges with my supervisor, I believe, have encouraged me to emphasise certain aspects and not others. I have continued to have long debates with him about the meaning of these texts, and while on many occasions we have not always agreed on how these dramas might read (in fact, this process has shown me how quite polysemic texts media texts can be) ideas of class and indignity have continued to remain a important feature of our exchanges.

In the account that I present particular emphasis has been placed on ideas of class and indignity and much less emphasis on other social identities such as gender, sexuality and race. While I recognise that these are important elements within a discussion of the social construction of rurality my emphasises are both practical and theoretical. In the former sense, I believe these dramas could be read and re-read from a variety of perspectives, but space does not permit a discussion of all that may be at work. In a theoretical sense, I feel inclined to carry on a conversation about particular social identities, such as class, whose importance seems to have increasingly waned in academic discourse (Cloke et al 1995). As the following discussion will show, class identities appear to particularly important dynamics structuring the social relationships at work in these worlds.

My engagement with media producers is also at partly at work in my reading of the texts’ rurality, although I have
not consciously activated their particular insights in the analysis. While I do not wish to ‘prove’ my reading through the words of media producers, in the production analysis I do wish to partly reflect on whether media producers, in the process of creating these texts, are reading the rurality of these texts in the same way as myself. However, in presenting the account that I do, the insights of programme makers are at least partially at work in the readings that I make, although I do believe the account is overwhelmingly routed through academic and lay discourse. In Chapters 7 and 8, I explicitly give voice to the interpretations of media producers when examining how and why they attempted to encode certain discourses of rurality into these texts.

3.3.10 Sampling Frame of Texts

It was through these discourses that I came to my own reading of these texts. However, the account does not encompass all the episodes I viewed. In what follows I consider an illustrative number of episodes in which to make my wider claims about these dramas. Such an approach allows analysis to identify broad trends between texts, while attending, in sufficient detail, to the dynamics of individual texts. I approximate that I have viewed 75 hours of these dramas in total, with a slight bias towards Heartbeat, the production that has more episodes per series that Peak Practice and Dangerfield. In the textual analysis I focus upon two series for each of these three dramas, drawing upon a total of 30 sample episodes. These comprise 10 episodes from each drama, divided equally between each of the respective series transmitted during the time of the study. Clearly, in a long running series important characters, settings and stories will be lost in
this process, and by default ideas about the countryside that may constituted through them. But I believe the account presented touches on some of the key themes at stake in these productions.

The texts that formed the basis for the substantive discussion are displayed in Figure 3.15, all developing chronologically so as to read serial storylines clearly. Episode title and audience figures are also given. In the latter respect, Heartbeat is the most popular series over this period, followed by Peak Practice and Dangerfield. As the figure shows, taken together the mean audience for these three dramas was 13.63 million.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drama</th>
<th>Series Number</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Audience*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dangerfield</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Untitled (i)</td>
<td>9.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dangerfield</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Untitled (ii)</td>
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<td>Dangerfield</td>
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<td>Dangerfield</td>
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<td>Behind Closed Doors</td>
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<td>Dangerfield</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Untitled (iv)</td>
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<td>III</td>
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<td>III</td>
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<td>III</td>
<td>Tricks</td>
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<td>Dangerfield</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Old Dogs - Old Tricks</td>
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<td>Heartbeat</td>
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<td>Unfinished Business</td>
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<td>Saint Columba Treasure</td>
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<td>V</td>
<td>Sitting off the Dock of the Bay</td>
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<td>Heartbeat</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Giving the Game Away</td>
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<td>Heartbeat</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Blood Sports</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heartbeat</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Old Colonials</td>
<td>17.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heartbeat</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Forget me not</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heartbeat</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>A Long Shot</td>
<td>16.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heartbeat</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Something to Value</td>
<td>17.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heartbeat</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Frail Mortality</td>
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<td>Peak Practice</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Holding it Together</td>
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<td>IV</td>
<td>Looking back</td>
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<td>Whipping Boy</td>
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<td>IV</td>
<td>In Safe hands</td>
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<td>Peak Practice</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Heart and Soul</td>
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<td>Classics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peak Practice</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Running to Hide</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>Total Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>13.0</strong></td>
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All figures are in millions. Source: British Audience Research Board 'This Weeks Viewing Summary' (1995; 1996; 1997). Figures rounded to the nearest 100,000
This chapter began by making a case for selecting three case study television dramas for interrogation by this research. It has shown how I made these choices through my own lay discourses of rurality, a formal survey of textual elements, an examination of extra-textual discourses circulating around these dramas, and the practical requirements demanded by approaching media production. It went on to explain how a framework for approaching the textual analysis evolved and then outlined the nature of this framework. Discussion moved on to consider the discourses of rurality that I have drawn upon to construct this account, and outlined the sample of episodes that I considered in particular.

One of the themes that emerged out of my process of choosing these texts was the value of a relational focus to media texts, and in turn, the problems that are encountered with attempts to quantify them. The following discussion intends to continue with this relational focus on the basis of the two key elements of narrative aforementioned: story world and story events. While this distinction is an analytical one only, it provides a useful operational framework in which to begin unpacking the construction of rurality within these texts. It is to this substantive analysis that discussion now turns.
Chapter 4

Story World
4.1 Introduction

The objective of the following chapter is to consider the first two aspects of dramatic constructions of the countryside: setting and character, which together constitute the story worlds of Dangerfield, Peak Practice and Heartbeat. The first section builds upon the insights of the previous chapter highlighting how impressions of setting in these dramas are constructed in relation to ideas of nature, community, urbanity, regionality, and temporality. It then moves onto a consideration of the established cast of characters that occupy and define further these impressions of material setting. It explores how the dramas are dominated by small groups of leading protagonists, all of whom are incomers ascribed a certain power over the social relations of setting through their occupational status as professional 'problem solvers', and through a wider set of cultural competencies developing around their identities in space. Through different relations of class and indigeneity, these competencies are shown to be replicated and contrasted by a cast of supporting protagonists whose role it is to help and hinder the actions of the leading protagonists in the resolution of narrative conflict.
4.2 Setting

So far this discussion has drawn attention to a range of signifiers that help to constitute these dramas with the impression of rural setting. This discussion intends to elaborate further on this theme. It begins by noting the way idyllic visions of nature and human settlement are often, but not exclusively, fostered by the production teams. It goes on to highlight how the texts of Heartbeat and Peak Practice emphasise ideas of rural community in a way that is absent from Dangerfield. Discussion then explores how impressions of rural setting may also be read in relation to notions of regionality, urbanity and temporality, all of which also foster broadly positive readings of rurality.

4.2.1 Idyllic Settings

In the previous chapter, the process of selecting these texts revealed a number of signifiers which could be read within academic and lay discourses of rurality. While I did not elaborate on the wider social meaning of these ideas, I do wish to briefly note at the outset that many of the elements highlighted are often synonymous with commonly held ideas of an idyllic rurality. In particular, the theme I wish to draw attention to in this section concerns the idea of 'proximity to nature', a notion that has been frequently identified in academic research as an important element within the idea of a rural idyll (e.g. Bell 1994; Halfacree 1995).

Through the frequent signification of flora, fauna and extensive open landscapes, I believe all of these dramas
bring senses of a natural world, un-exploited by human activities, to the fore. In particular, combined with wider elements of production style the idyllic effect of these relations is positively emphasised. In each of the dramas, for instance, camera work is rarely minimal in respect of locale. Each drama creates its own slow moving portrait of rurality by frequently resisting the pursuit of plot information. The relations of mise en shot repeatedly pause on a particular view of open landscape, or an image of trees and flowers. In a technical sense, this tendency includes the consistent use of panning shots in which rural scenes are gradually surveyed vertically or horizontally across the ensuing action. Similarly, camera work will also commonly allow character action to enter and leave a scene while remaining fixed on a particular view, what might be termed a 'lingering' shot (See Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Panning and Lingering shots
The construction of human settlement and activity rarely contradicts these ambient senses of nature. Villages are cloaked in signifiers of flora and flora, and nestle neatly within their wider extensive terrain. This impression of small, contained, settlements is also often emphasised through slow moving wide shots gradually surveying villages in their wider sense of space. Moreover, these worlds are often given a soft, filmic look, which affords them a certain warmth and eye pleasing aesthetic (see Figure 4.2). Combined with a propensity to fill these images with sunlight the effect is captivating.

**Figure 4.2 The Soft Filmic Look of the Three Productions**

In Peak Practice and Dangerfield, patient views over extensive landscapes and villages are also combined with pensive orchestral and solo violinist scores which, I would argue, affords these story worlds a certain serenity. The reading of Heartbeat is perhaps more ambiguous in this respect, since the series is dominated by the sound of the 'rock 'n' roll' years. Overlaying landscape scenes with the sounds of The Rolling Stones offers anything but a serene rurality, although equally, the upbeat tone of this music might nonetheless still be
seen to encourage the feeling that all is well in this rural setting; that life really doesn’t get any better than this.

There are exceptions to these positive impressions of settlement. First, these are not exclusively sun-filled worlds. Inclement weather is a common occurrence, particularly in the case of Heartbeat and Peak Practice, where settings can often appear harsh and unforgiving. At the same time, I do feel that even the bleakest weather in these worlds are often given a positive inflection when elements of production style are brought to bear upon an image. In Peak Practice, for instance, rain and snow often seem to glisten, while overcast and thundery skies are given a red hue that makes them appear like sunsets (see Figure 4.3).

**Figure 4.3 Positive Constructions of Inclement Weather in the Countryside**

Second, in Peak Practice there were a small number of instances when images of rural setting imply a recent industrial past. Indeed, if the countryside ideal is often formulated through allusions of escaping from modernity (Short 1991) then the rural world of Peak Practice does not always bear symmetry with it. In the episode *Holding It Together*, for instance, the audience is presented with a derelict factory in Cardale undergoing construction work, in the episode *In Safe Hands* the village also has a disused
plastic's factory, while in Running to Hide it has a coal mine (See Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 Alternative Visions of the Village: the Industrialisation of Cardale

4.2.2 Social-spaces and Narrative Action

As the previous chapter explained, narratives can be understood as configurations of events that are designed in space and time. In this section, I wish to briefly consider how space is organised to accommodate narrative events, and what this begins to imply for an understanding of rural social relations. In particular, I wish to draw a general distinction between the setting of Dangerfield, which I believe can often foster a negative vision of rural social relations, and those of Heartbeat and Peak Practice, which encourage a broadly positive vision.

Consider, in the first instance, the texts of Heartbeat and Peak Practice, which, in the episodes I considered, worked with a broadly similar narrative scenario in that
they developed their drama out of the dilemmas of nucleated village settlements, known as ‘Aidensfield’ and ‘Cardale’ respectively. It is worth noting here that these village identities are purely fictitious in so far as they are not the official names of the material locations within which they are recorded, although as recent work in rural studies has suggested, so widely circulated and recognised are these identities, that the issue of what might constitute the 'real' identity of the material location is often much in question (e.g. Mordue 1999; Phillips and Fish forthcoming).

In both of these dramas notions of the bounded village are emphasised visually by wide angled views over and around clusters of houses, and the repeated use of a small number of social-spaces - the square, pub, shop, school - within which information between characters can be exchanged, and plots developed (see Figure 4.5).

Figure 4.5 Village Settings as the Recurring Focus for Narrative Events in Heartbeat and Peak Practice
It is important to note that while these spaces may act as signifiers for village life in the texts of Heartbeat and Peak Practice, this logic of using a familiar set of social-spaces appears by no means reducible to rural drama. Consider, for instance, BBC's *EastEnders*, a drama which I take to be 'urban', and which appears to be governed by a process of information sharing in similar, often identical, settings (for Heartbeat's *Aidensfield Arms* read *EastEnders Queen Victoria*; for Peak Practice's *Cardale Square* read *EastEnders Albert Square*, and so forth). However, I do believe that, in terms of Heartbeat and Peak Practice, the interaction between characters that these recurring settings demand might encourage a broadly positive vision of village life: a space where intimacies and pleasantries are frequently shared.

In particular, this process of information sharing within the public spaces of the pub, shop, square might be read as markers of 'community', an idea which, again, has been frequently cited as an important element within idyllic discourses of rurality. Their use implies some symmetry, for instance, with Short's (1991) notion of a countryside myth in which the pace of life is "less hurried", and where people "have more time for one another" (p.34). Indeed, everyone appears to know everyone in the rural worlds of Heartbeat and Peak Practice, with characters regularly spending time exchanging conversation about each other's lives in the shop, pub and street. Even where characters are not familiar to an audience, established characters will often make polite gestures to them.
It should also be added too that both Heartbeat and Peak Practice commonly construct sequences of music and images, known as 'montages' (Millerson 1993), where people are seen to interact. These interactions are almost exclusively developed around formal village events, such as a cricket match, a fete or a village run and might be said to bring to the fore the idea that villages are both highly participatory, fun and uncomplicated in their pleasures. They are literally overrun by people of all ages, smiling, laughing and engaging with each other (see Figure 4.6). Moreover, in Peak Practice visual backdrops of the village are also often positively bustling with people, and where there are few people in shot, sound is often an important device for constructing the presence of absent others.

Figure 4.6 Constructing Intimate and Participatory Communities in Heartbeat and Peak Practice
Dangerfield in contrast, counters this vision dramatically. Devoid of an established village setting, its principal character has spent most of his time living in isolation in the countryside with his two teenage children, and later decides to move into Warwick because he is lonely. Notions of isolation and loneliness are thought to be common elements within lay constructions of rurality (e.g. Halfacree 1995) but they do not fit comfortably with ideas of an idyllic rurality. Moreover, that these themes are conveyed by Dangerfield's move to the town might be read simultaneously as an anti-rural and pro-urban construction of the drama's social-space.

Regardless of where Dangerfield happens to be living in the story world, events in this series are often spaced out, by which it is meant that events overwhelmingly occur beyond the lead character's immediate locale. They demand mobility. They demand the countryside to be constantly traversed. Significantly, these events usually originate within rural communities and environments that the lead character has to then enter into from the outside. Apart from the established spaces of home and work, these settings are often one-off and familiar only to an individual episode. Intimacies are generally confined to immediate family and work colleagues. Knowledge of passing characters is a rare exception. The majority of non-work time is spent within the private spaces of character homes. In place of Heartbeat and Peak Practice's closely-knit, intimate, and participatory rural settlements, Dangerfield appears to construct a spaced out landscape of anonymity and privacy.
4.2.3 Urbanity

At various times these dramas also draw on signifiers of urbanity. In Dangerfield, for instance, the series frequently makes use of the market town of Warwick. According to some academic discourses a settlement such as this might be encompassed within a definition of rurality (see for instance Lewis' 1979 definition in Chapter 3), but it is also the case that the built up character of this location might plausibly imply that it is 'urban'. In this, Dangerfield might be argued as developing two rather than one spatial focuses: the town and the country, a distinction that I would accept to a point. My hesitancy comes in the way that visually, signifiers of rurality are brought to bear across the dramas whole terrain. Warwick is constituted, for example, with many of the signifiers associated with the rural: from an abundance of flora and fauna on display, to roads hemmed in by trees and bushes, and cottage dwellings decorated with hanging baskets. My reading of this market town location is that it operates with a hybrid rural and urban identity, a suggestion that might be said to concur with Murdoch and Pratt's (1993) idea of the 'post-rural' in which experiences of rurality are seen to transcend the material dichotomy of urban and rural.

This point appears also true of Heartbeat, a series that makes occasional trips to a 'fictitious' urban centre known as Ashfordly, as well as that of Whitby Bay. In Peak Practice, the city of Derby and town of Matlock have also featured, the latter of which also seems imbued with a strong sense of rurality. However, its occasional engagement with Derby is inclined to construct urbanity as
a traffic filled concrete jungles where it constantly rains. Inter-cut with images of a sun filled rurality the effect is powerful (see Figure 4.7). Here is example of the way positive ideas of rurality might be emphasised through negative constructions of the urban, an idea that has been put forward in discussions exploring the nature and constitution of the rural idyll (see for instance Cloke and Milbourne 1992).

**Figure 4.7 Inter-cutting Visions of the Urban and Rural in Peak Practice**

4.2.4 Regionality

Rural research has often drawn attention to the way notions of regionality and rurality are closely intertwined (e.g. Cloke and Milbourne 1992, Brace 1999). It could be argued in the respect of the three dramas that widely pre-circulated discourses of material regional identity are marking out an understanding of these settings. My own reading of Heartbeat, Peak Practice and Dangerfield is to regard them as constructs of North Yorkshire, the Peak District and Warwickshire, respectively. While these readings demand a certain cultural competence among viewers to be brought to bear upon on the text that cannot be assumed, it could be suggested that regional constructions of rurality are all readily identifiable.
At one level, these identifications might be read through signifiers of extensive landscape: from Heartbeat's isolated moorland landscape, Peak Practice's rolling hills and mountains, to Dangerfield's gently undulating lowland terrain of patchwork fields and hedgerows. So too could attention be drawn to the way architecture and building materials depicted in these dramas emphasise their setting through a strong regional vernacular. With its consistent use of wide beamed, low roofed houses, Dangerfield's setting emphasises a Tudor past that is suggestive of Warwickshire, as is its use distinctive historical landmarks such as Warwick Castle. Peak Practice and Heartbeat's Derbyshire and North Yorkshire terrains could be inferred from the continuous terrain of limestone and gritstone buildings on display (Figure 4.8).

The relations of sound, too, are important instruments in marking the setting of these dramas through pre-circulated notions of regionality. The dialogue of characters, for instance, helps to emphasise these senses both through what they and how they say it. Dangerfield's characters speak with a combination of west midland and southern accents (with the emphasis on the latter), while many of the supporting characters in Heartbeat and Peak Practice provide a mixture of broad northern accents: from Liverpool to Yorkshire. Conversations occasionally include themes that begin to locate the supposed whereabouts of the storytelling world in material space (e.g. "I was on my way back to Manchester. I've been in Derby. I thought I'd pop in", Peak Practice's Holding it together) and frequent references to recognisable place names: Warwick and Leamington Spa in Dangerfield, Scarborough and Whitby
Figure 4.8 Visual senses of Regionality in Dangerfield, Heartbeat and Peak Practice

Heartbeat’s North Yorkshire: a gently undulating terrain of Moorland and stone vernacular

Peak Practice’s Peak District: rolling hills and mountains of grassland and moorland with stone vernacular

Dangerfield’s Warwickshire: a gentle lowland of patchwork fields with tudor vernacular and historic regional landmarks brought to fore.

Bay in Heartbeat, Derby and Matlock in Peak Practice. Other place names created by these dramas’ producers often have regional connotations (the villages that end in ‘dale’ in Peak Practice, for instance). In terms of the latter drama, regionality is also brought sharply into focus by its title name: Peak Practice.
4.2.5 Temporality

These dramas impression of rural setting can also be read according to different senses of temporality. It could be suggested, for instance, that patient views over uninterrupted 'natural' landscapes, combined with features of landscape that have a longstanding historical association with an area, afford these dramas a certain feeling of timelessness. They encourage the feeling that these worlds remain relatively unchanged by the forces of historical change, what Youngs (1985) would call a 'petrified' landscape.

At the same time, all three productions might said to evoke particular senses of period. Dangerfield and Peak Practice, for instance, could be read as contemporary dramas, most notably through the props that surround both leading characters, and those that occupy the background to images. In both productions, characters are dressed in current day styles, while technological devices used by them are up to date and readily on display. Furthermore, the use of motor vehicles in these dramas is overwhelmingly contemporary on design, as are the public and private spaces of characters. More generally, a rich and vivid hue is granted to the texture of their mise en scene implicitly affording both a certain sense of 'newness'.

Heartbeat could be said to encourage quite a different sense of period. From the design of interiors and the dress sense of characters to the motor vehicles they drive and their use of technologies, a general sense of the modern historical is constructed throughout. This impression is accentuated by the slightly grainy, flickering, effect of
its images, and the tendency to dress settings in sombre colours. A knowledge of popular cultural histories of the recent past would be required to appreciate that the modern limit of visual signifiers is the mid-1960s, although some props are more readily identifiable than others, such as the motor vehicles driven and the uniforms and informal dress of characters. One established character, for instance, wears a miniskirt and garish make-up and jewellery, while many of the principal male characters sport V-neck sweaters over polo-neck tops.

Reading this drama as a construction of 1960s life is arguably most apparent when account is taken of the soundtrack music which, as suggested, constantly overlays the unfolding action. Almost every potential moment of silence is filled with the upbeat sounds of the ‘swinging’ sixties although the specificity of this music to year, even decade, is not entirely clear. Heartbeat’s world is dominated by a sixties soundtrack that picks and choose from a 10 year stretch. The title music, on the other hand, is quintessentially 1950s, a rendition of Buddy Holly’s Heartbeat sung by the series lead character. It is worth noting too that these senses of the historical in Heartbeat may work with other elements of setting to evoke a feeling of nostalgia among audiences. Images of intimate and participatory village settlement, cast in sunlight and combined with the lively sounds of the rock’n’roll years, creates, for me at least, the feeling of a golden age lost to the experience of modern history.
4.3 Introducing the Characters

The relations of material setting outlined above are occupied and constituted, in turn, by an established cast of characters whose identities are defined in different ways by the narrative events unfolding in the story worlds. Character identities do not simply 'exist' in these rural settings. They are performed through the circumstances of conflict the story world finds itself in. The objective of the remaining discussion in this chapter is therefore to outline how the social-spatial identities of characters are constructed through their role in narrative events. It is useful in this respect to follow the insights of Mckee (1997) outlined earlier and initially define characterisation at two broad categories of narrative significance.

First, **main protagonists**, referring to those characters who dominate character screen time, and who are consistently responsible for determining the nature and course of events in both the main episodic narrative and the subsidiary narratives of the particular production. Second, **supporting protagonists**, referring to those characters who, at strategic points, are implicated in the events of main and subsidiary narratives, to the effect of facilitating or hindering the actions of the main protagonists. The focus of the following section of discussion is on the first of these categorisations, the main protagonists.
4.3.1 The Main Protagonist as Problem Solver

Because each of these productions are story telling mediums, and storytelling is based around the exploration of conflict, narrative events will always be strongly tied to the interrelated processes of problem creation and problem solving. In each of these dramas, the principal narrative function of the main protagonists is strongly defined by the latter as he or she seeks to mediate upon, and resolve, for better or worst, the conflict at stake in the drama's narratives.

At one level of analysis the problem solving function of main protagonists is constituted through occupational identity. Occupational identity in these story worlds is a key mechanism by which important information can be distributed and received between characters, and through which significant interventions determining the nature and course of narrative events can be made. So for instance, Heartbeat’s main protagonists are a police constable, Nick Rowan, a district nurse, Maggie Bolton, and a primary school teacher, Jo Weston, all of who live and work in and around the village of Aidensfield. Similarly, Peak Practice’s main protagonists are all general practitioners working out of Cardale’s village practice, ‘The Beeches’: Dr Andrew Attwood; Dr Erica Matthews; Dr Will Preston; and Dr David Shearer respectively. Dangerfield, like Heartbeat, combines the medical and police elements to construct a single main protagonist, Dr Paul Dangerfield, who divides his professional life between his role as a general practitioner in a Warwick practice and his job working as a police surgeon for the Warwickshire Police Constabulary (see Figure 4.9).
Occupational identity based around the credentials of 'Nurse', 'Dr' and 'Police Constable', then, positions particular characters at the centre of narrative action: tackling a crime, prescribing an illness and so forth. My own lay reading of these characters is to regard their occupational function as signifying a 'middle class' identity, an association which I make because I am personally inclined to strongly equate 'professional'
occupations, (which I take as doctor, nurse and police constable to signify), as important markers of middle class identity. Within academic discourse occupational identity is certainly often seen to be one marker of class identity (Crompton 1993). Following the insights of Goldthorpe (1985) it might be possible, for instance, to read these characters as displaying a 'service class' identity, a category defined by the similar work and market situation of professionals.

Notions of middle and service class have often been seen as important constituents in the processes of material rural in-migration (Cloke et al 1995, 1998b) so it is interesting to note that in these symbolic worlds these professional main protagonists could also be read as incomers to these rural worlds. According to Allan and Mooney (1998), although the idea of the 'incomer' (alongside its binary counterpart the 'local') is far from unambiguous in definition, they suggest that the term has been most commonly used to refer to "a person who, without prior local connection, has migrated into a rural community" (p.284). It is possible to argue that this notion of the incomer is being actively achieved through the personal biographies constructed around main protagonist in these dramas.

In Peak Practice, for instance, three of the doctors (Andrew, Erica and Will) arrived in Cardale from city practices located in Liverpool and Manchester, while in Dangerfield, the main protagonist moved to Warwickshire from London. Arriving from London is also the character biography of PC Rowan in Heartbeat, who originally moved to Aidensfield with his now deceased wife Dr Kate Rowan.
after starting his career in the London Metropolitan Police. In this respect, there are also strong intertextual associations surrounding the actor Nick Berry playing the part of Nick Rowan. Formerly of BBC Television's EastEnders fame as the character 'Wicksey', the biography of Berry's previous urban incarnation might plausibly be brought to a reading of his incomer identity in Heartbeat. Indeed, it is almost as if this character, from one of London's most famous squares, actually moved to North Yorkshire and took up a post as police constable. The other leading protagonists in Heartbeat, Jo Weston and Maggie Bolton, are also constructed as incomers to these village through their biographies, both arrived in Aidensfield from the cities of York and Leeds respectively. The more ambiguous example of incomer biographies is that of David Shearer in Peak Practice, who, after spending a generation of his life away from the village decides to return to his childhood idyll. David's incomer identity is tempered with the idea that he has a prior connection with the setting, even though before his formal arrival in the village space, audiences would never have seen him before.

There appear to be other elements within these dramas that might also serve to emphasise the incomer identity of these professionals. Particularly important here are the accents which these leading protagonists' display. In Peak Practice, no leading character speaks with an accent that could be described as archetypally Derbyshire in origin. The characters Will, David and Erica all have notably southern accents, while Andrew's strong accent could be seen as characteristically Liverpudian. The southern tone of accents is also continued in the main protagonists of
Dangerfield and Heartbeat, all of which I believe imply an origin from elsewhere.

Working alongside these incomer relations, I would suggest that it is also important to distinguish between the way their identities might be undercut with the notions of 'insider' and 'outsider'. I think it possible to read the leading protagonist's in Heartbeat and Peak Practice as all broadly having an 'insider' status, by which I mean that not only are these characters integrated into the social life of the village by default of their occupational function, but they also appear to unproblematically participate within village events. This is the 'move in and join in' lifestyle strategy that Cloke et al (1995) have highlighted as an important element in the lifestyles and practices of middle class in-migrants. While there are a few occasions where these insider relations are called into question in both series, I feel the overwhelming sense these drama's convey is that the professional incomer is happily integrated into the broader community.

This insider identity appears only minimally true of Dangerfield. As noted earlier, the main protagonist in this series lives in an isolated country house for most of the episodes I considered, and then moves into Warwick. While Dr Dangerfield does have formal relationships with patients living in the Warwickshire countryside, which are displayed very occasionally, from a narrative point of view his actions within particular rural settings appear very much of the outsider interrogating the suspicious affairs of those living in country settings. Events generally conspire for him to leave his urban practice,
enter a rural community from the outside, and deal with the reticent strangers within.

At the heart of these dramas therefore, is a group of characters whose identities might be read in different ways as both incomer professional and problem solving, and who appear to be constructed as either insiders or outsiders to the social relations of village life. What I wish to now suggest is these characterisations also appeared to be defined by a remarkably similar set of cultural competencies (Bourdieu 1984, Eder 1993) to the effect that overwhelmingly positive conceptions of their identities and actions in rural space are produced. In this respect the competencies these main protagonists' enact can be usefully divided into two themes: competencies of disposition, relating to their attitudinal qualities as they go about approaching conflict; and commodified competencies, relating to their ownership of, taste in, and use of, particular goods and services.

4.3.2 Cultural Competencies of Disposition

First, all main protagonists are, to borrow Maslow's (1954) phrase, 'self-actualisers'. The capacity of these characters to intervene under the auspices of their expert knowledges is matched by their pro-activity when it comes to identifying, and becoming involved in, problems. Driven by a basic desire to make things better, these characters that do not hold back when it comes to addressing conflict. In rural worlds where social dilemma is never far from the door, the professional main protagonists are always ready and willing to restore life to normality. Doctors appear constantly to hand for their
patients in Peak Practice, as does Dr Dangerfield, who appears able to hold down a full time job as a GP while spending most of his time playing detective with the Warwickshire Police Constabulary. Equally, PC Rowan et al are professionals who never appear off duty. They are either at work dealing with conflict, at home talking about conflict, or in the Aidensfield Arms acquiring more information about conflict (see Figure 4.10).

Figure 4.10 Active and Self-Actualising Protagonists in Dangerfield, Heartbeat and Peak Practice

To be sure, this image of the self-actualising professional is not exclusively positive in tone. Just as problem solvers of this sort never appear able, or inclined, to escape the dilemmas at stake in the story, so do they appear to meddle in people lives to an incredible extent, visiting homes and hospitals, day and night to make their point.

Second, protagonists of this sort display high levels of personal and intra-professional organisation. In Heartbeat, Nick, Maggie and Jo form one highly cohesive
inner circle of protagonists who through formal work relationships and strong personal bonds, think and act together. They share information on, and assessments of, the situation at hand, from which the appropriate intervention in the conflict at stake will be determined. Take for instance the extract displayed in Figure 4.11, a scene from the episode *Frail Mortality* where the three key problem solvers are discussing the conflict at stake. Here is a good example of how professionals appear to meddle in the lives of others, bringing their opinions together to reach a consensus over the issue in hand.

**Figure 4.11 Co-ordinated Professionals in Heartbeat’s Frail Mortality**

Exterior. School

Maggie: It’s a very odd set up
Nick: How d’yer mean?
Maggie: Well Ramsey doesn’t appear to work for a living
Jo: They’re obviously not short of money though
Nick: What makes you say that?
Jo: The other day Lizzy turned up to pay for her school dinners with a five pound note
Maggie: Plus they’ve got a new car and a cottage full of new stuff
Nick: I think I’d better have a word with this Mr Ramsey

Notice too the visual symmetry between characters as they discuss problems. No single character appears to dominate another character visually. The position of characters in the shot suggests that power is distributed evenly between these decision-makers, that each protagonist is on even terms with the other. Contrast this idea with the tendency of problem solvers to stand over
figures that embody conflict with the narrative (see Figure 4.12).

**Figure 4.12 Visual Construction of Power Relations**

The inclination to work together is also at work between the doctors in Peak Practice, although here the impression of co-ordinated thought and action can be tempered by a tendency to encourage differences in professional opinion over what is at stake and how it should be addressed. Such conflicts are often based around the different gender identities of the professional, particularly the conflicts between Erica and Will. The former is often constructed as the sympathetic caring professional who is in tune with patients and prepared to give them the benefit of the doubt, while the latter appears colder towards others, more suspicious of their intentions. As events culminate in significance, however, such a dynamic is always...
gradually resolved through a meeting of minds, based on rational dialogue and concessions to each others point of view. The group therefore regulates itself for the purposes of the greater good. Interestingly, the vast majority of these conversations between doctors take place on the back terrace to the Beeches, against a backdrop of green views. This back terrace view appears to act as a space where Doctors, with coffee cup in hand, can momentarily escape their worlds and ponder their actions and reactions to events: a space for collecting thoughts. (see Figure 4.13).

Figure 4.13 Peak Practice Doctors Collecting Thoughts and Debating Courses of Action on the Terrace

Dangerfield somewhat eschews the principle of intra-professional co-ordination. While the actions of the main protagonist work in tandem with those of the Warwickshire Police Constabulary, the two parties only generally work together at the extremities of the narrative (i.e. when conflicts is instigated, and when conflict is nearing its ultimate resolution). For the main body of the episode, the tendency for Dangerfield is to take matters in to his
own hands. Dangerfield thinks and acts alone. He is the resourceful male professional, co-ordinated in his own actions, but rarely courting the opinion and help of other professionals. This is not to suggest that Dangerfield does not have professional confidantes. Liz Moss the bereavement counsellor, for instance, is occasionally turned to for advice (see Figure 4.14, again noting the use of a rural backdrop as a space for collecting thought). But the general impression that Dangerfield creates is of a single main protagonist relying on personal high-mindedness to overcome the forces of conflict in the story world, while others, such as the Warwickshire Police Constabulary, struggle to keep abreast of events.

Figure 4.14 Dangerfield and his Confidante, Liz Moss in Still Waters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interior Paul House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liz: Is there anything wrong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul: Yes there is actually. There’s something I can’t work out. It’s...do you want to come for a walk?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz: Sure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exterior. Country Park</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paul: Two people loved each other very much and decided to kill each other in a suicide pact. They must have been holding each other very tight. Why were the bodies not found together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz: Surely that depends on the current of the water?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul: But this was still water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz: It looks like suspicious death. You could be dealing with a murder here</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Third, leading protagonists are intuitive. Their capacity to intervene in events is complemented by their ability to read situations to maximum problem solving effect. These are characters that appear to always be in the right place at the right time. Their capacity to witness the crucial incident, overhear the vital conversation, spot the important clue, read human action correctly is quite extraordinary. While the tendency of Peak Practice and Heartbeat is for such insights to be drawn together by like-minded professionals, Dangerfield appears to be unique in his ability to deal effectively with the events at hand. Although Dangerfield has no formal crime solving function in his capacity as police surgeon, it is his sensitivity to events going on around him that allows him to be implicated in the conflict at stake. Take for instance the conversation depicted in Figure 4.15, from the episode Still Waters, in which Dangerfield has just completed the formal task of pronouncing the death of a man. Not content with leaving the business of solving the crime to the police force at the scene of the incident, he starts to intervene in the situation, opening up opportunities for an investigation which he subsequently pursues himself.

Figure 4.15 Dangerfield Intervenes in Still Waters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exterior, Reservoir</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sergeant:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown Officer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Finally, working alongside these professional incomer identities, is a level of emotional complexity that is both positive and negative in tone. On the one hand these protagonists are constructed as internally dilemmic characters whose professional successes are dovetailed by personal complexities in matters of the heart. So, for instance, there is Dangerfield who throws himself into his role as police surgeon in order to exercise the emotional demons of his past (his wife died in a car crash). This biography is complemented, in turn, by his inability to communicate properly with his children and his failure to find the love of another woman. Peak Practice is also a world of broken hearts and homes: Will is separated from his wife; Andrew's relationship with his wife is in jeopardy; Erica is searching for love after splitting up with her long term partner; David and his manic depressive wife cannot communicate with each other. In Heartbeat, Nick and Jo are involved in an often strained relationship with each other, while Maggie Bolton is divorced.

At the same time, this idea of professional success versus personal failure allows leading male protagonists to appear as complex, sensitive and self-effacing 'new men'. They constantly discuss their problems with friends, or in the case of Dangerfield, his bereavement counsellor, in an effort to come to terms with their lives (see Figure 4.16). Moreover, by laying bear these characters' personal dilemmas, leading men and women might be said to be afforded a certain romantic function as they constantly seek to bring stability back into their lives. Images of professional's passionately kissing, often in front of roaring open fires, abound these dramas. (see Figure 4.17).
Interior. Liz’s Home

Paul: [Marty’s] messing around taking dead end jobs. He’s capable of much more but I can’t seem to get through to him. Or his sister. Both of them. Sometimes I feel that something must be wrong with me.

Liz: You said that Marty made you turn round in the car when your wife died. Do you blame him for the accident?

Paul: Of course not! I know he blames me. He told me. He’s probably right. I should have been concentrating.

Liz: You blame yourself, then?

[No answer]

Liz: Paul. You’re still trapped by the memories of your wife. You want to be trapped. Perhaps that’s why your relationships with other women don’t last.

Paul: No. That’s not true. They broke it off, not me. I really tried with Joanna. I just can’t seem to communicate with... I try my best.

Interior. Andrew’s Home

Will: There’s no such thing as right and wrong in modern medicine.

Andrew: I just can’t seem to do anything right anymore.

Will: Shall we go down the Manor and talk this through?

Andrew: Kirsty’s gone.

Will: Gone?

Andrew: I think she’s left me.

Will: She said I wouldn’t listen anymore. I suppose she’s got a point really given everything that’s happened.

Will: You’ll be alright you know.

Andrew: You reckon.
Two themes should be noted here. First, romance is a predominantly intra-incomer, intra-professional pursuit. So, for instance, in Heartbeat Nick is with Jo, although there were hints of romance with Maggie. While in Peak Practice, Erica was with a Doctor living in Manchester but then falls for David, who is married Kirsty from
Liverpool. Will has brief relationship with a drugs rep but then starts a relationship with a incoming doctor from another health centre, Kate Webster. In Dangerfield, Paul was beginning to find his feet in a relationship with fellow practitioner Joanna Stevens, who leaves him. He then starts a relationship with his counsellor. Second, it is also exclusively heterosexual in form, concurring with the suggestion by Bell and Valentine (1995) that constructions of rural space are often associated with hegemonic sexualities.

4.3.3 Commodified Competencies

These personal qualities of incoming professionals are complemented in turn by a particular set of competencies surrounding their ownership and use of commodities. First, protagonists working along this chain of signification are often seen to be in possession of, and control over modern technology, from mobile phones to lap-top and stand-alone computers. This point is also true of Heartbeat and PC Nick Rowan, albeit to a lesser degree and of different temporal resonance (see Figure 4.18).

Figure 4.18 Professionals as Owners and Users of Technology
In the case of Dangerfield and Peak Practice, technological possessions act as signifiers of affluence, while in all dramas technological know-how works in tandem with notions of professional expertise, allowing these characters to appear dynamic and in control of narrative events. Combined with clever uses of camera the effect is powerful. Consider for instance Figure 4.19 and the conjunction of *mise en scène* and *shot*: a tilted shot that emphasises character authority as it looks up to Dr Dangerfield answering his call on the mobile phone.

**Figure 4.19 Visual Constructions of Power and Technology**

Notice too in this shot the way that Paul has been dressed. Dangerfield shares with Peak Practice and Heartbeat the tendency to complement their problem solving function with a bodily appearance that is conservative but stylish, smart but relaxed. Dangerfield and Peak Practice regularly dress their leading men in Barbour jackets and natural commodities such as woollen overcoats and chunky sweaters, both markers of class identity and rurality (Thrift 1989; Urry 1995), as well as open collar shorts, crease-less trousers and brogue shoes. Style and authority pervades the dress sense of Peak Practice's leading lady too, who complements the relaxed formality and sophistication of the male doctors with a predilection for casual working suits and again woollen overcoats, decorative scarves and fur hats, simple jewellery and
make-up. When out of uniform, Heartbeat's main protagonists also continue the propensity for woollen products, particularly Jo and Maggie, while as suggested, Nick also displays an understated appreciation for the fashions of his time, from the leather coat and bryl-creamed hair, to the sheepskin coat (yet another natural commodity) and the roll neck sweater (see Figure 4.20).

**Figure 4.20 The Dress Sense of Professionals**

Surrounding these bodily appearances are the domestic spaces in which the professionals live. Whereas the homes of Heartbeat's main protagonists are modestly drawn, constructing professional lifestyles as what some might see as an idyllic rural simplicity (see Halfacree 1995). Dangerfield and Peak Practice reverse this principle with the display of spacious and lavishly designed homes set in well-managed and extensive gardens: from Dr. Dangerfield's
large country home and Dr David Shearer's farmhouse, the lifestyles of the rural middle class appear affluent worlds indeed. Peak Practice also depicts a large derelict house in the country being gentrified by Erica, a symbolic construction that bears symmetry with the class colonisation of material rural spaces, (see Phillips 1993), (see Figure 4.21).

**Figure 4.21 The Domestic Spaces of Professionals**

Furthermore, working in relation to bodily dress and domestic spaces are signifiers of dynamism, style and affluence associated with ownership and choice in private transport among incoming professionals. So, for instance, Will Shepard and Paul Dangerfield traverse the countryside in Range Rover Discoveries and Maggie Bolton in a Land Rover, again, often thought to be important markers of middle class taste and identity in the countryside rurality (Thrift 1989; Urry 1995). Impressions of style, affluence and dynamism are at work in Erica Matthews' choice of a sporty soft-top as it does in David Attwood possession of a distinctive classic car. The dynamism of Erica's soft-top is at work in Jo Weston and Nick Rowan's use of sports cars. While these particular cars are of
their historical epoch, from the position of a contemporary audience, they might also be granted a certain classic taste and appeal. It is also worth noting that in preference to the conventional police car, PC Rowan's decision to dash around the village of Aidensfield on a motorbike could be said to emphasise the idea of the dynamic professional (see Figure 4.22).

Figure 4.22 Private Transport and Professionals

Signifiers of affluence, taste and rurality are also at work in the wider social pursuits that these leading protagonists engage in (see Figure 4.23). So for instance, Nick and Jo are regularly shown horse riding and leaving Aidensfield for the weekend in their sports cars. Heartbeat also has the tendency to construct main protagonists as knowledgeable of popular cultural forms. While the sixties sounds of Heartbeat are often used as soundtracks (i.e. non-diegetically) to comment on the events of the narrative, the few occasions when it is seen to operate within the storytelling world (i.e. diegetically) it is generally the leading protagonists who initiate its presence, (e.g. leading protagonists may tune into a song on to a radio, or play a record). Images of
Nick and Jo horse riding are comparable with the social pursuits of Dangerfield, who spends much of his spare time looking after his pet hawk. The protagonists in both Peak Practice and Dangerfield also have a predilection for dining in expensive looking restaurants, attending exclusive social functions, such as dinner dances and Boxing evenings, as well as holding exclusively intra-professional dinner parties in which culinary expertise is brought to the fore. Dangerfield is also constituted as something of a connoisseur of art with a tendency to sit at home listening to classical music.

Figure 4.23 The Social Pursuits of Professionals
4.4 Supporting Protagonists

The argument this discussion is beginning to make, then, is that the rural worlds of these dramas are dominated by an established cast characters whose incomer and professional identity, and their status as problem solvers, are constructed in conjunction with other, overwhelmingly positive, markers of cultural competence in space. Set in relation to these leading protagonists are a wider cast of established characters whose narrative function it is to facilitate or hinder the actions of the main protagonists. These identities are often less developed and explored by the respective dramas, although in important ways they can be seen to replicate and contradict the identities of the main protagonists. In this section I wish to draw attention to three broad categories of supporting protagonists. First, those sharing with the lead characters a similar occupational identity. Second, characters that constitute the family and partners of main protagonists. Third, those supporting actors displaying quite different occupational identities.

4.4.1 Characters with Professional Identities

The first group of characters to be drawn attention to in this respect, then, are supporting protagonists who, I would suggest, share with the leading protagonists a professional occupational function: characters that could be read as displaying a middle or service class identity. So for instance, in Heartbeat Nick is supported in his work by Sergeant Oscar Blaketon, PC Alf Ventress and PC Phil Bellamy, all of whom reside at the police station in the town of Ashfordly that services the North Yorkshire
moors. The GPs in Peak Practice have the support of Beeches’ Practice Nurse Laura Elliott, while Dr Will Preston’s lover and confidant is Dr Kate Webster from a Rival Health Centre. Dr Dangerfield is surrounded by a host of professional colleagues from Detective Inspector Frank Dagley, Detective Sergeant Helen Diamond and a Sergeant known as Keith (surname unknown) in the Warwickshire Police Constabulary to Dr Annie Robbins, Dr Shaaban, Dr Nick Mackenzie and bereavement counsellor Liz Moss, all working in the Warwick Practice (see Figure 4.24).

In each of these series professional characters also share with the main protagonists an incomer identity. In Heartbeat, all characters live outside of the village of Aidensfield. Both Ventress and Bellamy reside in the town of Ashfordly, while Blaketon lives in the town of Pickering. In a narrative sense, events often conspire for them to leave their desks in the police station and enter the village from outside. This combination: residing elsewhere and entering the community shares much similarity with the identity of the lead protagonist in Dangerfield, and it is in this sense that characters might read as incomers. Like Dangerfield too, one of these characters, Sergeant Blaketon, is very much constructed as an outsider to the village: a figure of authority who should be approached with caution. This is not the case with Ventress and Bellamy, however. Despite living outside of the village they display strong social bonds with those within it, regularly participating in formal and informal recreation. Moreover, what should be noted with regards to all these characters is the way they
Figure 4.24 Supporting Protagonists with Professional Identities

Heartbeat

Sergeant Oscar Blaketon
PC Alf Ventress
PC Phil Bellamy

Peak Practice

Dr Kate Webster
Nurse Laura Elliot

Dangerfield

Keith
DI Frank Dagley
DS Helen Diamond

Dr Shabban
Counsellor Liz Moss
Dr Nick Mackenzie
Dr Annie Roberts

speak with accents that may arguably be read as markers of Yorkshire identity. I feel this is truer of Ventress and Bellamy than it is of Blaketon, but what this could be
said to amount to is a sense that these characters also display a sense of localism. Broadly speaking, however, my reading of these characters is to position them as incomers.

The critical point I wish to make in relation to these particular identities is the way they tend to invert many of the competencies of the main protagonists. In particular, while their occupational identity might be seen to offer them a certain problem solving capability, this is always countered by personal flaws of disposition. In contrast to the fair minded and intuitive professional main protagonists, Blaketon, for instance, is depicted as an officious and cold-hearted Sergeant who tends to make hasty assessments of situations; assessments based more on personal prejudice and less on a sense of rational professional judgement. Blaketon never seems to know what is 'really' going on. Through its omnipresent mode of narration, Heartbeat constantly offers information to the audience which suggests that Blaketon’s assessment of situations are consistently inaccurate.

Furthermore, while the main protagonist’s in Heartbeat appear self-actualisers, the character’s Ventress and Bellamy are generally shown as apathetic professionals who appear more interested in reading newspapers, smoking cigarettes, eating snacks and throwing paper around than solving crime and building their careers. Their power to intervene in a situation is contradicted by their lack of motivation, disinterested even, in the events at hand. One result of this, it could be argued, is to construct quite positive notions of rural authority: a carefree world in which the immediate gratification of a cup of tea will
always take precedent over the issue at hand. Little appears pressing in this cosy world of Ashfordly police station (see Figure 4.25).

Figure 4.25 Professionals and the Rural Workplace in Heartbeat

While it should be noted that PC Rowan is, in part, defined by this relaxed world of Heartbeat’s police station, regularly standing around drinking coffee with his colleagues, I believe that two quite different notions of the incomer professional emerge in these dramas. On the one hand, there are the dynamic and culturally competent professional incomers who actively and successfully engage with problems arising in these rural spaces. On the other, there are the professional incomers whose actions appear ineffective, inconsequential and somewhat foolish.
This inversion of identities also continues to a degree in Dangerfield. In the case of Paul Dangerfield’s surgery colleagues, protagonists constitute only a minor function in the determining the shape of narrative events, although as suggested earlier, his bereavement counsellor, lover and colleague, Liz Moss, is occasionally turned to for advice. Unlike Paul, however, these work place colleagues rarely enter the countryside to help with the resolution of conflict. They are usually confined to the practice in Warwick, providing light relief to the main episodic narrative, such as the apathetic and dithering Dr Mackenzie who constantly speaks of his strained relationship with his wife, or Dr Shaaban who occasionally adds words of amusing profundity to minor situations of conflict. As such, these thinly drawn characterisations of Dangerfield’s work based colleagues only serve to emphasise the extent of Paul’s control over the nature and course of narrative events.

In contrast, colleagues in the police constabulary, all again based in the town of Warwick, serve a more dynamic function in the addressing the conflict at hand. They share with Paul Dangerfield and Sergeant Blaketon a sense of being outsiders to these communities, and just like Heartbeat, these characters invert the cultural competencies of the main protagonist in negotiating rural social relations. Characters either appear to lag behind Dangerfield in understanding the exact nature of conflict, or otherwise assert themselves on a situation inappropriately.

So for instance, there is DI Dagley, whose cavalier attitude towards situations contrasts sharply with
Dangerfield's overwhelmingly measured and accurate assessments of events, a replication of the Blaketon-Rowan relationship. This often results in Dagley taking inappropriate and unsympathetic action towards those living in rural areas. Dagley consistently acts as a 'hothead' who enters the countryside, usually with an excessive fleet of police cars in tow, to impose his force upon others (see Figure 4.26). These negative constructions of the incoming professional can also be quite subtly drawn. Events often conspire to show urban based protagonists to be insensitive to the countryside, such as an episode when a Sergeant arrives in a wood and then starts treading over wild flowers (see Figure 4.27).

**Figure 4.26 Dangerfield’s Colleagues Arrive in the Countryside (a) (from Games)**

**Figure 4.27 Dangerfield’s Colleagues Arrive in the Countryside (b) (from Eden)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constable:</th>
<th>Sergeant! Those are wild flowers. I don't think you should be walking there.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sergeant:</td>
<td>(joking) I knew that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because Peak Practice dominates narrative events around the world of four established main protagonists it is perhaps of no surprise to find that, unlike Dangerfield,
there is often little room for developing too many other permanent characters. As noted earlier, however, Peak Practice does develop two supporting characters that share a professional identity with leading protagonists: Kate Webster and Laura Elliot. The important point to note about these characters is the way they replicate, rather than contradict the identities of the four GPS. Both could be read as incomers: Kate is a GP who arrives in Cardale from Nottingham, and heads up a rival health centre, while Laura is the practice nurse at the Beeches who was previously living and working in Africa. As wise, assertive, compassionate, motivated women, both share the competencies of disposition displayed by the GPS, only in a less prominent sense. However, in the episodes considered Kate Webster becomes an increasingly more central character in the episodes when she becomes embroiled in a tempestuous relationship with Will Shepard.

4.4.2 Character with Non Service/Middle Class Identities

The second group of secondary protagonists to be drawn attention to here concerns those established characters whose class identity departs from those of the main protagonists. Two broad types can be identified here. First, characters, who may be read as displaying a working class identity. By working class I refer to those characters undertaking manual work of a skilled and unskilled nature, an assumption which concurs, for instance, with Goldthorpe’s (1985) delimitation of this class grouping. This group is exclusive to Heartbeat and consists of Gina, the bar maid in the Aidensfield Arms and Claude Jeremiah Greengrass, a character who has a number of informal causal jobs, such as selling scrap metal and
pheasants to the local estate. Both have quite different social identities. The former character, arrived in Aidensfield in the first series with a broad Liverpudian accent and the fashions of her times (See Figure 4.28). The biography here was that she was sent to Aidensfield to live with her Uncle George because she had been involved in petty crime in Liverpool. This was a street wise city person sent to the countryside to rehabilitate; a process that must have work remarkably well because Gina is a incomer with a strong sense of morality. Gina appears to know right from wrong. In doing so, she shares many of the competencies of the professional incomers, passing on all relevant information to them, and often chastising George and other locals in the process. Her ability to do this is because, like PC Rowan, she’s integrated into the community, in this case, by dint of her position at the centre of one of Heartbeat principal social-spaces: the pub.

Greengrass in contrast, has a strong local identity, having lived in the village all of his life. Greengrass’ narrative function differs sharply from Gina, taking advantage of minor opportunities to make money from disreputable means. Donning a yellow waistcoat, cravat and hat, and living in a farmhouse surrounded by junk Greengrass’ identity is developed as a maverick one. From a narrative point of view Greengrass could be said to embody a vision of local crime that appears opportunistic.
rather than contrived, minor rather than major, harmless rather than harmful, irrelevant rather than serious, flawed rather than foolproof. Through Greengrass, Heartbeat appears to simultaneously construct a nostalgic idea of the crime of yesteryear, and a mocking assessment of the rural local, unable to execute crime. As will be shown in the following chapter, whereas the events of the main series narrative encourage enigma and suspense, Greengrass' fate appears entirely predictable and easily dealt with by leading protagonists such as PC Rowan. These are crimes that never appear likely to go unnoticed (see Figure 4.29).

Figure 4.29 Claude Jeremiah Greengrass, the working class local

The second type of protagonist that I wish to highlight are those who constitute what might be termed the 'petite bourgeoisie' of these rural settings of Heartbeat and Peak Practice, a term I borrow from the work of Wright (1978) and by which I mean those established characters who run small scale businesses in these rural worlds. This type of protagonist is present in Heartbeat and Peak Practice, and
in both cases, find its expression in the guise of the village publicans. In the case of Heartbeat, this refers to George Ward, publican of 'The Aidensfield Arms', and in Peak Practice, James and Chloe White who run 'The Manor Hotel' (which is actually a public house not a hotel) in Cardale. In both cases, these characters are developed as hospitable hosts of an intimate rural space and both serve a narrative function of overhearing and passing on key information. In the case of Peak Practice, the character biographies to James and Chloe are that they moved to the Cardale from Manchester to take up the reins of the public house. In Heartbeat, however, George is constructed as the local, with a broad North Yorkshire accent and a biography of living in the village all his life, apart from some time spent away in the war (see Figure 4.30)

Figure 4.30 The Petite Bourgeoisie in Heartbeat and Peak Practice

Like those with working class identities in Heartbeat, interesting differences appear to be at work around the social identities of local and incomer. In Peak Practice, the incomer petite bourgeoisie appear to be willing helpers to the causes of the problem solvers. Their practices are complicit with helping the doctors' address and resolve conflict. In Heartbeat, however, George can appear
untrustworthy and prejudiced, often choosing to withhold information if it suits his own ends. George is simultaneously developed as the hospitable host and the slightly deviant and flawed local in relation to the problem solving incomers. Moreover, because George shares the running of the village pub with his niece Gina, the negative competencies of George's local identity are arguably emphasised.

4.4.3 Supporting Protagonists as Family

The third and final category among the supporting characters that I wish to draw attention to refers to the immediate families of the leading protagonists. In Dangerfield, these are built around his son and daughter, Marty and Al, who in narrative terms serve to complexify the emotional dilemmas of the main protagonists. The central point I wish to draw attention to here is the way these characters become vehicles for emphasising the competencies of both commodity and disposition that characterises the service/middle class identity of their father (see Figure 4.31).

**Figure 4.31 Dangerfield’s Middle Class Children***

*The actors displayed above are replacements for the original Al and Marty, although their identities have not changed.*
In terms of disposition both Marty and Al are developed, for instance, as characters with strong wills and independent minds. These are characters who have well developed senses of right and wrong, and appeared empowered to command the direction of their lives, such as Al’s decision to leave home and move into a cottage in remote woodland, or Marty’s decision to become a voluntary worker helping homeless people in Warwick. Moreover, these manifestations of disposition are routed through the ownership of commodities. Al is only 18, but has afforded (courtesy of her father) a cottage in the country. Marty helps the homeless, but drives to work in a classic sports car (see Figure 4.32).

Figure 4.32 The Comfortable Lifestyles of Al and Marty

In Heartbeat, the key figure of family life in the professional households is PC Rowan’s mother in law, Eileen Reynolds, who moved from London to live with Nick following the death of his wife and fellow professional, GP Kate Rowan. However, in contrast to Dangerfield’s children, Eileen’s character is only thinly drawn. Her narrative function appears only that of serving Nick dinner and breakfast, although she is occasionally seen to replicate some of the dispositional qualities of the professional incomers, offering Nick advice on courses of action, and in particular, encouraging him to take promotion (see Figure 4.33).
In Peak Practice, Dr David's domestic circumstances is the one example of a stable nuclear family in the story world of this production. While David's wife has been constructed as suffering from manic depression, their happy children are regularly brought to the fore, and might arguably act as a symbol of idyllic rural childhoods, as noted in other media by Jones (1997). Mention must also be briefly given to Andrew Attwood's wife, Kirsty, who, as will be shown later, acts as a key site for developing ideas of the unsettled middle class incomer in the country, wishing to return to the urban. Kirsty also displays many of the competencies of the GPs: she is strong minded, assertive, compassionate, emotionally complex, and occasionally acts as the sounding board for Dr Attwood's dilemmas (see Figure 4.34).
4.5 Summary

The objective of this chapter has been to draw attention to those aspects of the three productions that are constitutive of the story telling world, and in particular, how these develop around particular rural identities. While established senses of setting and character could be read in a variety of different ways, a number of salient points have emerged. At one level of reading these dramas' foster highly positive visions of rurality. With a few exceptions these are worlds of abundant flora and fauna, dwelling on views of village settlement, unobstructed views over extensive landscapes, and within this, a regional vernacular that is rarely departed from. Even when cast in something other than idyllic sunlight broader aspects of production style will often, although not exclusively, encourage a sympathetic reading of the countryside to be made. In Peak Practice, Dangerfield and Heartbeat these positive visions of rurality will embellish a sense of urbanity too, although in Peak Practice urbanity and rurality will sometimes be set up in opposition to each other, to the effect that an idyllic rurality is emphasised. So too might these dramas evoke a feeling of a timeless rurality, and in the case of Heartbeat, a feeling of nostalgia for a recent past.

These rural worlds are dominated and regulated, in turn, by problem solving incomers whose ability to address narrative conflict is defined by their occupational status as professionals on one hand, and a wider set of cultural competencies on the other. Indeed, the social-spatial lifestyles and practices of middle class incomers are configured in a highly positive fashion. In Heartbeat and
Peak Practice, these positive constructions are emphasised further through their insider position in established village settings where idyllic conceptions of rural community are constantly brought to the fore. Ideas of idyllic rural communities are somewhat downplayed in Dangerfield. Visually, it creates highly idyllic images of village setting, but these are never fully known. It accentuates the private world of the single main protagonist who regulates rural communities from the outside.

Cultural competencies of disposition and commodity were show to be often replicated through the wider families of the main protagonists, although other supporting characterisations sharing a professional incomer identity were often characterised quite differently. While some did replicate notions of the dynamic and culturally competent professional incomer, many also inverted this idea, presenting such identities as ineffective, inconsequential and somewhat foolish. Other incomers residing in the villages of Cardale and Aidensfield tended to collude with the professional incomers and demonstrate some of their positive cultural competencies, while locals were constructed as untrustworthy and somewhat comic.

These relations constitute the story worlds of the three dramas, the established senses of setting and character through which the events of particular narrative will unfold. In describing these relations, then, discussion has emphasised some of the enduring social-spatial identities of these dramas, although a different approach to reading these dramas could be taken. An approach that would consider these productions as a collection of events
designed in space and time. In other words, a storytelling medium that brings these story worlds alive, and within this, potentially open to a variety of transformations as particular narrative events unfold. It is to this issue that discussion now turns.
Chapter 5

Story Events
5.1 Introduction

One of the assertions of Chapter 3 was that the established story worlds of character and setting are constructed through the events of a particular story, events that may in turn, bring a variety of different ideas about the countryside into play. The suggestion in this respect was that narrative design could be distinguished into series and serial story structure respectively, both of which will be characteristic features of these dramas. The focus of the first section of analysis in this chapter is on series narrative structures, and in particular, those narratives that come to dominate screen time within an individual episode.

As Chapter 3 explained, series narrative design is likely to be indicative of the archplot story formation; a formation in which events move progressively through the stages of equilibrium, dis-equilibrium and equilibrium. Using this model, the subsequent discussion begins by exploring how the texts of the three dramas follow the first of these protocols (i.e. equilibrium) before introducing the principal focus of conflict within an individual episode, and how such images might then relate to particular rural identities. It will be argued that many of these texts construct ideas of equilibrium through different notions of an idyllic rurality, which are then superseded by the relations of conflict at work in the inciting incident (i.e. the event which heralds conflict). The inciting incident is shown to encourage both positive and negative visions of both setting and character as conflict emerges around notions of local, incomer, and extra-personal social forces brought to bear upon these
worlds. Using case study texts from each production, the analysis then goes on to explore how conflict progresses from these inciting incidents around notions of the story 'idea' and 'counter-idea'. The suggestion here is that inciting incidents set up a particular construction of social-spatial identity will then either be transformed or affirmed as the events of the story unfold.

The chapter then goes on to consider subsidiary narratives at work in the productions. From the professional-incomer dilemmas of staying and leaving, 'fitting-in' and 'not fitting-in', to the misdemeanours of Heartbeat's comic local, Greengrass, this second section of discussion touches upon the multitude of other important narratives, both series and serial in design, that are interwoven with these stories, but which constitute quantitatively less of the action on display. Discussion concludes by re-emphasising the importance of reading these dramas as temporal and changing, as well as static and enduring, constructions of rurality.
5.2 Images of Equilibrium

When viewing the initial scenes of these dramas, particularly the texts of Heartbeat and Peak Practice, episodes often appear to play on the idea of conflict free rural world, an idea that, as academic discourse has often argued, is an important element in notions of an idyllic rurality (e.g. Bunce 1994). A number of themes appear particularly important here. First, idyllic images of rural landscapes combined with recreational pursuits (see Figure 5.1). So for instance, consider Heartbeat's Sitting Off the Dock of the Bay which opens with a tracking shot across the sun filled back garden of Nick Rowan's police house, where himself and Eileen relax with his baby to the sounds of the radio playing the heart warming sounds of 'Stranger on the Shore'. Or consider Peak Practice's Running to Hide, which opens on David and friend filling their lungs on an early morning jog to the backdrop of rolling hills and piano music, and upon reaching the top of a hill, remarking that, "this is beautiful, yer really get away from it out here".

In the same series, consider the episode Classics which opens with images of Andrew happily driving to a doctor's birthday party in his classic car against a spectacular backdrop of snow covered mountains combined with images of lavish food being prepared by his colleagues. In this case, the images at work also show how the recreational identities of the countryside are often dominated by the of pursuits of incomer professionals. This is particularly true of Heartbeat, such as in the opening shots to A Long Shot, which, to an accompanying piano score, shows school teacher Jo happily riding a horse through the countryside,
as does the episode *Frail Mortality* which depicts Jo and Nick racing to the top of the North Yorkshire Moor by horse back to the tune of sixties hit "I'm Alive" and as they do, watching horse drawn gypsy cabins leaving the village.
The leisure time pursuits of the main protagonists also continue in Heartbeat's *Old Colonial's*, which opens on images of a foxhunt, meeting on the edge of a snow covered Aidensfield. While images of foxhunting may have a negative reading, mapped as they are onto ideas about cruelty to animals, and the exclusivity of landed pursuits in the countryside, the vision presented is arguably not a negative construction of this rural tradition. Overlain with up-beat piano music and depicting a pleasant exchange of greetings between one member of hunt and PC Rowan as he passes by, the images constitute the practice as part of a vibrant and close knit rural community that is unproblematic to the world in which it takes place.

Idyllic visions of rural community are, in fact, common to episodes wishing to establish the idea of equilibrium (see Figure 5.2). Peak Practice's *In Safe Hands* opens on images of a lively village pub bonding in the celebrations of a soon to be married villager, while the Episode *Heart and Soul* opens on a heart warming depiction of a children's party in the same location. Similarly, *The Price* begins with a montage of slow moving images of Cardale combined with the sounds of children singing the hymn 'Jerusalem', while *Innocent Blood* opens on an image of David chatting idly with locals in the village shop. Dangerfield also develops this theme of warm and intimate community in *Old Dog Old Tricks*, which opens on a slow moving panning shot across a bustling village green. So too does Heartbeat, in the episode *Unfinished Business*, whose initial scene depicts a local school boy being given sweets by a kindly village station master. Similarly, the episode *Forget Me Not* depicts Eileen Reynold's waving at a new arrival in the village: "Welcome to Aidensfield!" she
cries as the removal vans pull in. It is also worth noting in this case that upon their first meeting she is already baking him cakes in a gesture of goodwill and friendship!

In one particularly interesting example from Peak Practice, the episode *Looking Back* actually uses the idea of urban dis-equilibrium to construct an idea of rural equilibrium, switching from an opening image of a young homeless man victimised by some passers by as he asks for change on a wet and dreary urban flyover, to an image of Andrew and his partner Kirsty, drinking coffee in the village pub. Here, the positive reading of rurality in the second image is charged by the negative reading of urbanity in the first as it was in Figure 4.7: an idyllic image empowered by the anti-urban, even though the image of urbanity is no longer present (see Figure 5.3).
Heartbeat also creates ideas of initial equilibrium around positive images of professional working life in the countryside, such as in *Blood Sports* which opens on Nick driving through the countryside to the soundtrack of rock 'n' roll hit 'Free', or in *Thanks to Alfred* which depicts constables sitting around drinking tea and reading the newspaper in the police station (see Figure 5.4).

**Figure 5.4 Rural Equilibrium and Working Practices**

The aim of this section is to show how each of the three dramas constitute a process of dis-equilibrium in these rural series through an inciting incident. In particular, it will show that scheme of dis-equilibrium will always be implicitly defined, and defined by, the social-spatial identities of characters. Indeed, the development of the inciting incident creates particular ideas about both established and temporarily characterisations that will then be explored in the remainder of the narrative. It is useful in this respect to think of the inciting incident as aspirating three broad types of social-spatial
5.3 The Inciting Incident

In Chapter 3, it was explained how notions of equilibrium under the archplot formation are superseded by an inciting incident that changes the condition of the story world from one of equilibrium to one of dis-equilibrium. It was explained how the inciting incident was designed around two elements: the set-up (i.e. an occurrence) and the pay-off (the implication of the occurrence). In one sense, this principle of transformation from equilibrium to the inciting incident is an indicative feature of those episodes that open on an idyllic reading of the countryside. All these episodes race towards the set-up element of the inciting incident with urgency, transforming the story world into a world of conflict. The remaining episodes within these series eschew the process of transformation from equilibrium to dis-equilibrium entirely, by developing solely from the basis of an inciting incident, such as Dangerfield’s Episode 1 (untitled) where the drama opens on a vicious and violent argument between a couple.

The aim of this section is to show how each of the three dramas constitutes a sense of dis-equilibrium in these rural worlds through an inciting incident. In particular, it will show that senses of dis-equilibrium will always be implicitly defining, and defined by, the social-spatial identities of character. Indeed, the development of the inciting incident creates particular ideas about both established and temporarily characterisations that will then be explored in the remainder of the narrative. It is useful in this respect to think of the inciting incident inaugurating three broad types of social-spatial
narrative: incidents based around locals, incidents based around the arrival of an incomer, and incidents based around an extra-personal force in the countryside. Consider each of these in turn.

5.3.1 Inciting Incidents Developed around Locals

The first types of inciting incident are those based around locals, and tend to reveal develop in one of two ways. Either locals are constructed as figures of personal tragedy, or they are constructed as figures of criminal suspicion. While the origins of these characters are never explicitly explained by the drama, I use the term ‘local’ here to refer to characters who display the three following features. First, they reside in an established village space. Second, they display accents that could be read as characteristic of the regional identities of the drama. And third, they are all addressed with a certain familiarity by main protagonists.

With one exception, where a villager is knocked down in Heartbeat’s Frail Mortality, incidents where locals are positioned as victims of personal tragedy are monopolised by Peak Practice and its preoccupation with the theme of health, or to be more precise, ill-health. So for instance, Running to Hide follows its opening images with the sacking of David’s running mate for almost killing a coach load of village school children (set-up), which is in turn followed by his denial of Parkinson’s disease (pay-off). The episode In Safe Hands follows its images of people drinking together in a pub with the news that a retired man is diagnosed with cancer of the liver (set-up), who then refuses to have a potentially life saving operation (pay-off). In Innocent Blood the son of a
shopkeeper to whom David was idly chatting has now got Leukaemia (set-up) and the parents are refusing to tell him (pay-off). In *Classics* Dr Andrew breaks down on his way to a party in the cold winter night of the Peak District (set-up), which is then followed by the horror of a car crash in which a lorry driver is seriously hurt (pay-off).

It is worth mentioning in this last instance how important this event is to a reading of the material countryside in this drama. Whereas snow covered mountains and Andrew visiting a party formed an idyllic image in the opening images to this drama, the Peak District now becomes a symbol of the treachery and unforgiving nature of the rural, (See Figure 5.5) a point which bears symmetry with the progression of narrative conflict in rural horror films (see Bell 1997).

Figure 5.5 Changing Identities of the Rural

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<th>Time</th>
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<td>![Image 1]</td>
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This point is also true of Peak Practice's *Holding it Together*, which to great dramatic effect develops the inciting incident by simultaneously inter-cutting between ideas of rural equilibrium and dis-equilibrium. It commences with a slow moving long shot of open countryside overlain with piano music that appears to suggest that this is a world of anything but conflict; a world to be indulged for its beauty and serenity. But this is then inter-cut with images of Erica, rushing to make her

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appointments (set-up) to such an effect that she appears to force a car in a fast flowing river, thereby putting a child in hospital (pay-off), (see Figure 5.6).

**Figure 5.6 Inter-cutting Equilibrium and Dis-equilibrium**

The idea of personal tragedy in these dramas constructs social-spatial identity in very particular ways. Overwhelmingly, they are built around local male characters who, according to my reading, are working class villagers. I make that reading, as I did in the last chapter, because these characters are generally manual workers of a skilled and unskilled nature (such as construction workers, lorry drivers and mechanics).

The important point I wish to note here is the way that many of these characters appear to be constructed as figures of derision, often in relation to the wisdom and assertiveness of incoming professionals. So for instance, the villager in *In Safe Hands* diagnosed with cancer of the liver who won't take the Doctor Andrew's advice over an operation, happens to have worked for years as a labourer.
in a plastics factory. The man in *Eye of the Storm* who can't look after his daughter properly and foolishly negates the advice of the doctor, lives in the village and works there as a local mechanic. The man with Parkinson's disease in *Running to Hide*, who won't face up to the truth of his condition in spite of Doctor's Andrew's efforts is a local bus driver who used to work in the colliery. The man and woman in *Innocent Blood* who won't tell their son he has Leukaemia despite the fact that it will enhance his treatment, relies on the income the mother gets from stacking shelves in the village shop. In the episode *Classics*, a local man seriously injured in a car accident happens to be the victim of a lorry driver from the village too busy singing along to songs on the radio to concentrate on the road ahead (see Figure 5.7).

**Figure 5.7 Working classes Locals as Victims of Personal Tragedy**
In two instances, Peak Practice’s *Holding it Together* and Heartbeat’s *Frail Mortality*, this pattern appears somewhat reversed. Instead of working class locals appearing ignorant, they are shown as the victims of other peoples’ actions. In both cases these actions involve car accidents in which locals are seriously injured in some way, in the former case, Mick the factory worker and his daughter, in the latter Susan, the local cleaner and carer. These incidents are propagated, in turn, by the unintentional acts of characters with identical social-spatial identities. In both cases, the car accidents occur through the actions of female incomers who are struggling to execute their professional tasks in the face of a hostile physical environment.

The second theme that appears to be at work around these local identities is to construct them as figures of criminal suspicion on the part of incomer professionals. This is the case, for instance, in Heartbeat’s *A Long Shot*. A local child appears to be being abused by his father (set-up) instigating, in turn, an investigation in those claims (pay-off). It is also at work in *Old Colonials* where the theft of antiques takes place on Lord Ashfordly’s Estate (set-up), initiating a police investigation into the estate manager (pay-off). In Peak Practice’s *Whipping Boy*, the theme of domestic child abuse is also implied (set-up) leading to an investigation by Drs Andrew and Will (pay-off). In Dangerfield’s *Episode 1* (untitled) an estranged women is shown arguing violently with her husband in the drive of their country home (set-up). This is then followed by the women instigating a hate mail campaign against her husband’s lover. Similarly, in Dangerfield’s *Still Waters* a body is discovered by a deserted reservoir (set-up) and a local man to that area
becomes the focus of Paul's investigation (pay-off). It is worth noting in both these Dangerfield episodes, the way that the relations of the rural image downplay the negativity of the criminal act. Dangerfield's *Still Waters* for example, visits the scene of the crime with a slow moving wide shot of the countryside, cast in sunlight, while in same series *Episode 1* (untitled) visually displays the affluence of protagonist lifestyles as the conflict unfolds (see figure 5.8).

**Figure 5.8 Positive Constructions of Negative Occurrences**

![Image of rural scenes and characters]

Finally, the theme of criminal acts on the part of a local is also at work in Dangerfield's *Episode 2* (*Untitiled*) when a villager is knocked down in a hit and run (set-up), and a local man becomes the object of suspicion (pay-off). Just like Peak Practice's *Holding it Together*, quite different impressions of rural social relations are created in developing this inciting incident. In this case, sun-filled images of Dangerfield, his partner and children relaxing at their country home.
are inter-cut with images of the person being run over as he leaves his house for work.

There appear two noticeable themes at work in the instigation of crime/criminal suspicion on the part of locals. First, criminal acts, with one exception, are all developed around males again. Second, reaction to these real or suspected crimes by the problem solving incomers differs depending on the class identities of the characters' generating the problem. In Heartbeat's *A long Shot* and Dangerfield's *Still Waters and Episode 2 (untitled)*, for instance, locals are treated incredulously by the problem solvers, and it just so happens that the objects of suspicion are characters that have, under the logic I outlined above, working class identities: an iron monger, mill worker and farm labourer respectively.

If the reactions of professionals are uniform, assertive and suspicious when inciting incidents are based around working class identities, it differs quite markedly in episodes where the locals are depicted with other, economically and culturally more powerful, class identities. In episodes such as Peak Practice's *Whipping Boy*, Heartbeat's *Old Colonials* and Dangerfield's *Episode 2 (untitled)* the problem creators are, respectively, the manager of a large fish farm, the manager of a local estate and a brain surgeon. Like the main protagonists, I would suggest these professional identities signify a middle class status. It is interesting therefore to find that leading characters in these cases are divided over whether the person is suspicious, and whether it is fair to intervene in their lives.
5.3.2 Inciting Incidents Developed around the Arrival of an Incomer in the Countryside

The second major theme present in these productions are inciting incidents based around arrival of an incomer in a country setting. In the episodes that I viewed the incomer scenario was predominant in Dangerfield and Heartbeat, but only featured in one episode of Peak Practice. Three themes appear of particular note in this respect.

First, incomers constructed as figures of vulnerability. This inciting incident occurred in three episodes, all from the series Dangerfield. In two of these episodes, the incomers are constructed as vulnerable in relation to the behaviour of people residing in the countryside setting where they arrive. In the episode Old Dog Old Tricks, for instance, a man arrives in a Warwickshire village (set-up) only to find himself victimised (pay-off) by the community. In Eden, a lady moves into an isolated woodland cottage (set-up) where a man in the woods is suspiciously watching her (pay-off).

In both these particular cases, the vulnerable incomer is constructed with the impression of middle class identity. In Eden, this impression is built out of the viewer’s wider knowledge of the character’s identity, for in this case, the incomer happens to be Al Dangerfield, who has moved in to a country cottage with her friend. In Old Dog Old Tricks, I feel the character is encouraged to be read as middle class because, for instance, he speaks with a noticeably ‘well to do’ accent and is introduced, biographically, as a retiree from a high status profession (he was an ex-general in the army). The locals in contrast, are shown as socially quite different. In Old
Dogs Old Tricks it just so happens that the locals victimising the man reside on a run down housing village estate, a construction that I believe encourages the reader to identify these locals as working class. In Eden, the man is shown as economically impoverished, living in a tent, and seemingly suffering from some kind of mental disorder. This latter character construct very much reminds me of the remarks Bell (1997) has made in relation to American rural horror, in which country folk are consistently constructed as backwood and menacing. There are other ways these identities may be read. Al is not only middle class, she is also a woman and in this sense, the countryside might be read as a site of female vulnerability. Similarly, Eden also shares with Old Dog Old Tricks constructions of particular age identities: Al being young and vulnerable in relation to a middle age character, while the ex-general is constructed as an elderly gentleman victimised predominantly by cruel village children.

These negative constructions are inverted in the third example from Dangerfield, Episode 4 (untitled), in which a Bosnian refugee is abandoned in Warwickshire (set-up) and then taken into the country home of the Dangerfield’s (pay-off). This incident simultaneously constructs child and middle class identities in the countryside as positive. That is, middle class lifestyles in the countryside as secure, happy and caring environments for children.

The second major theme developed around the arrival of a local is to construct them as figures of criminal suspicion. In Heartbeat, a similar logic was consistently
followed: a male character arrives from 'the city' which coincides with a criminal act (set up) in which they are implicated through the inquiries of the professional incomers (pay-off). This was the case, for instance, in the episodes *Something to Value*, *Forget me not* and *Saint Columba's Treasure*. The idea being encouraged in these cases appears that of the urban deviant unsettling the pre-ordained status quo of the village.

This reading of the urban incomer is often a matter of how these characters are constructed visually. Their dress sense always invites suspicion in the reading process, encouraging the viewer to arrive at the same assumptions of the problem solver. Heartbeat creates the feeling that these characters stand out as different, and should therefore not be trusted. So for instance, in the episodes that I considered one incomer walked around the village wearing a bobble hat and camera around his neck, another donned a trilby hat, pink shirt and suit, while another wore dark glasses both day and night (see Figure 5.9).

**Figure 5.9 Urban Incomers as Objects of Criminal Suspicion**

While this could be said to construct incomers quite negatively, there is a cultural competence at work here that is absent from the actions of locals. Indeed, where as the criminal acts of characters such as Greengrass
reveal the local to be foolish, in the case of incomers, crime is shown to be calculated, ambitious and potentially successful. It is also worth noting that, in all three cases, the criminal act involved the breach of local middle or upper class property. In *Saint Columba's Treasure*, for instance, the inciting incident depicts the break in to a reclusive Professor's country home, and his subsequent murder. In the episode *Something to Value* it portrays the theft of priceless wine from a wealthy land owner, while in *Forget Me Not*, events develop from the break in, and subsequent kidnapping of, a villager who runs an exclusive clothes shop in Ashfordly.

Moreover, each of these episodes provides further examples where production elements are also used to foster particular readings of space in *Heartbeat*. Set against these criminal acts are catchy sixties soundtracks which arguably lighten the overall tone of the crime being committed. In doing so, they could be said to create a sense of nostalgia around the events in hand. A sense that this is a time and place where crime is really not that bad, not that unsettling.

Inciting incidents that construct the incomer as criminal are also at work in the episodes of *Dangerfield*. So for instance, in *Treasure*, an emotionally unbalanced schoolteacher living in a town abducts a child and hides him in the countryside (set-up), which then precipitates a criminal inquiry (pay-off). Here the countryside acts as a space to prolong the crimes of urbanity; a space where urban deviants can hide away in secrecy. In the episode *Games*, a stranger is depicted suspiciously photographing *Dangerfield* as he certifies the death of a person in the
countryside (set-up) who then turns out to be fraud doctor who is visiting his patients in the country settings. Dangerfield duly investigates (pay-off). Finally, in the episode Tricks, the inciting incident depicts Dangerfield and police in a misty wood at dawn where a man from the town has hung himself (set-up). This corresponds with the arrival of a paranormal psychic in the areas, who becomes the focus of Dangerfield’s investigation.

The inciting incident to Tricks is an interesting example in the way that it totally contravenes many of the assumptions held about media constructions of rurality. Not only could the subject - paranormal activity - be read as unsettling, it also horrifies the inciting incident both visually and aurally. When Dangerfield and colleagues visit the site of a suicide in Tricks, for instance, viewers witness a man hanging from a tree in a misty wood at dawn, overlain with the forbidding sounds of a solo violin to boot! This is a world away from a cosy sun filled idyllic rurality (see Figure 5.10).

Figure 5.10 Horrifying the Inciting Incident

The third theme developed around the arrival of local is to construct them as socially marginal in some way who, by dint of their identity, create social division among those residing in the village. So for instance, in Peak Practice’s Looking Back, the incomer is a homeless young
man from the city of Derby, while in Heartbeat’s episode *Sitting Off the Dock of the Bay*, the incomer is a local arsonist returning to Aidensfield from Borstal (set-up) seeking forgiveness for his sins by the village (pay-off). Similarly, the episode *Giving the Game Away* in Heartbeat opens with the arrival of Errol, a black person from London, while in the episode *Blood Sports*, an escape convict and his child arrive in Aidensfield in a caravan. (see Figure 5.11).

**Figure 5.11 Socially Marginal Incomers as Figures of Ambivalence**

These set-ups all involve the pay-off of a mixed reception from which the drama develops. This ambivalence tends to create social division in two ways. First, they are constructed as objects of prejudice among locals, and objects of sympathy among the established incomers. This is the case in Heartbeat’s *Giving the Game Away* where Errol is treated with hostility and suspicion among locals, such as Alf the pub landlord, and warmly and non-judgementally by the incomers, from Gina, the bar maid from Liverpool, to PC Rowan. This is also the case in *Sitting Off the Dock of the Bay*, where the boy from Borstal seeking redemption for his actions finds himself ostracised by the locals and treated sympathetically by the established incomers.
Second, they are constructed as figure of ambivalence among incoming professionals. So, for instance, the incomer in Blood Sports is treated sympathetically by Maggie Bolton doing her rounds as the district Nurse, and suspiciously by PC Rowan, believing him to be up to no good. Similarly, in Peak Practice's Looking Back the arrival of a homeless person in Cardale divides a sympathetic Erica from an unsympathetic Will. Again, what is also at stake in both these cases is a gendered construction of the professional: the male professional as cold and unsympathetic, the female professional as warm and sympathetic.

5.3.3 Extra-Personal Forces and the Unified Community

Third and finally, there are inciting incidents that occasionally depict a village community in some sort of adversity through the occurrence of an extra-personal force. In Heartbeat's Unfinished Business for instance, a World War II bomb is about to be blown up the village (set-up) and the lives of everyone are now in danger (pay-off). In Peak Practice's The Price, the viewer is presented with the voices of children singing the hymn Jerusalem, which fade out over slow moving images of the village only for the viewer to then learn that future of the village school is in doubt (set-up) and that the village will have to fight to keep it open (pay-off). Rather than constituting a negative reading of rurality, however, in both cases the pay-off to the inciting incident appears to imply a positive construction of village community. The event at hand allows communities to appear unified in the presence of major social upheaval (see Figure 5.12).
Figure 5.12 Extra-personal Forces and the Unified Village

The aim of this Final section is to consider episodes developed around the narrative of personal tragedy. Two examples to be contemplated for this purpose are Peak Practice, a Bilking? it Together and in Safe Hands. As the following discussion will show, between the introduction of conflict and its dissolvement, such of these dramas necessitate transformation in the identity of the narrative’s central characters. In particular, it will argue that in the case of Peak Practice, events unfold in such a
5.4 The Progression and Resolution of Conflict

Understanding the nature of the inciting incidents I have outlined above is the crucial first step in understanding the readings of rurality the remaining body of a particular narrative can make. Not only do they often occupy a significant amount of screen time to develop, (sometimes up to 20 minutes of a 60-minute episode), they set up a particular problematic that will then be explored in the subsequent narrative events. In Chapter 3, it was shown how the idea of conflict set up in these inciting incidents is built around a story value (e.g. justice) that moves between an idea (e.g. justice will prevail because..) and counter-idea (e.g. justice will not prevail because..) as the story unfolds. Drawing upon a selection of case study episodes reflecting the three major styles of inciting incident, the following discussion will demonstrate how social-spatial identities developed at the start of the narrative can often be transformed, as well as affirmed, as the problematic at stake is gradually addressed and resolved through the idea and counter-idea.

5.4.1 Narratives of Personal Tragedy

The aim of this first section is to consider episodes developed around the narrative of personal tragedy. The two examples to be contemplated for this purpose are Peak Practice's *Holding it Together* and *In Safe Hands*. As the following discussion will show, between the introduction of conflict and its resolution, each of these dramas involves a transformation in the identity of the narrative central characters. In particular, it will argue that in the case of *Holding it Together*, events unfold in such a
way that working class locals' move from a position of sympathy to one of derision. This transformation is marked, in turn, by an increasingly positive reading of the incomer professional. In the case of *In Safe Hands*, it will show an opposite scenario to be at work.

As suggested in the last section, *Holding It Together* develops an inciting incident built around the actions of the doctor, Erica, in relation to Mick, the local factory worker, and his young daughter. Standing by her soft-top vehicle, mobile phone and map in hand, Erica struggles, to her increasing consternation, with finding her way round the Peak District: a world that middle class incomers - in spite of map, phone and car - struggle to traverse. As suggested earlier, what follows from this image is a scenario that is anything but idyllic. This sense of the frustrated professional incomer is followed by images of her speeding soft-top 'papping' its horn at a slow moving car, and then overtaking it on a winding country lane to the effect that it appears to force the car off the road and into a nearby river. And here the drama is quickly into a completely different reading of rurality altogether. One that emphasises, both through dramatic camera work and acting, the treachery and dangers of nature as Dr Erica seeks to save the passengers from the sinking wreck. As Soper (1995 P.71)) would put it: 'nature as foe' (see Figure 5.6 earlier).

For the purposes of this stage of discussion, the important point to make about this inciting incident is the way the readings of rurality at work are held together by the expression of conflict between a story idea and counter-idea, which is built in turn around a particular
story value. One possible way of reading this sequence, for instance, is to suggest that what is at stake here is a conflict over the story value of 'responsibility', developed around the interplay between the story idea that 'we should accept responsibility for our actions' and the counter-idea that, 'we should not always accept responsibility for our actions, because our actions are often determined by forces outside of our control'.

In the inciting incident the story idea (i.e. we should accept responsibility...) is expressed through Erica turning back to save the victims of her tempestuous reaction to the circumstances in which she finds herself (i.e. forget about the safety of others, Erica is a professional struggling to do her job within a difficult environment). In this sense, Erica is able to quickly redeem herself through her personal reaction to the events now at hand (i.e. Erica is horrified by what she has done and rushes back to deal with the consequences) and her professional identity (i.e. administering life saving first aid). The sequence of events on one hand therefore quickly transforms a negative social identity (i.e. problem creator) into a more positive one (i.e. problem solver).

Working alongside these developments is the counter-idea (i.e. we should not always accept responsibility...) which appears to redeem her actions further through a negative reading of rurality and a sympathetic reading of the professional and incomer. That is, Erica was only forced to rush because she was trying to make her mounting house calls. Was it really her fault? Are not her actions the symptom of her professional circumstances and the difficult environment in which she works (i.e. the rural
difficult environment in which she works (i.e. the rural as a treacherous landscape for humans; the poor middle class incomer who is simply out of her depth in the countryside).

The subsequent drama in *Holding It Together* then proceeds to unfold around this idea and the counter-idea, and as it does, brings particular constructions of social-spatial identity into play. In the subsequent scene, for instance, Erica stumbles into The Beeches post-accident and quite explicitly expresses the counter-idea (i.e. we shouldn't accept responsibility). Dripping wet she complains of the mounting number of house calls and her inability to find her way around the Peak District. In expressing this counter-idea, then, she continues to articulate the conflict through a sympathetic construction of incomer and professional identity set against a critical reading of rurality (see Figure 5.13).

In subsequent scenes, Erica then consistently preaches the story idea (i.e. we should accept responsibility) redeeming herself further as she starts a bedside vigil of the girl injured in the accident. The girl whose life she now feels responsible for. But something is afoot. Running alongside Erica's story is the realisation that Mick, the factory worker from the village who was driving the car forced in the river, is having blackouts and dizzy spells. The viewer initially learns this over and above the knowledge of the doctors (i.e. through omnipresent narration) as scenes show him dangerously dropping instruments at work.
**Figure 5.13 Conversation Between Will and Erica (Holding it Together)**

**Interior. Beeches Surgery**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Will</th>
<th>Erica</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will: Erica?</td>
<td>Erica: I was in a road accident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will: What happened?</td>
<td>Erica: I had a car crash!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will:</td>
<td>Erica: because I was late and I was going TOO fast! Do you want to know why I was late? I had 17 home visits this afternoon, which is a marked improvement on yesterday...and we're not talking inner cities here, because that I can handle. These patients are miles apart, I'm a locum, I don't know where these places are, I've been half way round the Peak District - you don't even have decent roads!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will: Are you alright?</td>
<td>Erica: The little girl has a suspected skull fracture, apart from that I'm fine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will:</td>
<td>Erica: This has got nothing to do with flu!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The suspicion now grows: did Mick, the working class local, cause the crash by having a blackout? Is Mick not accepting responsibility and transferring the blame instead onto the incomer and professional, Erica, through his silence? What follows from this is the gradual realisation by Will that Mick has, in fact, got a brain tumour. In typical Peak Practice style he denies the authority of the doctor's opinion, blaming the event on everyone but himself (i.e. the counter-idea). In this particular instance a derisive reading of working class identity is accentuated through visual symbols of cultural competency and power. When Mick dismisses Dr Will Shepard's suggestion that he has brain tumour it just so happens that Will, clean-cut and in a suit, should be standing over him (i.e. emphasising control) while an
unshaven Mick tucks into a fry-up (i.e. constructing ideas of poor diet and lifestyle), (see Figure 5.14).

Figure 5.14 Visual Constructions of Class Competence and Power (Holding It Together)

This plot turn culminates in a confrontation between Erica and Mick, built around the two premises at stake and emphasised visually through its staging in inclement weather (see Figure 5.15). This is then followed by a final act in which Mick, the working class local, eventually accepts responsibility for the crash (i.e. the

Figure 5.15 Conversation Between Erica and Mick (Holding it Together)

Exterior. Beeches Surgery

Mick: It [the tumour]'s got nothing to do with you!
Erica: Nothing to do with me! I've just been through hell thinking that I've killed your daughter. I need to hear this from you. Did you black out in the accident? I need you to tell me what happened
Mick: Yes I backed out
Erica: Did you blackout as I was overtaking?
Mick: Yes I had a black out! I've got a bloody brain tumour!
story idea) and the wishes of the doctor to have a brain operation. In doing so the local has been made to look weak, foolish and evasive in relation to the wisdom of Will and the strength of Erica's character. Erica is absolved: "This is the Doctor that saved your life", her mother says at the end as the girl gains consciousness. The key point that must be made about this particular episode, then, is the way that identities are gradually transformed over the telling of the story: as Erica's identity is constituted increasingly positively over the course of the unfolding events, Mick's identity is drawn increasingly negatively (see figure 5.16).

Now briefly compare this example to Peak Practice's In Safe Hands. In this particular case, the inciting incident presents the working class local man and the incomer professional in an entirely different relationship with each other. Roy Bennett, a retired plastics factory worker is sent to hospital for a scan because Dr Andrew suspects he has a gaulstone. Unfortunately, Roy returns with the news that he has tumour on his liver and if he does not have an operation he will die within 18 months. Roy, however, is of independent mind and doesn't appear to like doctor's fussing over him. He declines the hospital's offer of an operation: "It's a hell of a big decision, you shouldn't just rush into it" says Andrew, "My minds made up. I don't want the operation. And that's the way I want it!" Roy rages. In doing so, Roy expresses the story idea that "we should be allowed to take responsibility for our own lives, because only we know what is truly best for ourselves". Andrew, however, has different plans for Roy, expressed through the counter-idea that "we should take responsibility for the
**Figure 5.16 Social-Spatial Narrative of Peak Practice’s Holding it together**

**Equilibrium**
- Impression of Rural Tranquility

**Inciting Incident**
- Set-up: MC incomer Rushing/Lost
- Pay-off: Rural as difficult to traverse

- WC local as victim

- Counter-idea: Don’t Accept responsibility

**Idea: Accept Responsibility**
- MC incomer as life saviour
- MC incomer as Remorseful
- WC local as Foolish

**MC Incomer**
- as victim
- as Pressured
- Rural as Difficult to traverse

**WC Local**
- as suspicious
- as self deceiving

**MC Incomer**
- as problem solver

**MC = middle class**
**WC = working class**
lives of others when we think we know better”. He speaks to a consultant at the hospital, saying such lines as: "Roy didn't know what he was saying"; "Roy hasn't had a chance to think it through properly"; "Roy might change his mind if he thought again". What follows from this is an exploration of this idea and counter-idea as Andrew constantly preaches the ignorance of Roy's decision to his family.

This culminates in confrontation in the village square between Andrew and Roy in which Roy finally gives in: "I'll have the operation, you've got your way, but I'll thank you to respect my privacy in the future". It is at this point that a major reversal in identities is depicted. Whereas in the example Holding It Together, it was the working class local who moved from a positive to negative reading and the professional incomer from a more negative reading to positive, in this case, the opposite begins to happen. Roy has the operation against his wishes and dies because of post-operation complications. Andrew is blamed. The identifications that the viewer has been working with for the majority of the narrative are suddenly reversed (see Figure 5.17).

**Figure 5.17 Conversation Between Andrew and Roy Bennett's Daughter (In Safe Hands)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interior. Hospital</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daughter of Roy:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughter of Roy:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

220
I think it important to stress here that ending on negative constructions of main protagonists are rare indeed for these series, and even when this does occur events often conspire to reveal other positive competencies among the professionals. So for instance, in the episode just considered as if not to unsettle many of the assumption held about the competent professional the series ends on Andrew expressing remorse for his inability to listen (see the conversation in Figure 4.16 in Chapter 4). While the identity of a main protagonist is occasionally transformed a wholly negative reading of the professional is generally resisted (see Figure 5.18).
Figure 5.18 Social-Spatial Narrative of Peak Practice's In Safe Hands

Idea: Take responsibility for our own lives because we know best

- WC local as ignorant
- WC local as victim.
- MC incomer as remorseful & partially incompetent

Equilibrium

- Rural Community

Inciting Incident
- Set-up
  - Diagnosed Cancer
- Pay-off
  - Refuses Operation

Set-up

- MC incomer
  - Insists on Operation
  - as problem solver/wise

Counter-idea: take responsibility for others when we know what's best

Pay-off

- WC local
  - has operation

MC = middle Class
WC = working Class
5.4.2 Locals Arousing Criminal Suspicion

Narratives built around criminal acts on the part of a local are also constitutive of a transformation in identities. The example to be considered in this respect is Heartbeat's A Long Shot, whereby a local man becomes a figure of suspicion among the main protagonists. As the earlier discussion highlighted, the inciting incident to this narrative is based around a narrative of child abuse within a working class family. The focus of the conflict centres on the character of Len Schofield, the son of an ironmonger in the village. In the introductory scenes to this drama Len is initially caught playing truant from school and stealing from the village shop by PC Rowan, and then discovered to have severe bruises on his arm by schoolteacher Jo Weston. This inciting incident is therefore built round enrolling the concerns of the professional incomers as they start to speculate on Len's out of character behaviour.

As is the case in Heartbeat, when an issue arises the incomer professionals always start to share information and opinions over the nature of the problem (see Figure 5.19). In this instance, Jo makes certain inferences about Len's situation, quickly drawing the conclusion that he is the object of abuse by his single parent and father, the ironmonger, Harry. The inciting incident appears to open the narrative to the story value of "judgement". Here, Nick expresses the story idea of, "we shouldn't judge people by appearances because our assumptions are probably ill founded" (i.e. 'boys get bruises all the time don't they?'), and the counter-idea expressed by Jo, "we should judge people by appearances because our assumptions are
Figure 5.19 Conversation between Jo and Nick (A Long Shot)

Interior. Jo’s Home

Jo: That boy worries me Nick. He used to be top of the class according to his reports. Now he’s just a trouble maker.

Nick: Well, I’ve had a word with his dad this morning. Perhaps he’ll talk some sense into him.

Jo: Well I was wondering whether he might be part of the problem.

Nick: Why’s that?

Jo: He came to school with some nasty bruises today; said he got them playing cricket.

Nick: What, at this time of the year?

Jo: Better than admitting your dad beats you up.

Nick: Oh come on, you don’t know that. Boys get bruises all the time don’t they?

Jo: Well, I hope your right. There’s no mum around is there?

Nick: No.

probably well founded' (i.e. There's no mum...he must be abusing the boy').

While the above scene appears to map Jo concerns onto ideas of gender, in the following scenes the expression of the counter-idea by Jo is firmly routed around negative constructions of local. Take, for instance, a subsequent conversation between Jo and the head teacher at the village school displayed in Figure 5.20. Here, Jo's assumptions about Harry Schofield are confirmed through ideas of social-space. Apparently, physical punishment is a fact of a life in a 'hard community' like Aidensfield.

The audience is then privy to a scene unobserved by Jo, but which seems to confirm her assumptions further (i.e. through omnipresent narration). In a scene that uses a close up of Harry's angry face scaling at Len in a
**Figure 5.20 Conversation between Jo and Head Teacher**

**Exterior. School Playground**

| HT: Len was such an nice little boy when I took him, very bright. | Jo: He’s bright enough, he just doesn’t seem interested. |
| HT: Could it be something to do with your teaching methods Joanne? | Jo: The other children seem happy Mrs Watkins. What’s his father like? |
| HT: He’s what they call a ‘Man’s man’. If Len’s behaving at home like he is at school it won’t go down too well with Harry Schofield. | Jo: Could that explain the bruises and today’s black eye? |
| HT: It’s possible I suppose. | Jo: But if they’re being beaten up surely we have a duty? |
| HT: Joanna. This is a hard community. Physical punishment is a fact of life. And if that’s the way the parents want to discipline the children there’s nothing much we can do about it. |

threatening way, he confronts his son about stealing. The following day, Len duly turns up at school with a black eye thereby expressing the story idea again (i.e. judge by appearances). Jo's hunches appear to be well-founded (see Figure 5.21). But then comes a transformation in the way these identities are being built. Jo decides to confront Harry with the Nurse Maggie Bolton (see Figure 5.22). In this sequence the negative discourse surrounding Harry's local class identity transforms from being one of suspicion to the idea of 'wanting better for his son'. In other words the move from counter-idea to idea. It appears that Len's father is desperate for him to become a cricketer as a way to a better life. Unfortunately he can't see the ball properly. Compared with the way he was being constructed...
Figure 5.21 Conversation between Harry and Len Schofield

(A long Shot)

Interior. The Schofield's Home.

Harry: We're going to spend the next half an hour talking about why you've weren't at school this morning. If it takes less than half an hour you're going to spend the rest of the time telling me about why you've been stealing from the village shop.

Len: I'm sorry dad it won't happen again.

Harry: Not as sorry as you will be!

Figure 5.22 Conversation between Harry, Jo and Maggie (A Long Shot)

Interior. The Schofield's Home

Jo: I couldn't help noticing the bruises that he has picked up lately.

Harry: You're friendly with Nick Rowan aren't you?

Jo: Yes, but,

Harry: Yeah, well, if you're all so desperate to know I never laid finger on the lad. He got his black eye while we were practising his batting. I was tossing a golf ball at him. I thought that if he could hit that a cricket ball would be like a balloon.

Jo: So you want him to play professionally?

Harry: Yeah. So he won't have to struggle like me.

Jo: Yeah but is it what Len wants?

Harry: Of course it is!

Maggie: It could be his eyes Mr. Schofield. I gave him a test today. He needs glasses.

Harry: Glasses! If he can't see the ball he'll never be a cricketer.
before by the professional incomers the working class local now appears far more sympathetic. At the same time, his identity is still being constructed somewhat negatively, only this time as the 'pushy' parent. This is confirmed in the following scene as Len runs away because he feels he is letting his father down. The episode ends with a further affirmation of the story idea, with a more positive construction of the working class local. Horrified by what he has done, Harry admits to his son to being wrong for pushing him too much, and duly promises to be a more sensitive parent.

Again, what is work in this narrative is a partial transformation in the way social-spatial identities. For Harry, the working class local moves from a broadly unsympathetic to sympathetic position, although he still is shown to have caused the child much distress. The identities of the problem solvers remain, I would suggest, consistently positive. Their actions may have initially been based on wrong assumptions, but their interventions are shown to be correct. That is, while the conflict was different than what the professionals' expected (i.e. domestic violence), there was still a conflict at work (i.e. pushy parent), which they uncovered and helped resolve (i.e. Harry is now more understanding), (see Figure 5.23).
Figure 5.23 Social-Spatial Narrative of Heartbeat's *A Long Shot*

**Equilibrium**
- Recreational Pursuits of MC Incomers

**Inciting Incident**
- Set-up: Assumed abuse of Child
- Pay-off: MC Incomers collude. Male WC local as object of Suspicion

**Idea: Judge by appearances**
- Male WC local argues with child
- Local head teacher confirms negative identity of WC local. Notion of Village as a 'hard' Community
- Black eye confirms identity of WC local.

**Counter-idea: Don't judge by appearances**
- WC Local as pushy parent. WC local Regretful MC incomers correct to intervene
- WC local as Misunderstood.

*WC = Working Class  MC = Middle Class*
5.4.3 The Arrival of an Incomer in the Countryside

The third theme for consideration focuses upon narratives of the incomer. Drawing on the example of Heartbeat's *Giving the Game Away* and Dangerfield's *Eden*, the following section shows how transformations in the social-spatial identities of characters again occur across the events. The first of these, Heartbeat's *Giving the Game Away*, develops around the arrival of a black person in the white space of Aidensfield, and his social exclusion from it. As suggested earlier the marginalisation of black identities in rural space, their exclusion from an idyllic rurality has been increasingly documented in recent years (e.g. Kinsman 1995; Agyeman and Spooner 1997). In this episode, I want to demonstrate how Heartbeat explores this theme of ethnicity and difference in a way that positions village life and the black experience of the countryside as increasingly positive over the course of the narrative.

*Giving the Game Away* opens on an incomer from London being pursued off farmland by both man and dog, and as is so often the case in Heartbeat, the sequence makes use of audio (in this case the soundtrack 'keep on running') to comment directly on the action and begin to trivialise the social-spatial dynamic at work. Working in tandem with the apparently fun and harmless nature of the events in this rural world are, I believe, two other possible reading strategies. First, the incomer as deviant: why else would he be running? Why else would he be chased of the land by an angry looking farmer and his dog? In this case, the 'incomer as deviant' scenario might also be read by audiences in conjunction with wider racist discourses: the incomer is black so he must be involved in an act of...
deviancy. Alternatively, the reading strategy may be reversed. It may involve the reader positioning Errol as the victim of prejudice by a white countryside. Errol is being chased off the land simply because he is of a different colour. In the following scene, these two ways of reading the outsider's status in narrative events are then more explicitly drawn as Errol attempts to book a room for a few nights in the village pub. (See Figure 5.24).

On the one hand, what is at stake in this scene is the story idea that 'we shouldn't judge people by appearances because our prejudices are ill founded', on the other, the counter-idea that 'we should judge people by appearances because our prejudices are likely to be well founded'. Whereas the opening scene is more open to interpretation depending on the discourses of race brought to the text, this scene encourages the audience to identify with the story idea (i.e. do not judge on appearances). Alf's fumbling reaction to Errol's request, combined with the way the local's physically move away from the bar expresses the counter-idea as irrational and unsympathetic. The expression of the counter-idea by the locals is in marked contrast to reaction of incomers: Errol's polite and humble demeanour, Gina chastising Alf for his actions towards Errol, Maggie offering Errol help. In other words, the story idea is conveyed by constituting a positive reading of incomer, the counter-idea, by relating a negative vision of rurality around local identities.

What develops in the scenes that follow this incident is confirmation of these social identities in space: the persecution of the outsider by the locals, and the more sympathetic reaction to difference by the incomers. The former manifests itself in the ostracism of Errol from
Figure 5.24 Conversation between Errol and Villagers (Giving the Game Away)

Interior, Aidensfield Arms

(Pub falls in to silence, people move away from bar)

George: What would you like son?
Errol: Could you put me up for a couple of nights?
George: (Evasive) The problem is er, we're a bit booked up
Errol: (Knowingly) Really? It was just I was told.....
George: We don't have a lot of rooms
Errol: Really....It's alright. It happens all the time

(Leaves pub)

Gina: Uncle George!
George: You don't understand.
Gina: I understand perfectly well...you wouldn't give him a room because he was black.
George: It isn't that simple. I've got nothing against him. It's just some of the regulars, well, they may not be ready for it
Gina: Well that's not just good enough Uncle George and you know it!

Exterior, Aidensfield Arms

Maggie: I couldn't help over hearing. Are you looking for somewhere to stay?
Errol: Not to worry it's not important
Maggie: Look, people round here, they can be a bit stuck in their ways, but...
Errol: There's no harm in them. Maybe not if you're white
Maggie: Yeah.
Errol: Look, I know somewhere you could stay the night. I assure you they'd welcome the business.
the community and his formal implication in a burglary. But then, in a major reversal in values, the community shifts to the story idea, (i.e. we shouldn't judge others by their appearance) on the discovery that Errol is rather handy at cricket, which is apparently great news because a cricket match with local rivals beckons. Suddenly everyone stops looking at the colour of Errol's skin and starts observing his batting technique. Errol is quickly integrated into the community, instead of being marginalized from it. He is absolved from the crime and the drama closes with Errol winning the cricket match for the village: "I've decided to settle up here for a bit," he says to Nick at the end.

Much like the episode A long shot, what this narrative demonstrates is the partial transformation of social-spatial identities as the events unfold. While the identities of the incomers remaining consistently enlightened, Giving the Game Away starts with a highly critical reading of the nature of village communities, but then reverses this. It moves from an apparent suspicion of ethnic difference to the idea of the village that learns, the village that, once over its prejudices, is really quite a pleasant place. In fact, pleasant enough for the victim of prejudice to now settle (See Figure 5.25).
Figure 5.25 Social Spatial Narrative in Heartbeat’s Giving the Game Away

--- Idea: Judge by appearances ---

**Inciting Incident**

**Incimer arrives**
- Incomer being chased off of land
- Black as Deviant.
- Village as vulnerable
- or
- Black as figure of prejudice.
- Village as Prejudiced

**Set-up**

**Pay-off**
- Incomer cannot book room in Pub.
- Incomer implicated in burglary

**Incomer**
- Village revealed as prejudiced.
- WC/MC incomer as non prejudiced.

--- Counter-idea: Don’t judge by appearances ---

**Incomer**
- Village as prejudiced.
- Village revealed as prejudiced.
- WC/MC incomer as non prejudiced.

**Incomer**
- Implicated in burglary
- Incomer competent at cricket
- Incomer absolved from crime
- Incomer integrated into hospitable community

*WC = working class
*MC = middle class*
The second illustrative episode to be used here centres on Dangerfield's *Eden*, which, as already suggested, is built around the arrival of Al Dangerfield to an old woodland cottage in the Warwickshire countryside where she is left on her own in the company of a male stranger living in the woods by himself. For Al, moving into the cottage is a symbol of independence; a sign of control over her own life *vis a vis* her well meaning but overprotective father, Paul Dangerfield. Regular viewers will know that there is a certain serial element to this episodic story line. In an earlier encounter Al had already announced that she was going to be having a baby and that she wished to have the pregnancy and birth within, as she was to put it, a "natural environment". This was going to be a space where she could "live off the land" with her student girl friend, Anna, "eating healthy food" and where she would not be "bothered by anyone". The narrative therefore constitutes a particular set of gender relations in space: the countryside a place of safety for females, a space where females can bond together in relation to nature and nurture children. The close relationship between notions of female identity and nature has been well documented (e.g. Soper 1995), and in the subtext to the episode there certainly appears, to me at a least, an idea that the countryside is constituted by and constitutive of the feminine.

What is more explicitly at stake in the inciting incident to this drama, however, is the way that Al and Anna's move to the wood in the countryside is bound up with negative constructions of the middle class incomer by Anna's two visiting friends 'Jase' and 'Stype' (see Figure 5.26). If Jase and Stype comment negatively on Al and
Figure 5.26 Conversation between Al and Friends *(Eden)*

**Exterior. Al and Anna's Cottage**

Al: I wouldn't mind getting a couple of chickens Anna. Have our own eggs
Anna: Yeah that would be great
Stype: Except that it wouldn't stop there
Anna: What do you mean?
Jase: You born again yokels are all the same. You start with two chickens and you end with a whole heard of them. It weren't a joke, yer know. It was meant to demonstrate the great rural divide. Between them who come down here for the weekend in their blue Volvo and their red setter and their green Wellington boots, and the other poor buggers that belong here, who can't afford to live
Jase: What do you do for music?
Al: We don't
Jase: Yer know what? This is my idea of hell.

Anna's new life in the country then what follows from this is a narrative that begins to confirm their scepticism.

The introduction of the story idea in this incident occurs when Al waves off both Anna and friends and then finds herself alone in the woods. To demonstrate the negativity of this event the viewer is shown an image of a stranger in the woods that has been watching her. A stranger who knows she is on her own (see Figure 5.27). In this case, Al's identity is now constructed as the vulnerable female who is out of her depth, who may fall prey to the strange man wandering the woods. The woods become a symbol of fear (see Cloke et al 1996 for comparable idea in relation to the forest). In doing so, it expresses the seemingly contradictory story idea that
shapes one half of the conflict, that 'independence is fine as long as you are not left not alone'. This idea, I believe, is quite explicitly spatialised and feminised: the countryside as a space of female vulnerability. The obligatory scene set up in the audience's mind around this idea is not, of course, what will be the fate of the stranger when he meets Al? But, what will be the fate of Al when she meets the stranger. The story idea is embodied in this sequence as the camera positions the stranger as a 'watcher in the woods': a rural other who should be thought of as suspicious, even though Al remains blissfully unaware of him.

Granting knowledge to the viewer over above the main protagonist, Al, is a common device in television used to create the feeling of suspense. In this case it is the difference between the viewer's negative construction of rurality, aligned with the story idea 'independence is fine as long as you are not left along' and Al's idyllic ideals, aligned with the counter-idea 'independence means getting by alone'. The viewer has been encouraged to the fear the worst for Al's idyll in this process. These fears culminate in a nighttime scene whereby Al starts to hear things going 'bump' outside. Things do not appear to bode
well as she grasps her torch to the forbidding sounds of a piano soundtrack and creeps around the house. Reaching the yard, she weakly cries: "Anna, is that you?" The audience is well aware it is not Anna by now, and the stranger duly appears. But instead of attacking her, it turns out he is delivering a gift of some wood (see Figure 5.28).

Figure 5.28 Al and the Stranger Meet (Eden)

In a narrative twist, then, ideas about the man in the woods are quickly transformed. Instead of the stranger being dangerous, he now starts appears, in fact, quite harmless. Rather than fearing him, the stranger is welcomed him into her home and allowed to fix her fire (see Figure 5.29). The fear and hostility associated with the woods and the stranger is supplant by an entirely different reading of rurality. It is suggestive of rural companionship, of people living in isolated areas coming to rely on each other for help.

Figure 5.29 Al and the Strangers Growing Friendship
However, just as Al is busy getting on with life in the country alone, Dr Dangerfield arrives in his Discovery and starts asserting himself on the situation. Dangerfield's visit switches between the story's counter-idea, expressed through an image of Al walking through the countryside with flowers in her hair to the sounds of a sweet clarinet melody, and the story idea, as Dangerfield expresses concern that Al is now living alone in the woods. By positioning the audience to know that Al is not as vulnerable as Paul might expect – that the man who lives in the woods is not threatening – his concerns seem unfounded (see Figure 5.30). But this reading only works until narrative identities are reversed back to negative again. Indeed what follows from this is an arson attack in which the police discover and implicate the stranger in the wood. Maybe the fear of life alone in the country was reasonable after all. Maybe, in time, the rural other would have attacked the vulnerable middle class girl.

Figure 5.30 Conversation between Al and Paul (Eden)

**Exterior. Cottage**

Paul: The door was unlocked. And the car
Al: Dad! There's no one else around here that's why I moved here
Paul: Yeah, but you do lock up at night don't you?
Al: Of course I do!
Paul: Where's Anna these days?
Al: She comes and goes.
Paul: In other words, you're out here on your own.
This expression of the story idea culminates in nature loving Al wandering through the woods and finding a badger that has been hammered to death. Her illusion of an independent life is shattered and dad duly arrives, at this precise moment, to save the day: 'Come on Al' he says, 'Let's go home', and with home signifying here, a space away from the deepest countryside. The original social identities (i.e. the local man as suspicious, the female incomer as vulnerable) are duly restored through the endeavour of the male middle class incomers (i.e. Paul Dangerfield et al), (see figure 5.31).
Figure 5.31 Social-Spatial Narrative in Dangerfield's Eden

Idea:
Independence is fine as long as you are not alone

Local acting suspiciously → Local offers gift and fixes fire → Local Arrested, Animals murdered → Incomer leaves countryside

Inciting Incident

Set-up | Pay-off
-------|--------
Al moves into isolated cottage | Al is left on her own with watching male
Rural as feminised space of nature and nurturing | Woods as symbol of fear.
Female as vulnerable to male predator | Male as predator
MC rural identity expressed as negative

Incident:

Vulnerability

Incomer realises vulnerability

Idyll becomes Anti-idyll

Companionship

Incomer realises rural companionship

Incomer leaves countryside

Vicious Circle

Incomer increasingly self-sufficient and displaying attachments to nature world

Counter-idea:
Independence means getting by alone

MC = middle class
WC = working class
5.4.4 Village Communities Unified in the Face of an Extra-Personal Force

The sixth and final example to be considered here focuses on a village community unified in the face of an extra-personal force, in this case, Peak Practice's *The Price*, which develops around the threat of closure to Cardale's village school. The conflict at stake in this episode works with a quite different idea and counter-idea than those thus far outlined.

The news that the future of the village school is in threat reveals a negative idea about contemporary social change in the countryside, and opens up the narrative to the story idea that 'human life suffers when we are governed solely by monetary concerns'. Such a narrative is one of the few instances where the events develop as an explicit political commentary on the rural life. It uses the story world to critique the new right agenda that has so often be regarded as elevating economic efficiency over social provision (see Figure 5.32).

This passage, revealing both set-up (the school might be closed) and pay-off (the community will have to fight for it to remain open) makes the issue at stake plain: budgets, league tables and performance are going to potentially undo a vital part of the rural community. If the viewer is in any doubt from this conversation as to how Peak Practice wish this scene to be read, then the visual relations of the image arguably make it clear. On the one hand, this conversation is depicted through a slow tracking shot depicting a sunlit playground where carefree children, making lots of noise, play. Regardless of its league performance, this appears an ideal place to school
Figure 5.32 Conversation between Head Teacher and School Inspector (The Price)

Exterior. Village School Playground

| Head Teacher: | This school. It's vital to a community like Cardale. I mean the nearest place they'll be able to send their kid is Braddon. It's miles away |
| School Inspector: | It the same for all the schools on the short list. Cardale is no different |
| Head Teacher: | How many are there? |
| School Inspector: | Three. And I'm sorry. But a hard decision will be made. One of the schools has to go to balance this year's budget, We've no choice" |
| Head Teacher: | But why ours? |
| School Inspector: | Because of the school's mediocre performance in this year's league table, Mr Jackson. And its proximity to two other schools neither of which are full |
| Head Teacher: | League tables...! |
| School Inspector: | The school in Cardale can barely be justified on the size of its pastoral base |
| Head Teacher: | Pastoral bases! We're taking about children here! Children, not sheep |
| School Inspector: | If this community wants to keep its school then it will have to fight for it |

children. Furthermore, the conversation is embodied in quite specific ways. A kindly and demonstrative male head school with unkempt hair and relaxed manner, contrasts sharply with the bearer of bad news. With her tidy outfit and her hair tied back in a bun, the female inspector appears both cold and officious.

The idea set up here then, that 'human life suffers when we are governed solely by monetary concerns', is clearly mapped on to an idyllic notion of rural social relations. From the outset, it encourages the feeling that, closing this school down would be, it would be an abominable,
heartless act. What develops from this is a sequence of events that work between this story idea, and a counter-idea that says, 'human life does not have to suffer through the pursuit of monetary goals. In fact, it can prosper'.

The following scenes depict images of a community galvanised into action through the counter-idea, initiated by Doctor Andrew who tells a despondent head teacher expounding the story idea that "you've got to do the best for your pupils, Bill. Fight for the School". This involves the middle classes being enrolled into 'the fight': "I trust the campaign to save our school can count on your full support" the head teacher asks Will at a chance meeting the pub. "Anything you need" Will replies. Interestingly, it turns out in this conversation that Will, as well as heading up the Beeches, used to be the ex-chair of the Parent-Teacher Association. Such is the way in which middle class incomer power pervades sites of village authority in Peak Practice. Doubts over the future of school, and comments about the negatively of playing the survival of one village school against the survival of another are interspersed with highly visual displays of the community togetherness, such as a march and a fund raising fete, as the idea and counter-idea are explored (see Figure 5.33).

Figure 5.33 A Community in Adversity from The Price
The episode ends on an ambivalent mix of both idea and counter-idea. The village school is saved through its common endeavour, but the head teacher and his partner look on in pity as other head teachers receive bad news. While there is an element of social realism in this particular episode (i.e. communities being destroyed by political acts), and while the future of the school is in uncertain until the end, this narrative continually sustains a positive vision of rural community (see Figure 5.34).
Human life suffers in pursuing of monetary goals

Community threatened by political agenda

Rival village schools closed
Communities destroyed

Budget restraints will have may close to compete village with other school villages to remain open

School children happily playing

Rural ideal for schooling children whatever statistics claim

Village community galvanised into action

Rural community prospering in adversity

Community identity enhanced

Human life prospers through the Pursuit of monetary goals
5.5 Subsidiary Narrative structures

So far this discussion has focused upon the main narrative events of an episode. It has considered examples of those narratives that dominate the screen time of a 60-minute drama and how these may encourage certain readings of rurality to be made. Little has therefore been said about the multitude of other important narratives, both series and serial in design, that are interwoven with these stories, but which constitute quantitatively less of the action on display. Consideration of these subsidiary narratives is the objective of this section although as befits the objectives of this thesis, it concentrates exclusively on those narratives that have particular relevance to a reading of rural identities in these dramas. Four narratives appear of particular importance in this respect. First, narratives built around the misdemeanours of Greengrass. Second, extra-personal forces of change in the countryside. Third, dilemmas of fitting-in. And finally, dilemmas of staying or leaving. Consider each of these in turn.

5.5.1 The Misdemeanours of the Comic Local: Heartbeat's Greengrass Narrative

The first theme to be considered here focuses on a narrative that is of critical importance to a reading of Heartbeat's rurality. Whatever the inflection of the main series narrative at work in this production, Heartbeat consistently introduces into its drama a narrative built around the misdemeanours of one of its central protagonists, Claude Jeremiah Greengrass. While the specificity of events in these narratives are series in design, being instigated and resolved within the confines
of an individual episode, the Greengrass narrative develops out of the actions of an established character undertaking similar actions and meeting a similar fate. Even though particular Greengrass storylines never develop beyond an individual episode, such narratives have a strong serial flavour for regular viewers. Moreover, even though these narratives generally occupy far less screen time within an episode than the main series narrative, their importance to the production incrementally grows through time.

Just like the episodic narratives mentioned above, the Greengrass narrative also has an inciting incident. The nature of these inciting incidents is almost always identical. First, Greengrass happens upon an opportunity to make some easy money, such as through a chance conversation with someone in the village pub, or by eavesdropping on the conversation of others. Second, an ill thought-out plan will be hatched, either expressed explicitly in dialogue or implicitly through the guilty twitching of Greengrass’ eye.

These set-ups are then swiftly followed by the pay-off, in which a self conscious Greengrass fumbles his way through his plan to a soundtrack that emphasises the humour of actions in play. So for instance, in Old Colonials he is seen handling stolen goods, in Forget Me Not and Something to Value poaching Pheasants, in Saint Columba’s Treasure and Sitting Off the Dock of the Bay illegally distilling whiskey, in A Long Shot stealing a horse for stud, in Frail Mortality setting up an illegal animal stuffing business, and so forth (see Figure 5.35).
5.35 The Misdemeanours of Heartbeat's Greengrass

As the drama of an individual episode unfolds, the Greengrass inciting incident provides an important antidote to the generally more sombre main series narrative in play. In this sense, the harmless nature of local crime often appears directly set up against the negativity of conflict from the outside. Greengrass misdemeanours, always prone to failure, faithfully progress around the story idea that 'the truth will find you out if you don't plan carefully enough'. A story idea that is never contradicted in the unfolding of the narrative. It is always a question of 'when', rather than 'if', Greengrass will be found out.

The tendency of the Greengrass narrative is to develop in two distinct ways. First, the narrative will continue to act as a counterpoint to the other episodic narrative, with Greengrass eventually undone by his own actions. Such is the case in Sitting Off the Dock of the Bay. On the one hand, there is the boy from Borstal seeking forgiveness from the village and eventually overdosing on drugs because he cannot shake off his reputation. On the other,
there is Greengrass and his attempts to distil Whiskey illegally. Unfortunately, these activities end up poisoning Greengrass who is discovered by PC Rowan after he accidentally sets fire to his makeshift distillery (see Figure 5.36).

**Figure 5.36 Greengrass meets his Fate**

Second, the narrative will invest in the events of the main episodic narrative to such an effect that Greengrass' actions are found out. Such is the case in *A Long Shot* where the boy assumed to be abused by his father runs away only to be discovered by Greengrass as he is stealing the horse for stud. Greengrass' heart gets the better of him and he takes the boy to the hospital only for his crimes to be detected by Nick. In this instance, the critical flaws in Greengrass' plans are exposed further. Apparently the horse he stole for stud was impotent anyway.

In closing the Greengrass narrative, then, the protagonist always ends up with 'egg on his face' rather than a criminal record. Greengrass has never spent a minute in jail, court or the police interview room. PC Rowan simply deals with Greengrass with a wry smile on his face, Blaketon with a sense of exasperation. Reprimand is never severe. Greengrass' actions either result in a punishment from the 'clip round the ear' school of policing (e.g. "We won't say anything more about the [stolen] horse if you take it straight back" Nick says to Greengrass in *A Long Shot*) or in
the unplanned consequences of his own actions (e.g. Greengrass falling ill from drinking whiskey in *Sitting Off the Dock of the Bay*), (see Figure 5.37).
**Figure 5.37 Archetypal Greengrass Narrative**

**Inciting Incident**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Set-up</th>
<th>Pay-off</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A disreputable opportunity</td>
<td>Greengrass devises an</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>arises for Greengrass</td>
<td>ill-thought out plan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Idea:** the truth will find you out

Greengrass inadvertently exposes misdemeanours to main protagonists

Greengrass implements flawed plan

Green misdemeanours are exposed by main protagonists

Greengrass is reprimanded by main protagonist

WC local as deviant problem creator

WC local as figure of incompetence and comedy

WC local as harmless

MC = middle class

WC = working class

MC incomers as competent problem solvers
5.5.2 Extra-Personal Forces of Change in the Countryside

The second theme of concern is based around a longstanding narrative in Peak Practice concerning the precarious future of the village practice. The narrative here is built around the Beeches' status as a fund holding practice and the implications that this has for the provision of patient care. Like the episode *The Price*, this serial narrative connects village dilemma to wider forces of social change and develops with the identical story idea, the notion that, 'human life suffers when we are governed solely by monetary concerns'. In conveying this idea Peak Practice consistently depicts a village surgery in turmoil. The Beeches is always lurching from one management crisis to the next: waiting rooms are frequently overflowing, staffing is low, the senior partner is always fighting with the fund holders to release more resources, often to no avail (see Figure 5.38).

**Figure 3.38 The Beeches in Turmoil (Eye of the Storm)**

Laura: This last six months haven't been a picnic. We've had a series of locums with serious allergies to work. The waiting room is practically bursting. We've had to cut back on the services because we've overspent by 3% on the fund last year. And now we've heard that the FHCA are not allowing for inflation this year.

Andrew: And that's another cut.

Laura: And no real fund manager. It's not that great is it?

In propagating this story idea, the notion that patient care in a small village community is somehow more attentive and congenial than elsewhere is firmly undermined. Such a
where doctors, without complaint, appear constantly on hand to administer patient care, from home visits at night to bedside vigils at a hospital. Indeed, Peak Practice never appears certain of which idea it is trying to convey. This is a world where doctors will tirelessly complain about lack of resources to deliver the service, then spend whole episodes, working in two's, sometimes three's, treating the physical and emotional well being of a single patient (see Figure 5.39).

**Figure 5.39 Attentive Patient Care in Peak Practice**

5.5.3 Dilemmas of Staying or Leaving

The third principal theme of note in these subsidiary narratives is one that is common to all three dramas: dilemmas of staying or leaving the countryside. The narrative here develops around the dilemmas of the incoming professionals who, in different ways, find themselves in a quandary over whether they should remain living in the countryside. In Dangerfield, this narrative finds its expression in Paul's own attempts to find peace of mind with himself. Indeed Dangerfield's professional success as a
police surgeon is matched, in part, by his emotional dilemmas: such as his inability to form longstanding relationships with women, his inability to come to terms with the death of his wife, or the growing sense of loneliness he feels as his children become more independent.

Throwing his energy into his role as police surgeon is one way of dealing with the circumstances in which he finds himself, but at the heart of this drama is this basic dynamic between professional success (the episodic story line) and personal unhappiness (the serial story line). The story idea at stake in this latter case is the notion that "personal happiness will only be achieved when we learn to let go of our emotional demons". Expressing this story idea comes in many forms, from his efforts to find a new partner so that he can get over the death of his wife to his desire to communicate with his children about his feelings. For the purposes of this discussion, however, one major expression of this develops from the loneliness he feels spending most of his time living on his own in a large house in the country.

In this sense, the countryside becomes a strong metaphor for his discontent, a world that he must leave in order for him to begin living life again. Dangerfield is consistently shown sitting in his home alone pondering the circumstances in which he finds himself. Over a series of episodes Dangerfield tentatively breaches this topic with his children. In doing so, negative visions of middle class lifestyles in the country are gradually articulated in words: "This house is too big, I'm out here all alone," he says to his children in one; "I need to be near some life,
It's no good being stuck out here living in a place of this size", he says in another. A partial resolution to Dangerfield's personal narrative is reached as he eventually leaves his country home to move into the town of Warwick.

In Heartbeat, this staying/leaving story line is also developed, coinciding with Jo's blossoming relationship with Nick. In this case the scenario develops around professional ambition, and the implications that career progression has for living in the country. While Nick is happy to carry on pursuing his career as a village policeman in Aidensfield, stressing that he feels a "countryman at heart" Jo has bigger plans for both him and her. Jo wants to be head mistress, and wants Nick to match her ambition by taking his sergeant exams. This can mean only one thing however: leaving Aidensfield. This story line incrementally builds over a number of episodes, with Nick finally conceding to Jo's overtures while out horse riding: "I can't just stay a humble constable in Aidensfield if you're planning on becoming a high flying teacher, can I?" In this particular scenario, a heady mix intra-professional love and ambition come together. As soon Nick concedes to Jo they enjoy their first on screen kiss (see Figure 5.40). Regular viewers may know that the consequence of this decision gathers considerable momentum in the following episodes, culminating in Nick and Jo leaving the village to supposedly pursue their careers abroad.

Dilemmas over staying or leaving among professional have their most consistent expression in the production of Peak Practice, and the narrative surrounding Dr Andrew and his partner Kirsty. The story idea at stake here is the notion
that 'personal happiness will be sacrificed if we put other peoples' happiness before our own'. Instead of producing a counter-idea to develop the dilemma at hand, it explores the same idea from a different perspective. On the one hand, there is Dr Andrew who wishes to stay in the village, who sees the village as a marriage of personal and professional happiness. On the other, there is Kirsty who detests village life and wishes to move back to Liverpool. The dynamic at stake in this narrative is about sacrificing one's own happiness for the sake of another's, a sacrifice that neither wishes to make. This makes for some interesting contrasts in the construction of village life as Kirsty and Andrew try to win each other over.

First, there is Andrew consistently preaching to Kirsty the wonders of village life: its beauty, its safety, and its community. For Andrew, this is a world where families can be started and where doctors are able to get to know their patients. In contrast, there is Kirsty consistently speaking of how stifling it is for a woman's ambition, how isolated a
village can feel, how "backward" these kind of communities can be. Interestingly, the visual and aural construction of these dilemmas is firmly directed at encouraging a positive reading of the countryside. For instance, Andrew and Kirsty are frequently shown having debates about their future against soft focus sweeping backdrops of the Peak District, with Peak Practice’s gentle piano signature tune playing in the background (see Figure 5.41).

**Figure 5.41 Andrew and Kirsty Debate their Future Together in In Safe Hands**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exterior. Cardale Churchyard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty: Why don’t you just admit it? You decided it’d be best for us to stay in Cardale. You thought you’d say yes to the job offer and talk me round afterwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew: I haven’t told Will I was definitely going to take it, and anyway we have been discussing things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty: That’s not discussion Andrew, that’s you telling me what a great idea it is and switching off when I raise any objections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew: Alright, you want to talk about things. Then let’s do it. Let’s talk things through</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty: If we go back to Liverpool I can do my training there, and there’ll better jobs going when I finish. Staying here would really cut down my options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew: Okay. But aren’t there good schools around here as well. There are some big cities about. And anyway are you sure this is the right time to do teacher training. Isn’t it better that you do that after we’ve started a family. This is a perfect place to bring up children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty: I don’t believe I’m hearing this.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Later, when Andrew eventually concedes to Kirsty’s wishes, and moves back to Liverpool the audience is presented with a quite explicit anti-urban, pro-rural construction of this
scenario. In one scene Andrew is shown in a busy city practice dealing with aggressive patients and rapidly coming to the conclusion that he does not belong there. This is inter-cut with images of Will and Erica cheerfully arriving at work together against the backdrop of sunny day in Cardale (see Figure 5.42).

Figure 5.42 Anti-urban/Pro-rural Constructions in Dr Andrew's staying-leaving Narrative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interior. A Busy Manchester Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manager: Dr Attwood. I thought you were taking a few days off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew (Sarcastically) I missed the place too much</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exterior. Beeches Car Park</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erica: Morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will: Hi...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interior. Manchester Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew: Right. Miss Russell?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient: Do we have to go through all this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew: I see you've been on anti-depressants for 18 months now. So how are things at home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient: I don't want to talk about it. I just want a prescription, alright!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew: Miss Russell I can't write you a prescriptions without first finding out what's wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient: Give me my pills doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew: Well, can we just talk about how you've been feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient: I don't need this I'll go see someone else</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Patient walks out. Manager walks in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manager: What's going on?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew: I'm not handing out prescriptions without finding out what's wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager: We've got 30,000 patients in this practice. You're a doctor not a social worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew: I shouldn't have come in today. I don't belong here</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Subsequently, Andrew is then shown returning to Cardale to plead for his job back, and as he does, the audience is shown a sequence of images in which Andrew stands around pondering his future against effulgent images of the Peak District (see Figure 5.43).

Figure 5.43 Andrew Contemplates his Future in *Eye of the Storm*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interior. Public House</td>
<td>Andrew: I demand a fair hearing. Will: But what would happen in six months time? You'd be off again. Back to Liverpool or Manchester trying to prove something to yourself. Andrew: Oh come on Will I've learnt a lot since I left. I know how to manage a fund. You need that. Now I want to work in a place where I can make difference, Where I really help the patients. This is where I feel at home. Will: We can't trust you. Andrew: Come on Will. I know the area. I know the patients. I want to come back and make this work. Will: I'm sorry Andrew, but...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is Andrew and Kirsty's story which provides perhaps the most explicit commentary on the staying/leaving dilemma across the three productions, although it not the only one at work in Peak Practice. Will, for instance, laments the effect that living in the countryside has on his love life in frequent confessions to friends and colleagues. In one instance he speaks of being "buried alive" in the countryside (see Figure 5.44). Similarly, Erica finds herself embroiled in a dilemma between staying or leaving when a recent lover arrives in Cardale to persuade her to move to London with him: "I didn't know this was your sort of thing, country life. What's the story?" he asks her.
condescendingly. Erica flirts with the idea of leaving as her lover gradually undermines her life in the country. The matter, however, is soon resolved when she realises where her heart lies: "I'm not coming with you Dan" Erica says, "It's been tough working here. Tough. But good".

**Figure 5.44 Will Laments the "Professional Graveyard" of Cardale in *In Safe Hands***

***Interior, Public House***

Will: So you were in Nottingham before this?
Kate: Yeah
Will: Don't you get bored here?
Kate: I don't get time to
Will: You really think Cardale is a good career move for an ambitious doctor?
Kate: Well I don't think it's exactly the graveyard of the professional classes, do you?
Will: I've been trying to figure that one since I was buried alive here 10 years ago"

---

5.5.4 Dilemmas of Fitting-In

The final theme to be drawn attention to in this analysis concerns dilemmas of fitting into rural communities on the part of the incomer professionals. Again, it is *Peak Practice* that demonstrates the most explicit commentaries on this issue. Dangerfield eschews a narrative here entirely, and *Heartbeat* does so only infrequently. Occasionally, for instance, the credentials of PC Rowan to mediate on situations is humourlessly called into question by locals simply because he is a southerner. Furthermore, in one episode, *St Colomba's Treasure*, Eileen Reynolds, Nick's mother-in-law, is thrown out of sorts shortly after arriving
when she is presented with the gift of uncut fowl by Greengrass (see Figure 5.45)

**Figure 5.45 Eileen Receives an Unexpected Gift**

Peak Practice, however, seems to make a point of exploring this issue. This is at work, for instance, in Dr David's return to the village where he was brought up, and his consistent efforts to tell people that he is a "local boy" and how he "loves" the area. David's love for the country, however, does not appear matched by an aptitude for country life. When he goes to view a farm house the family intends to buy, he proceeds to fall over in cow dung as he explains to both wife and children what life on a farm is really like (see Figure 5.46). It is also the case in the episode *Holding it Together* when Erica tries to find her way around the Peak District. Indeed, there is a sense in Peak Practice in which incomers are shown as wonderful professionals on the one hand, but sometimes dispossessed of the necessary social competencies that rural life demands on the other.

**Figure 5.46 Dr David falls in the Muck**
In one particularly striking example of this construction, Andrew and Kirsty, coming to terms with life in the countryside, are given a chicken, called Vanessa, as a present from a local lady, Mrs North. The story unfolds over a couple of episodes as the two incomers agonise over what they should be doing with it: "What am I supposed to do with her?" he asks Mrs North. "As if you don't know", she jokes back. The problem is, they don't know. Is she a pet? Is she meant to lay eggs for them? Is she meant to be next week's dinner? They conclude that they are meant to kill the chicken (see Figure 5.47). Fortunately for the chicken they do not have the heart and proceed to return it to Mrs North: "We tried to kill her but we couldn't", Andrew explains. "Kill her!", Mrs North responds, "I didn't give Vanessa to you so you could kill her. It was for the eggs!". Such are the predicaments of the incomers from the city trying to make their way in village life.

Figure 5.47 Andrew, Kirsty and The Chicken

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interior. Andrew and Kirsty's Kitchen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty: Right.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew: Right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty: What do we do with it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew: Strangle it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty: Okay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew: I can't do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirsty: Oh your useless. We're in the country now. I'll Do it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Pause)

Andrew: I guess we're stuck with her.
5.6 Summary

This chapter has shown how the story world is harnessed around the events of particular narratives, and in particular, how rural identities develop in different ways as dilemmas unfold. A significant element of this discussion has been concerned with these dramas use of the archplot formation, and its logic of instigating, addressing and resolving conflict within the confines of an individual episode. In this respect, discussion began by demonstrating how these dramas often commence by developing a conflict-free sense of rurality constituted by, and constitutive of, images of community and the recreational and working pursuits of professional incomers. It then went on to demonstrate the way these impressions are quickly overturned by the drama’s inciting incidents. Just as the Guardian article in the introduction to this thesis commented humorously on the anti-idyllic premises at work in the 'sugary idyll' of BBC’s Radio drama The Archers, it might be suggested, in this respect, that the recurring introduction of a problematic into these worlds encourages anything but an idyllic reading of the countryside: burglaries, prejudice, child abuse, murder, hangings, terminal illness. All of these are par for the course in the story worlds of Dangerfield, Heartbeat and Peak Practice.

Care has to be taken, however, in simply mapping these dramas’ hunger for story, and thereby conflict, onto a negative reading of rural identities. The inauguration of conflict was shown to construct the social-spatial identities of these worlds in a variety of ways. Three broad themes appeared particularly important in this
respect: the incomer, the local and extra-personal forces of change brought to bear upon village life.

In the case of the first of these, incomers identities, the analysis explained how these characters are constructed in relation to other social identities such as those of class, gender, race, poverty and urbanity, which were revealed both sympathetically and unsympathetically in relation to those living in the countryside. So for example, incomers could be revealed as figures of deviancy vis a vis the normalcy of the village, but so too could they be seen as figures of vulnerability vis a vis the prejudiced and unwelcoming nature of the village. Typically, but not exclusively, these incidents would simultaneously introduce the main protagonists, the problem solving middle class incomers, in a positive light.

These relational identities of social-space were also at work where local identities were at the heart of the inciting incident, a theme characteristic of Peak Practice. In these cases, the predominant idea was of working class local men being constituted variously as figures of tragedy, derision and suspicion in relation to the wisdom and authority of the middle class incomers. In the case of third type of inciting incident, developed around an extra-personal force in the countryside, the narrative fostered a positive reading of rurality around ideas of the unified community.

As the discussion then went on to show, these initial constructions could be transformed, as much as affirmed, in the unfolding of the narrative. As stories develop over
time, social-spatial identities can potentially shift from positive and negative, negative to positive, as story idea and counter-idea are explored and conflict gradually resolved. So for instance, it explained the way Peak Practice’s Holding It Together transformed a local from being a figure of tragedy to a figure of derision, while the incomer moved from being an ‘assumed’ problem creator to a ‘wronged’ problem solver. Similarly, it demonstrated the way the black incomer in Heartbeat’s Giving the Game Away moved from being an figure of prejudice to an integrated member of the Aidensfield community.

Running alongside these main series narratives are a number of subsidiary narratives also important to a reading of these dramas’ rurality. It noted, for instance, the way Heartbeat develops an episodic narrative around the misdemeanours of Greengrass, a narrative that simultaneously functioned as a positive construction of criminal activity in the countryside and a mocking assessment of local figures unable to execute their plans effectively. In Peak Practice, it was shown the way the drama developed an ongoing commentary on the village surgery and the dilemmas it experienced as a fund holding practice. This commentary was shown to profit the identity of the incomer professional even though it disturbed ideas of attentive patient care in the countryside. At the same time, this idea was contradicted by the evident display of commitment that doctors in the village of Cardale seemed to be able to give to patients. Discussion also noted the way these texts developed a narrative of ‘staying and leaving’ in which both positive and negative constructions of rurality were articulated, as well as a ‘fitting in’ narrative, in which middle class incomers were sometimes
shown to be ill-equipped to deal with the life in the country.

This discussion has therefore shown how these dramas create a variety of rural identities in their exploration of conflict. In light of these insights it appears important to recognise that while each of the productions continually replicate certain social-spatial themes across episodes, the experience of reading an individual episode is always open to transformations. Whether the moment in a text displays positive constructions of the local or negative constructions of the incomer, a community in turmoil or a community unified, rural identities will always be supplanted by another moment, and because of this, open to another reading. An adequate understanding of how rural identities are developed in storytelling media can only be reached by recognising that these dramas are dynamic and changing, as well as static and enduring constructions of rurality.

The focus of discussion now turns, however. Having made a close reading of these texts it is important to move beyond a critic-driven style of analysis and open these dramas up to the wider relations of the circuit of culture of which they are a differentiated part. It is to this end that remaining chapters in this thesis will examine these dramas in relation to the thoughts and practices of their architects, the media producers.
Chapter 6

Approaching Media Production
6.1 Introduction

"Meaning? Oh no we avoid meaning. We just like to use all those photographic shots, all that moorland. Just miles and miles of fuck all"

(Heartbeat Production Team)

In the above, throw-away, comment some degree of scepticism (and amusement) has clearly been derived from my suggestion to a director on the Heartbeat production that the series might be involved in conveying particular sets of ideas about the countryside to its audiences. It quickly pours scorn on the idea that the thoughts and practices of media producers involved in the creation of the series might be bound up with a desire to reproduce particular meanings about rural space through the text.

The comment is a telling one, for concealed behind its flippancy is, in fact, a highly specific interpretation of the drama’s rurality, one appearing to demand of Heartbeat’s extensive landscapes a certain aesthetic, picturesque quality: ‘we just like to use all those photographic shots, all that moorland’. Given that this comment was also smuggled in among a series of rather intricate and committed discussions surrounding the appropriate audio-requirements of a forthcoming episode of the drama, a striking contrast to the idea that producers simply “avoid meaning” appears to be work. Indeed, whether it is hidden behind a highly replicated and institutionalised set of creative protocols, as in the case above, or reflected in a highly self-conscious set of practices, closely attuned to the achievement of a specified effect, the second substantive focus to this research will demonstrate that programme makers display a very deep sense of engagement with, and understanding of,
the worlds they are trying to convey. As a writer on the Dangerfield production team put it:

"Every image on television is there for a reason. There's always an intention behind a shot ... everything has meaning"

The three chapters that follow this discussion represent an engagement with the relations of media production and an extension to the work of the critic driven analysis. They consider how constructions of the countryside were fostered in the thoughts and practices of those responsible for creating the three texts, and why these ideas were fostered. The intention of this particular chapter is to clarify the way in which this second focus of the research was undertaken.

Discussion proceeds by presenting a brief overview of the basic structures and practices of television production, and goes on to examine two of the principal ways in which media researchers have gone about engaging with the thoughts and practices of media production: observation and interviewing. The merits and problems associated with these techniques are discussed, as is the value of alternative techniques in relation to the objectives of this research project. The discussion proposes the use of a mixed methodology based around the techniques of interviewing and observation. It outlines the way in which access was gained to media personnel and the nature of questioning employed. It closes by considering the dilemmas that emerged as a result of employing this methodology in practice.
6.2 The Production Process

The aim of the following passage is to outline the basic structures that comprise the practice of programme making in television drama. Production processes have a number of generic practices that make up the profession of programme making, although what follows should not be considered a universal model of approach. The following outline is designed to reduce a complex set of work practices into an intelligible form, and in doing so, clarify the methodological approach taken towards researching the production teams of the three dramas. The insights made are based on outlines developed in Millerson (1993) and Holland (1997).

Television production is generally regarded as a collaborative medium, held together with the perception of unity and purpose. The most senior member of the production team, the *producer*, maintains ultimate responsibility for the creative output of the production process. By overseeing the various stages of a programme's development, the producer is supposed to carve out a creative vision for the series understood by those at work on its production. It is a process which formally begins in 'research and development' with the work of the series *creator*, often an established television writer, who is commissioned by senior producers and industry executives to generate a programme idea within a particular set of artistic parameters and practical constraints. Creators will almost certainly become involved in the subsequent writing of scripts at the 'pre-production' stage, when a production team is appointed to plan and prepare for the actual shoot, although other *writers* will also be brought in to work on later episodes.
and return series'. By and large, all script-writers are freelance, being commissioned by television companies to work on individual episodes. The specific number of script-writers for each of these productions varies between series, ranging from two or three script-writers per series, through to an individual writer per episode. In general terms, the writer who is brought in to work on established television dramas such as those under consideration, operates in both a temporary and independent capacity. The disparate set of writing styles which this process consequently fosters is steered in a particular creative direction by the script-editors, whose principal role it is to assist writers in delivering workable shooting scripts which conform to the established production style.

Complementing these writing practices in pre-production is the work of the production designer who, like the script editor, is preoccupied with translating the unique demands of individual episodes and scenes into a coherent vision for the series. Designers are responsible for establishing the overall look of the programme. Coordinating the choice of props and designing the appearance of sets and exteriors will be fundamental to this process in pre-production. The work of the designer is highly integrated with the work of the location manager, whose job it is to determine suitable locations for the shooting of individual scenes. This endeavour is also sensitive to the wishes of the director, who is recruited by the producer to achieve the overall audio-visual effect of a particular episode. In principal, directors should have a creative input into all aspects of an episode's production in order achieve their own distinctive look for the programme. In long running and
well-established drama series, however, where production practices are highly attuned to the delivery of a specific creative vision, director autonomy will invariably be compromised. Communication between these varying activities in the run up to the actual shoot is achieved through a series of production meetings and location 'recces'. These events involves varying numbers of production staff at differing levels of seniority and are fundamental to working through the practicalities of recording individual scenes: shots will be planned or 'blocked' by the directors, camera persons and lighting director, as well as specific design requirements being assessed.

If the pre-production process works well, then the actual ‘shoot’, where specific scenes are recorded on location or in the studio, should be a fairly routine and unproblematic exercise. The technical staff responsible for delivering the recorded material are called the crew, and their work will feed directly from the work of pre-production. At the core of the operation is the work of the director, cameraperson, lighting director, and sound recordist, all directly engaged in the recording of material. These practices are underpinned by a myriad of other supporting activities including within this the work of the gaffer’s electrical and lighting technicians, the design team’s set dressers, props and continuity specialists, as well as the costume department’s make up artists and wardrobe supervisors.

The material recorded by the crew is transformed into the final image for transmission in ‘post-production’, the fourth and final stage of the production process. Again, like the practices of the previous stages, the work of
post-production is about mediating between the emphases of the individual director and the overall creative vision for the series. It initially involves the work of picture-editors who are responsible for selecting the best shots, and arranging them into a particular duration and rhythm. At the same time, it involves the application of aural effects by the sound-editors and musical composer. The process is formally completed by the dubber, who combines and balances out the various sources of sound to achieve the desired audio-visual effect of the programme. These roles and practices are summed up in Figure 6.1.

**Figure 6.1 Key Practices and Personnel of Television Drama Production**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research and Development</th>
<th>Who?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioning process</td>
<td>Executive Producers/Producers/Heads of Drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conception of programme idea</td>
<td>Writer-Creators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pre-Production**

- Generation of Scripts for Series: Writers/Script-editors
- Determination of Locations: Location Managers
- Design Assessments: Production Designers/Art
- Planning of Shots/Lighting: Camerapersons/Lighting, Director

**The Shoot**

- Dressing and Preparing Sets: Set Dressers/Construction
- Preparation of Artists: Wardrobe/Make-Up
- Recording Scenes: Director/Camera/lighting/Sound/Continuity

**Post-Production**

- Selection and Ordering of Shots: Picture-editors/Director
- Application of Aural effects: Sound-editor/Composer
- Mixing of sounds and images: Dubber
This overview captures some of the key processes and roles at work in the creation of media output. Production teams are large units, however. More than one person will often occupy roles, personnel will change over time, while each of the aforementioned functions will be supported by a wider team of employees performing a range of technical, creative and administrative roles. Nonetheless, this overview provides a snapshot of how productions work and the types of media practitioner the project should be particularly interested in a gaining an understanding of. The purpose of the following discussion is to outline how these relations of media might be approached.

6.3 Techniques for Approaching Media Production

Approaching the thoughts and practices of media producers is open to a variety of different research techniques although it is telling that the vast majority of work in this field has emphasised two broad strands of data collection. The first of these is built around a tradition of observation, in which the researcher enters into the work place of media professionals and, as the term implies, gains insight by viewing and listening to what occurs. The second approach to media production, and one often developed in tandem with this approach concerns the use of interview techniques, an approach that engages with research topics through the use of oral questioning of research subjects. Consider each of these in turn.

6.3.1 Observation

According to Deacon et al (1999), studies of media production "almost inevitably" (p.249) involve some degree of observation, the major distinction at work in this
field being observation that is either participatory or non-participatory in form. Participatory techniques involve the researcher taking an active role in the research environment to gain insight into that world. The researcher becomes immersed in its activities by occupying a particular function within the social relationships at work. The participant observer uses the power invested in this role to deepen his or her insights into that world. Typically, research of this kind has involved researchers who are media professionals themselves, such as Ferguson (1983), a journalist who explored how ideas of femininity were produced through women magazines, or Hetherington (1985), who used his respected position as a journalist and BBC Controller to conduct a study of the news media.

For novice researchers of media production with a limited amount of time, participatory observation is neither realistic nor necessarily desirable. Not only would this approach require a role to be attained within the production process and the acquisition of specialist skills, unless that role had the capacity to move between the varying practices at ease (such as a producer) this approach would also restrict the researcher to a particular point in the production process. Hetherington, for instance, was able to manoeuvre as a participant with these worlds to great effect. But Hetherington was also the ex-editor of the Guardian and a Controller of BBC Scotland.

The alternative is observation as a non-participatory technique, or 'simple' observation as it is sometimes known (Sarantakos 1993). Simple observation works on the principle that the researcher is detached from the research environment under scrutiny, that events unfold as
if the researcher were not there, such as Schlesinger's (1980) seminal work on the production of television news in which the author sat around, for months, watching the BBC Newsroom edit the day's stories.

It also worth noting that media research of this sort is overwhelmingly conducted in an overt manner, by which it is meant that the intentions of the researcher are known and understood by the research subjects. Indeed, it is difficult to see how simple observation could be covert in the context of media production. Except in a few small instances, such as the observation of location shoots in public places, it is highly unlikely that the researcher would be able to stand and observe in a covert manner. The observer could not expect to drift around the corridors and rooms of a television company and expect their intentions to remain unknown for long!

The picture being created therefore, is that for both practical and strategic reasons, simple, overt observation would be the logical approach to observation for the research proposed by the second aim of this thesis. This is not, of course, a reason for undertaking such endeavour, although for its proponents, simple observation has a number of merits. Its strengths lay in its ability to understand the social world 'naturalistically'. Activities are able to be rationalised by the researcher as they occur, rather than having to rely on the second hand accounts of practitioners in artificial environments divorced from the research context. Moreover, observation is also often thought of as an 'open' methodology, providing the necessary room for unexpected themes and issues to emerge within the research process. In this, observation may be effectively used as a precursor to
other research techniques, such as interviewing, allowing important agents in the process to be identified and research questions to be defined more clearly.

At the same time observational techniques are not without their problems. In a practical sense, access to research environments over substantial periods of time, such as media production, may prove difficult. In contrast to other techniques, such as interviewing or postal questionnaires, data collection is generally demanding on time. It also generates a large amount of information that may be potentially irrelevant to the research aims. Furthermore, some research environments are arguably easier to observe than others. It is one thing observing the recording of a television drama on location, for instance, but observation starts to become slightly inappropriate when a researcher tries to observe a script being written!

In terms of the data generated, despite its overtures to naturalistic data collection observers cannot be sure either, of the degree to which the research environment is being distorted by his or her presence. Moreover, relying on observation can mean that the voices of research subjects on the issues being interrogated are downplayed in relation to the authority of researcher observations. Allied to this is the way in which observation techniques fail to prompt research subjects to reflect on the issues at stake. Gaining firm insights into how subjects' think and feel in relation to the research questions can be easily be stifled by observation techniques. Finally, observation is chained to the present. Its emphasis on seeing and hearing is built around the here and now. It cannot, in itself, observe processes temporally. Its sense
of time is confined to the period spent observing (For a fuller discussion of these merits and deficiencies see Cook and Crang 1995, Sarantakos 1993)

6.3.2 Interviewing

As suggested, often dovetailing this technique is the use of interviewing, a key device for data collection in the media research. If observational techniques are open to certain distinctions, interviewing is more varied still. Its defining quality is that data are generated through verbal questioning, (again, for a detailed overview of the breadth, possibilities and limits of this technique see Sarantakos 1993). In comparison to observation techniques, the key advantage of interviewing is that it encourages respondents to directly engage with research themes (i.e. it is focused). Where observation works on the assumption that insights will somehow emerge through careful scrutiny of what is seen and overheard, interviewing attempts to make explicit how the research subjects' think, feel and act in relation to the issues at stake.

A key distinction when approaching the use of this technique is that between structured and unstructured interviewing. Interviewing that follows a strict schedule of questioning is known as structured interviewing, and involves the interviewer following a predetermined battery of questions. Alternatively, questioning can be formulated discursively as the interview unfolds, known as unstructured interviewing. Here, interviewers' fashion the discussion around the broad research themes, but questioning is not staked out in advance. Interviewing is flexible and non-replicable. It is traceable to the research issues but defined through the particularities of
the interview situation. Somewhere between these two points is what is termed semi-structured interviewing. In this case, a schedule of questions is defined in advance of the interview, but this does not preclude questions unfolding discursively. Discussion constant flickers back and forth between apriori sets of questions, and those emerging as relevant during the interview process.

The key merits of employing the structured interviewing technique is that it affords the researcher consistency over a number of interviews and a high degree of control over the data collection environment. The problem is that this sense of consistency and control can come at the expense of developing unexpected and potentially important avenues of inquiry emerging within the discursive process. There is no inherent problem in this, provided that the possibilities for questioning can be adequately anticipated in advance of data collection. Whether this is feasible when seeking to explore the complexity of thoughts and practices that may be in play in the construction of media images of the countryside is questionable, not least because this represents an uncharted terrain for the researcher. There is good argument to suggest, therefore, that formal interview situations would profit from a semi-structured mode of questioning. Moreover, where discussion emerges in addition to simple observation - where thoughts and questions arise out of reactions to watching and listening - unstructured questioning is arguably the more desirable option.
6.3.3 Alternative Techniques

The use of observation and interviewing does not exhaust the options available to this stage of research. Somewhat allied to the practices of interviews, the research may choose to build insights around the use of group discussions with practitioners (see a special of edition of Area 1996 for a detail overview). Under the auspices of this technique, the researcher would bring together media producers of similar or different identities (e.g. a group comprised of writers, or a group of writers and editors) and then lead a discussion based around the research themes. Small group discussions generate insight primarily out of the interaction between research subjects. While the researcher directs the course of the discussion through particular lines of questioning, the emphasis of this technique is on how a group defines, shares and contest meanings inter-subjectively (Cook and Crang 1995). Significantly, the group dynamic can allow consistencies and differences over research questions to be defined, in part, by research subjects, as opposed to single respondent methodologies, where relationships are constructed solely by the researcher (i.e. the only person party to all comments).

The success of the group discussion technique relies very much on the qualities of the researcher to lead discussion effectively. The researcher must be able to keep discussion on course and encourage all members of the group to participate. Unlike single respondent techniques, the dynamic of group discussion may mean that some respondents tend to dominate discussion. Respondents may conceal genuine feelings due to the presence of others,
leading false consensus to emerge around particular research issues.

Furthermore, in a practical sense, whether the use of group discussion is feasible within a research environment such as media production was uncertain at the initial stages of research design. While some practitioners might prefer to be interviewed together within particular production functions, and while group discussion may naturally occur when one or more than one person is present (such as interviews emerging from the process of observation), in an environment where patterns of work vary greatly in space and time, the organisation of these was anticipated to be problematic. The point is that, while group discussion was unlikely to be the main focus of discussion, the research process may produce scenarios where group discussion occurs.

The final technique that must be considered here concerns the possibilities of the postal questionnaire. Similar in design to the structured interview, the questionnaire is built around a battery of questions designed in advance by the researcher to which respondents commit written answers. Like the structured interview, the questionnaire has the merits of developing a consistent form of inquiry in the research environment, although its chief advantage over the interview scenario per se is its ability to survey a greater number of respondents over the study period. Moreover, questionnaires avoid the possibility that responses may be stifled by direct questioning. In contrast to the interview environment, which demands the respondent to react immediately to the questions of the researcher, the questionnaire survey affords respondents the opportunity to make a more
considered response to the questions posed. Its great problem is an inability to engage with exploratory discussion around ideas. Questions cannot be clarified, completion can be partial, while responses can lack analytical depth. The questionnaire survey is arguably most suited to providing a course overview of information of research themes than capturing the complexity of human thought and action.

It was against this context that it was decided to adopt a two-stage approach to media production. First, simple observation of practices in the production environment conducive to processes of viewing and listening. This would provide space for personal reaction and assessments of media processes to be made, as well as providing a way of helping to identify media practitioners of particular interest to this research. It would also provide a space for informal unstructured conversation with a wide range of producers about research themes, as well as a precursor to more formal interviewing with them (i.e. making contacts, building trust and interest in the research project). Second, formal interviews with media practitioners at each stage of the production process. This would include interviews with practitioners who were defined as of *apriori* importance to the process, but also discussion with producers who emerged as important during the course of the research.
6.4 Gaining Entry into the Production Process

Gaining access to institutions such as the media is potentially difficult. Television companies work with strict deadlines and may be concerned the presence of researcher will obstruct the creation of media output. Producers may be wary too of granting access to a researcher who may be party to sensitive information. They may be sceptical about the intentions of the researcher, and critical of the research aims. They may uncomfortable with being made the object of research. Much care has to be taken therefore in how the nature and scope of the research is represented to media producers when attempting to gain access to the processes and practitioners of interest. It is with these matters in mind that it was decided to write to a senior member of the production team - namely the producer - outlining the scope of the project in general terms (i.e. how and why media images of the countryside are created) and asking them, in the first instance, permission to watch the production process in action while it was being recorded. At the time of initiating this research it was felt that this approach would allow the production to gain an broad understanding of the research intentions while not appearing too demanding of peoples’ time. Once access to this element of the production process was achieved it was hoped that the researcher would gain the trust and sympathies of the production team, thereby creating the possibility for more formal interviewing of practitioners to take place.

This approach proved to be successful. Access was granted to each of the production teams: Yorkshire Television and Heartbeat first, followed by BBC Pebble Mill Birmingham and Dangerfield, and then Carlton.
Television's Peak Practice based at Nottingham. The time spent with these production teams totalled 2 weeks for each drama: Heartbeat in one 2 week block during February 1996; Dangerfield over four visits between May and July 1996, and Peak Practice over 2 occasions, one in October 1996, the second in February 1997. I was partly responsible for this staggered timing. Treating one production team at a time rather than all simultaneously, seemed the most logical way of handling the large amount of information expected to be generated. At the same time, the timing of the research reflected when these dramas were in production.

Each observation experience generally followed the same pattern. Observation would quickly be interspersed with unstructured conversations with practitioners who were soon offering important insights into the research issues. These conversations were more often than not restricted to junior members of the production team. Indeed, it quickly became clear that to speak with senior members of the production (such as the director, or the designer) would involve formal contact through the production administrator. This was not exclusively the case. Some interviews were arranged informally on-site, which were then confirmed directly by letter. Furthermore, contrary to expectation, observing the production process did not provide many contacts with practitioners outside of the location shoot. It became clear, in fact, that the production process is remarkably divided, with many of the crew, having little or no conception of who was working in the pre and post production stages of a drama's creation.

In consequence, most formal interviews were arranged by writing a second letter to the producer specifying who it
was that I wished to interview formally. The persons
formally interviewed for this study are detailed in Figure
6.2, all of which occurred over a year and a quarter long
period (April 1996 and July 1997). All of the formal
interviews were recorded and conducted in single
respondent form, except in one case, where discussion with
two script-editors on Dangerfield took place
simultaneously at their request. In roles where there were
more than one practitioner at work interviews with more
than one respondent were sought, although I did not set
myself a pre-requisite limit of participants. I was
successful in securing interviews with all the desired
programme makers I approached, except musical
composers/arrangers in the Dangerfield and Peak Practice,
where repeat letters and phone calls were unsuccessful.

**Figure 6.2 The Interview Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Heartbeat</th>
<th>P’Practice</th>
<th>Dangerfield</th>
<th>TTL BY ROLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Executive Producers/Producers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creators</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Script-editors</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production Designers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location Manager</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound Artist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music Composers/arrangers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL BY PRODUCTION</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Creator here refers to the author of the books on which Heartbeat
was based. The person who was responsible for the television adoption
not available for interview, although I did obtain his original
proposal for the series.

In Table 6.3 an outline of nature of questioning adopted
in the semi-structured interview format is presented.
Questioning was divided up into two broad sections of
discussion: themes that were common to all interviews, and

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themes that related to particular aspects of the production under scrutiny. Because of the variability of questioning involved in this second form of questioning, an example is presented from interviews with production designers.

Figure 6.3 Guideline Questions for Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe these dramas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe the location of these dramas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you describe the characters of these dramas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What sort of society do you think [NAME] depicts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think [NAME] relates to a sense of realism?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What makes [NAME] such a high rating show?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is a typical [NAME] story?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What makes a good [NAME] Story?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel the stories in [NAME] relate to their settings in anyway [if so, in what ways]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you feel the drama has changed over time, [if how, in what ways and why]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have a conception of the audience for [NAME] [if so, what is this, and why]?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Specific Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What does your role involve you doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What image for the drama are you trying to create through your work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are you looking for in a location?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does your work relate to original script ideas?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the drama's broad sense of setting affect the way you select and design a location [if so, in what ways]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does characterisation affect the way you select and design a location [if so, in what ways]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does your work relate to the rest of production?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything that you are required to include in images [if so, what and why]?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think about the audience when selecting and designing locations [if so, how does this relate to your work]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I endeavoured as much as possible within interviews to avoid leading questions, and to frame discussion in an open manner, so that any ideas relating to the rurality of these dramas programmes was activated by the respondents. My identity as a rural researcher I am sure orientated respondents to register ideas about the countryside with
their practices, although I believe my general line of questioning did not demand this of them.
6.5 The Researcher-Subject/Object Relationship

Earlier in this chapter it was suggested that one of the characteristics of simple observation was the way it allowed the researcher to remain at a distance from the world being observed. If participatory observation was built around the researcher intervening and being immersed in the research environment, then simple observation was about standing back and letting events occur as if the researcher was not there. This line between participation and non-participation is perhaps more finely drawn than methodology textbooks might suggest.

It soon became clear that observing the closed world of television production would not involve wandering around unnoticed in the background. Practitioners were quick to notice the arrival of a stranger. Many hadn’t been told about my arrival and some were curious, in some instances, suspicious, of my intentions. In spite of the initial courtesy of people asking who I was, and my reasons for being ‘on location’, as a general rule members of these teams were more concerned with my willingness to be a team player: whether I would be prepared to move props around; whether I would make sure members of the public were being quiet; whether I could make tea; whether I could take a joke; and so on.

In all production teams, actions spoke much louder than words, although the nature of these rituals varied considerably. In one incident during my time with Heartbeat, my identity as a ‘good sport’ and as an ‘adopted’ member of the team depended on my willingness to be dressed as a vicar, and among other things take on a starring role in the production. Rather fortuitously, the
director decided to halt this plan before my walk on part became a reality. Despite the good-natured intentions of the team, and the enjoyable time I had being dressed by the props team (it is not often a researcher imagines becoming a TV star) it is remarkable how quickly the simple observer can become the object of the research. Remarkable how easy, in the right circumstances, the researcher can be enrolled into the very practices that are being critically examined (See Figure 6.4). It is through these rituals that production teams began to engage with me. I did not contrive to being dressed as a vicar, although it certainly gave me a certain license to speak comfortably and informally about my research with practitioners.

**Figure 6.4 The Researcher becomes the Researched**
This, however, is the positive interpretation of events. Confidence can be broken easily. Often, what appeared as inconsequential actions on my part quickly aroused mistrust. It soon became clear, for instance, that my use of a small red notebook to note interesting thoughts and comments down, aroused considerable suspicion on the part of the production team. I became aware that people, in a questioning and mistrustful fashion, were watching me write in the book. That my research intentions had been stated to them counted for little in these situations. It was clear that the presence of the book made them feel uncomfortable. I also, by accident, managed to press the play button down on my tape recorder and disrupted the recording of a critical scene in Heartbeat. While many had been happy to speak into the microphone of a tape recorder, the impression that I gave was that I was trying to record information without people knowing. I felt as if I had been ‘caught in the act’.

Furthermore, occasionally I would assume over-familiarity with my research subjects. I would start questioning people in an overconfident fashion only to realise that they were reticent about speaking to me. I quickly learnt that the trust I shared with people over a limited period of time was fragile at best. At the time, I felt so excited that I had their attention, that I had managed to gain access into this unseen world of television production, that my I forgot my identity was still being constructed as the researcher, the stranger, who should be treated with caution.

Finally, the issue of taking notes in public view spilled over into relationships with villagers in Goathland, North Yorkshire (the location for Heartbeat).
Over the course my time there I often sat in the public house and wrote up my accounts of the day, interspersed with casual conversation with the patrons. Unfortunately, as I was standing in the corridor putting on my coat at the end of my time with Heartbeat, I had the misfortune of overhearing what patrons in the bar actually thought of me and my practices. Thinking that I had left they proceeded to speak, quite aggressively, about my note taking: how I was a 'sociologist' who had been 'eyeballing' them during my stay. I am still ambivalent about whether I was naïve thinking that undertaking such practices were perfectly reasonable in such a visible space. I did address my critics, after standing in the corridor listening to them in horror. I'm not sure this was the correct intervention to make. It was instinctive reaction to the situation. They were surprised by my return, but they were not forgiving. They simply laughed at me, quite callously. It is nevertheless the case in these situations that one realises how damaging even the most innocuous activities, such as writing in a public space can be, how threatening it can seem to people. I stopped using the red book in public spaces.
6.6 Summary

This discussion has set the scene for the second stage of this research project. It has outlined the nature of the production process and considered the techniques that were open to this approaching these relations. In working through these methodological issues the research adopted a combination of interview and observation techniques. The way that media producers were approached and the nature of questioning has been clarified. The experience of employing these methodologies has also been discussed. It is to the substantive insights from this endeavour that discussion now turns.
Chapter 7

Originating Ruralities
7.1 Introduction*

The objective of the following chapter is to explore how and why media producers sought encode particular ideas about the countryside into these dramas at the very earliest stages of their development. It considers four key themes in this respect. First, it reflects on the way media producers built their respective dramas around particular settings and character identities by emulating the success of other dramas, as well as defining these texts as 'original'. Second, it considers the way that senses of rurality were encoded into these texts through attempts to relate output to an imagined audience defined by their place in the television schedule. Third, it considers how senses of rurality were developed out of different conceptions of realism held by originators in relation to the proposed text. Fourth and finally, it considers how character identities and relationships developed by these series helped meet certain protocols of effective storytelling in television drama. Through these themes, discussion demonstrates the way programme makers developed a particular vision for the proposed drama's rurality, and develops a basis from which to explore their subsequent development and transformation by contemporary production teams.

*NOTE ON TEXT

This analysis uses many direct quotes. They have been presented as the respondents spoke them. They have not been tidied up in any way, although I have chosen examples where I feel points are expressed most clearly. Where three dots appear in quotes i.e.( ...)this indicates a pause in conversation. Where three dots occur either side of brackets(...) this indicates that words were spoken between the comments displayed. I have made this latter intervention for the purpose of brevity, particularly where a respondent departs from the issue of interest, only to return to it subsequently. Where words are inserted in brackets, these are my own. They either substitute respondent words where I feel confusion for the reader may occur, or they include additional terms that may clarify points raised.
7.2 Issues of Emulation and Originality in Programme Origination

Rationalising the creation of media output can begin from a variety different perspectives. This section focuses on a particularly important issue governing the origination of media texts: the imperative of reproducing an audience. In particular, it argues that this imperative is closely related to media producers attempting to encode into the text, from the outset, a rural setting based around the actions of professionals, a key identification made in the textual analysis.

The issue at stake here concerns the need of mass media institutions to build a sense of the audience in order to reproduce its own conditions of existence: the generation of television income. Indeed, for the BBC, maintaining audience share and sensitising its output according to a diverse range of popular needs is primarily about legitimising state and licence payer funding, allied to its identity as a 'public servant'. For independent broadcasting, delivering large audiences with particular social backgrounds, identities and lifestyles is about generating their major source of income: advertising revenue. The business of television, in other words, is the business of creating audiences.

The problem is that while television has always needed to construct an audience, viewers are seen to be much scarcer today than they were in the formative years of broadcasting. With the expansion of non-terrestrial output in the 1980s, audiences are being divided up between an increasing number of television companies, a situation that is likely to proliferate further with the introduction of digital technology over the next ten years.
(Curran 2000). Consequently, the process of guaranteeing an audience *per se* has become increasingly uncertain for both public and commercial broadcasters.

So when Ang (1991) claims that the contemporary television industry is 'desperately seeking the audience' and that its continued attempts to construct an audience reflect an "institution's control - or better, lack of control - over the conditions of its own reproduction" (p.17) she is alluding to the much greater uncertainty which the process of constructing the audience now generates for television producers. She is capturing the sense of urgency, and awareness, now characterising the industry's investment in this process.

The clear disparity between the medium's highly centralised mode of broadcasting and its resolutely dispersed, invisible and privatised mode of reception means that constructing a television audience has never been a particularly natural or straightforward process for media producers. It is, what Raymond Williams (1974, p.18) terms, television's "deep contradiction". And just like any other system of mass communication which operates in multiple time-space formations this disjunction between the contexts of production and reception create a "distinctive kind of indeterminacy" in which producers lack "direct and continuous forms of feedback" (Thompson 1995, p.13) from their audiences.

While television broadcasters have always had to overcome this fundamental poverty of exchange between production and reception (Ang 1991), the new demands placed on television producers to deliver an audience, of a particular size and form, is one which makes this state
of indeterminacy an uneasy one for today's producers to accommodate. Faced with an increasingly competitive market place for media audiences, public and commercial broadcasting has increasingly sought to overcome this problem by developing a range of formal and informal strategies aimed quite directly at making audience identity and practice less capricious. The development of new output is one aspect of television production closely bound up with different strategies for reproducing the audience, of which the three productions are no exception. In this respect, the particular theme this section wishes to develop is the way each of these dramas attempted to construct an audience through ideas of emulation and originality; ideas that were closely connected to the encoding of rural settings and professional main protagonists.

A useful entrance into how these ideas came in to play in the development of the three dramas is found in the practice of independent audience research, by which it is meant the provision of extensive industry-led data on audiences after transmission of the output. Such data can be characterised as the systematic and ongoing process by the broadcasting industry to identify the 'who', 'how many' and 'where' of a television audience. This data is carved out of a range of research methods ranging from 'setmeters' (registering what output is being watched), and 'peoplemeters' (registering who is watching it) through to 'diary' methods (personal accounts by the audience of what they are watching). As Brierley (1995) has argued, these methods generally emphasise the use of data that is quantitative in form, not least because, "qualitative approaches ... by definition increase the
complexity of the viewing moment and reduce the power of
the media" (p.132).

Together, independent audience research represents a
conceived attempt to relate the character and needs of the
viewer to particular creative output. It is therefore a
marker of the way in which the television industry has
increasingly sought to inject greater certainty into the
planning and control mechanisms of the industry by trying
to generate a discernible set of facts about the audience.
While such research is primarily designed to provide the
television company transmitting output with data on their
own audiences, (and as such is a important planning device
for determining their future output), in its most general
form, it provides a common reference point through which
the success of different productions can be judged more
generally in the industry (Nelson 1997). As far as
programme commissioners and makers are concerned, the
provision of formal market research is an opportunity to
contemplate which types of programme output have the
potential to deliver an audience. It provides television
companies with an objective set of information on the
audience by which they can anticipate the potential
success of their transmissions.

The use of such data in the development of production
means that programme makers can be seen as only a short
step away from a much derided, but defining characteristic
of television: the practice of formula. For the purposes
of this discussion, formula television can be defined as
the process by which programme makers continuously encode
into a production, or a set of productions, an
identifiable set of elements that are widely accepted to
reproduce the popular appeal of the resultant form. It is
a process by which the essential ingredients of a text’s popular appeal are determined, and then replicated in another text.

As far as the development of new output is concerned, audience figures help programme makers discern such creative formulas and then systematically insert them into subsequent productions in order to anticipate, with a greater degree of certainty, an audience for the proposed output. The deployment of independent research by media producers, therefore, becomes part of the process by which texts begin to develop an identifiable form and recognisable appeal, a situation that will always be desirable for a television industry uncertain about what its audiences want to see. If the text can work with a set of conventions expected, recognised, and enjoyed by particular viewers, then the process of reproducing the audience would not seem so unstable. The flip side to this is that potential audience appeal can be defined through a strategy of difference. Poor or fading audience figures for particular formats can act as a means for evoking ‘original’ texts, the elements of which are determined as much by what they are not, as what they are.

7.2.1 Emulation and Originality in Heartbeat, Peak Practice and Dangerfield

It is possible to see how each of the three dramas were bound up with ideas of emulation and originality. The development of Heartbeat for instance might be attributed, in part, to the success of another rural drama transmitted some 15 years before. Indeed, according to the author of the Country Constable novels, on which the series were initially based, the original approach made to him by Yorkshire Television occurred at a time when the BBC TV’s
All Creatures Great and Small was making television history. As he suggested in our discussion:

"...[The Constable books]... appeared when Heriot was highly popular, and I got an approach after book number four from YTV talking about a series based on them"

In Nicholas Rhea's Constable books, Yorkshire Television saw an opportunity to reproduce the essential elements of Heriot's success. While All Creatures Great and Small was based on the autobiographical accounts of Alfred White (alias James Heriot) and his veterinary practices in the Yorkshire Dales of the 1930s and 40s, the Constable books were based around the stories of Peter Walker (alias Nicholas Rhea) and his life as a country constable on the North Yorkshire Moors of the 1960s. In other words, a series based on the Constable Books provided a striking set of parallels with the BBC series: a literary, historical based drama set around the experiences of a figure of authority living in the countryside. In this respect, it is interesting to find that the initial publication of the Constable books were themselves borne out of the success of Heriot's original novels. As far as the author of the Constable books was concerned, however, it was his idea that came first, a point that makes the issue of 'who was copying who' less than straightforward:

"They were very similar books. In fact, I wrote my first ... [Constable] ... book before ... [Alf White] ... wrote his first ... [Heriot] ... book, but mine was rejected and his wasn’t. Then his came along and then mine sort of followed"

Moreover, set against this basic appeal of Heriot, there is some evidence to suggest that the books themselves were also considered to have their own unique appeal that might be reproduced through a television adaptation. In his outline proposal for the series, for instance, the
originator gestured at the popularity of the books, and the way he envisaged the series would recreate, for television, stories "which have delighted and captured the hearts of a wide readership". This process of cross genre appeal has long since been reversed, with the popularity of the television series leading to the successful publication of further Constable books such as Constable at the Dam, Constable in Control, and Constable versus Greengrass. In this case, the question of where replication begins and originality stops is again thrown into doubt. Indeed, while the Constable books are still written by the original author, they are now usually based upon narratives and characterisations he has not developed himself. This is the case, for instance, with the character Greengrass, for while Peter Walker developed this character, his disposition and appearance was quite different. As the author suggested, "originally...

[Greengrass]... wasn't that nice or funny a character, a bit of old weasel really", and that, "now I write him in the style of the series, because that's what people are expecting".

It was not, however, until the end of the 1980s that Yorkshire Television decided to act on this earlier idea of trying to emulate the success of Heriot, a passing of time which saw most of the personnel involved in commissioning Yorkshire television drama change. As a result, most programme makers involved in resurrecting the idea actually failed to acknowledge this original guiding logic for the series. In fact, the considerable uncertainty among the current production team over why the idea was left undeveloped for so many years has led some to claim that Yorkshire Television was actually trying to avoid emulating Heriot:
"It was just one of those projects that never quite got off the ground. One factor was certainly the success of All Creatures Great and Small ...[BBC TV]..., which was very big at the time and in many ways was the same kind of show and also set in the same part of Yorkshire"

(Heartbeat Production Team, quoted in Bonner 1994, pp8-9)

In this sense, the delayed production of Heartbeat has gradually lent the production the status of originality among many of its contemporary producers, although in other distinctive ways the formula approach to rationalising the rurality of the series was still actively at work. For one, Yorkshire Television had just finished producing another major network success in the name of The Darling Buds of May whose level of popularity they desperately wanted to emulate (Bonner 1994). It is of no coincidence, then, that Heartbeat demonstrated some noticeable parallels with the themes of its immediate predecessor, itself a literary based drama production firmly rooted in modern rural nostalgia.

Furthermore, set against this intention to replicate previous audience successes was a desire to avoid replicating the characteristics of a recent ratings failure. Indeed, the proposed location for the series was partly a reflection of the perceived failure of another Yorkshire Television series Yellow Thread Street, set in Hong Kong and produced at the time Heartbeat was being developed. In this respect, Heartbeat was seen to stand a better chance of audience success because it was seen as quintessentially 'home grown'. As the executive producer on Heartbeat explained:

"We had just shot a series in Hong Kong which was only moderately successful and my then employer said er, I reckon we ignore our own backyard at our peril. Anyway,
he was sort of saying that we should find something firmly rooted in Yorkshire."

On a more indirect level, the development of the drama's central characters, based around the experiences of the professional in the countryside were at least partly informed by this wider understanding of popular television formulas, with one producer talking about the main protagonists satisfying the audience's "insatiable appetite for doctors and nurses". In this sense, the producers of Heartbeat quite deliberately altered the established characters of the Constable books in order to give both of the lead characters a professional status. Whereas the original books were centred solely around the work of the policeman, with his wife having a highly domesticated role in the narrative, the creators of Heartbeat turned her into a doctor. In later series, when the original leading lady had left, they simply replicated the formula. A senior producer explained that the introduction of Jo Weston and Maggie Bolton some years later was designed to continue, as well strengthen, the tradition of "caring professions" in Heartbeat.

According to current programme makers on Peak Practice, injecting the critical elements of wider popular successes into the development process was not the driving force behind Peak Practice's creation, although I suspect that the persons I spoke with may not have been fully party to the original decision making process. It should be noted, however, that some practitioners now involved in its contemporary construction did rationalise its appeal in relation to other similar texts. As far as one of its longstanding writers was concerned, for instance, the notion of the rural professional driving the stories of
Peak Practice along was firmly rooted in the televisual past:

"In terms of television, I think ...[Peak Practice's]... appeal is very similar to All Creatures Great and Small. Country based stories based around practice. It's nostalgic in a televisual way"

Nonetheless, the predominant idea emphasised was that the series was designed as an 'original' production vis a vis established production formats at the time of inception. Its appeal was designed to be based on its difference, rather than its replication, of formula. So, for instance, while the originator admitted the practice of formula had at least some license over her earlier ideas ('I went down all the usual routes' she said, 'law, police ... at one point I thought it would be a solicitor') she was, at the same time, entirely disparaging of this market-led process:

"At the moment, yer know, adaptations work: wow! Medical works: wow! And country works: wow! A great thing would be a adaptation of a medical country drama. I mean, that would hit all the jackpots with a great big star"

As far as the majority of those involved in its production were concerned, Peak Practice was an original idea. As one senior member of the production team put it when reflecting on the initial development of the series:

" ... [The executive producer] ... analysed a hole in the market. And the hole was that no one had ever done a series about rural GPs"

Similarly, the writer subsequently commissioned to develop the series quite explicitly states that she wanted to set the series in the countryside because she considered it "original territory", although in contradiction to the last comment, apparently it was not the executive
producer’s idea to grant the text its middle class rural themes, but her own:

“I decided that if I was going to do a series I wanted to set it in the countryside. I felt then, I think it’s less so now, but I felt then that it was less explored, country life was less explored than city life ... then I came up with the idea of a doctor”

It is in these claims of originality that Peak Practice’s programme makers find Dangerfield somewhat lacking. For them, Dangerfield was the real culprit of formula drama, conspicuously trying to reproduce the audience by aping the content and style of original dramas like their own and Heartbeat. As the current producer of Peak Practice put it:

“Heartbeat and Peak Practice are original dramas, where as I think Dangerfield is just a rip off. The BBC looked at what ITV were doing successfully and created their own. Basically, it’s a total amalgam. Because it is the policeman from Heartbeat and the doctor from Peak Practice, the scenery from Peak Practice. It’s a hybrid ... It’s absolutely obvious ... as far as I’m concerned it was a cynical exercise”

As the above comment suggests, Dangerfield’s rurality was seen to be firmly aimed at mimicking it predecessors (‘it’s a total amalgam’), a process informed by the independent audience research which had deemed them both ratings winners (‘The BBC looked at what ITV were doing successfully’). Clearly, there is a hint of cynicism (and pretension) in such a suggestion, one that exposes the supposed purity of Peak Practice and Heartbeat at the expense of Dangerfield’s creative poverty. In other words, Dangerfield was seen to be anathema, a contrived attempt to turn the rural appeal of Peak Practice and Heartbeat into a trusted formula. As the originator put it:
"I know Dangerfield is crap. Dangerfield is one of the most crappy series on television that there is. I’ll watch other series very happily ... but what Dangerfield did was, the BBC are quite honest about it, they went in and said ‘we want a Peak Practice’”

(Peak Practice Production Team)

These claims were not, however, substantiated by members of the Dangerfield production team involved in the creation of the series. On one level, the drama’s originator quite explicitly states how he would have liked to set Dangerfield in the Matlock area of Derbyshire but, “Peak Practice had pinched that spot. I couldn’t really set it in the same place”. Moreover, his decision to eventually set the series in Warwickshire was at least partly taken because, as he puts it, the area “hadn’t been touched by BBC drama”. In fact, the closest a member of the Dangerfield production team came to acknowledging the process of mimicry came in the originator’s suggestion that he had wanted to recreate the appeal of a much earlier BBC drama, Doctor Finlay’s Casebook, a rural series which had been running some decades before:

“I wanted to create a rural doctor, like one of the most famous, Doctor Finlay’s Casebook, a BBC1 drama in the Sixties and Seventies. Not the recent one on ITV, Doctor Finlay, which we knocked out of the schedule because Dangerfield was more successful. Doctor Finlay’s Casebook was immensely successful. It was on a Sunday evening, when the BBC occupied Sunday evening, in the Heartbeat slot, and the audience figures were enormous. Something like 17 or 18 million. Because they liked the music and the rolling hills of Scotland, and the home spun philosophy which came out of the mouth of the old Doctor”

While Dangerfield’s originator, therefore, wanted to appeal to the strengths of other successful dramas (i.e. the rural professional), he certainly was not prepared to acknowledge a debt to the themes of Heartbeat or Peak
Practice. As far as the originator of Dangerfield was concerned, the BBC was quite uncertain about the potential success of the proposed output. Rather than simply relying on his ability to write a popular series, which he claimed to have done many times before, the BBC decided to put the proposed themes of the show through a rigorous, and rather secret, process of in-house pre-testing:

"Now I know that while I was writing the first script, unbeknown to me, they'd got a control group, a questionnaire group of people all over the country, and they're asking them the question: 'A' Do you like the title ... Dangerfield? 'B' Do you like it being set in the countryside?"

According to the originator of Dangerfield, this process was lamentable, representing an almost paranoiac desire on the part of the television industry to drive output according to market needs. He argued that the writer's creative autonomy was gradually being clawed away; a trend that he admitted had begun to effect how he now went about devising dramas like Dangerfield:

"When I started out in television we never considered the audience. We did what we liked, because we thought, if we liked it everyone else would like it. Nowadays, because everything is so much more commercial you do think about the audience ... This to me is debasing, I never used to ask about audience figures and it does start to effect you because you want to sell it to the BBC, you want it to be done. So you're trying to think what they are thinking. You're putting yourself in their shoes. I didn't know they were submitting ... [Dangerfield] ... to market research, but they were. As it happens, I was on the right track"

It remains uncertain, then, whether allegations about Dangerfield's emulation of Heartbeat and Peak Practice are correct, although it is entirely clear that the drama's fusion of a picturesque countryside setting with the character and plots of the criminal and medical
profession, drawn attention to in the textual analysis, bear a striking resemblance to its immediate predecessors. For the producers of both Heartbeat and Peak Practice, salvation is found in recourse to the audience, and its power to apparently differentiate between the originality of their own dramas and the poverty of Dangerfield:

"It's quite interesting that these other productions have again quite cynically tried to follow the format and failed"

(Script-editor, Heartbeat Production Team)

"... [Dangerfield] ... have done it, but not as well, and they haven't got the viewing figures. They've always been a notch below us. Because the audience know. You can't fool them. You can offer them more of the same and you can offer a slightly different diet of the same and they'll take the different diet, but they know"

(Producer, Peak Practice Production Team)

These points would certainly explain the difference in audience ratings for the three dramas. As the figures in Chapter 1 and Chapter 3 show, out of the three dramas, Dangerfield is consistently lower than Heartbeat and Peak Practice. If this logic is followed through, however, it is also tempting to suggest that Peak Practice, which draws 2-3 million fewer viewers than Heartbeat, performs less successfully for the very reason that its creators criticise Dangerfield: Peak Practice came in to production one year after Heartbeat.

7.2.2 Summary

This section has begun to explore some of the relationships between the creation of media images of rurality and issues of audience reproduction. In this particular case, the argument being made is that media producers charged with developing these dramas appeared to
reflect on the critical ingredients of other perceived successes and failures as a way of creating the dramatic texts under question. As this discussion has shown, these dramas constitute something of a formula insofar as the creation of rural settings and professional main protagonists is concerned. These themes appeared to be built out of reflections on recent, and not so recent, televisual histories, a process by which programmes are marked out by the industry as successful/unsuccessful, and then replicated/reversed when creating new output. Conversely, claims of originality in the themes of these texts also appeared at work, particularly among the thoughts of media producers developing Peak Practice, although often this premise seemed to be little more than a way of exposing the artistic purity of creative output vis a vis 'cynical' copies. There is also evidence to suggest that the development of Dangerfield was also subject to particular assurance mechanisms by which the original idea was designed to be altered if it had not satisfied the tastes of sample audiences. While I did not have opportunity to pursue the validity of this idea either in Dangerfield, or Peak Practice and Heartbeat, there is evidence to suggest that this process of in-house testing is common in the contemporary television industry (Nelson 1997).
7.3 The Audience in the Schedule

The process by which programme makers actively tried to position their dramas as 'original' or emulate the success of other dramas as the basis for production appeal, begins to demonstrate how rural settings combined with professional main protagonists were actively encoded by these production companies. In the following section, issues of text-audience relations are taken one stage further by considering the relationship between the practices of media producers and their conceptions of the television schedule. The issue at stake here concerns the way in which the characteristics and needs of audiences are thought to be defined by the point at which the text operates in the television schedule. According to this logic, the audiences are already pre-defined for the television industry, and it is the task of the programme makers to align its output to their particular needs. This process appeared to be at work among programme makers interviewed in the production of Dangerfield and Heartbeat.

7.3.1. The Story World and the Pre-Watershed Audience

The critical theme to draw attention with respect of these two series was the way both were commissioned for a pre-watershed audience, by which it is meant output commissioned for transmission before 9pm. For both sets of originators, this pre-watershed remit brings with it the assumption that audience will be broad in social composition, and within this, the idea that output should be created in such a way that it should not offend viewers assumed to occupy this particular point in the schedule. Typically, the social identities of these viewers were
either constructed as "family", "children", "grannies" or "women with children", terms which suggest a clear gendering (i.e. female) and ageing (i.e. young and old) of the audience by media producers. What is of particular interest here is the way originators tried to fashion these dramas around rural settings as a way of pandering to the imagined needs of these assumed audiences:

"The rural setting was designed to appeal to that family audience we were after"
(Executive Producer, Heartbeat Production Team)

"Of course it's an advantage if you set it in the countryside ... because my brief initially was that it was going to be before the watershed"
(Originator, Dangerfield Production Team)

Two broad logics were at work behind such statements. First, the construction of a country setting carried with it particular properties that would please the pre-watershed audience in some way. The originator of Dangerfield spoke, for instance, of the "pastoral tranquillity of the countryside" which had a "relaxing feeling for that widespread family audience I was looking for". According to him it had a "therapeutic effect over the family audience", and was "like a friend you could welcome into the living room". Similarly in Heartbeat, the rural setting was designed to be a "gentle backdrop to family viewing time" and a setting that would be "pleasing on the eye for grannies".

Second, that the rural backdrop would act as an insurance against the potentially disturbing effect of narrative. According to this line of reasoning, the relations of setting were thought to keep check over the conflicts at stake in the plot. One producer involved in the development of Heartbeat spoke of the way the scenery

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"softened storylines", while in Dangerfield the originator spoke of the way he explicitly called for a "roses round the door, cows in the fields, pretty pictures" view of the countryside that would act as a "counterpoint" to the dilemmas of the main characters.

Allied to this idea of material setting, the originators of both these dramas actively sought to constitute these televisual worlds with a particular set of social relations that they thought would be appropriate to the transmission time. In Dangerfield, the originator's decision to set the series around middle class characters was seen be "safe ground with that kind of audience". According to him, middle class characters living in the countryside "presents life in a positive way to audiences". By creating a "work driven series" set around the life and practices of a "rural doctor", combined with "family based" stories, the series was as he put it, "guaranteed to be more middle class than anything else".

To consolidate the programme's pre-watershed appeal, the originator was insistent that the plots which flowed out of these drama middle class characterisations should have an "optimistic" and "upbeat" focus throughout. He envisaged that the series would display a sense of "warmth" in its stories and its characters, that it "wouldn't dwell too much on nasty things", and that it would avoid lingering on aspects of a narrative which might begin to unsettle the drama's positive themes. As far as he was concerned, the main protagonist's role as a police surgeon did not sit uncomfortably with these imperatives. In fact, it inserted a criminal element into the series that did not directly involve the main protagonist (and therefore the audience) witnessing a
crime. According to the originator, police surgeons were involved after an incident (after the "nasty things") and as a result, the drama's positive social relations were largely protected:

"I wanted to major more on the police surgeon's work so we could bring in crime. So crime would feature heavily in his work. But again I didn't want to be see any violence because I didn't want to see anything nasty, because again I thought it was a pre-watershed programme and it would be negative to do this and would work against it. In any case, a police surgeon always comes in on the scene after the event. He doesn't see anything violent ... He picks it up from the circumstances he finds".

The way in which the originator of Dangerfield sought to respond to the imperatives of the schedule clearly had a direct influence on how he sought to shape the social and spatial scenario of the story world, and while these points register quite closely with the insights of the textual analysis, it is clear that witnessing "nasty things" as he puts it, was not entirely avoided (note, for instance, Figure 5.10 earlier from the episode Tricks). This difference might be at least partly explained by the fact that Dangerfield's eventual transmission time was after the watershed, a change in focus that the originator was not anticipating:

"I wanted it to be a soft focus rural series because it was meant to be out at about 8 o'clock. They didn't put it out at 8 o'clock in actual fact, they always put it out after the watershed at 9.30, which surprised me because I wrote with the intention that it could be watched by a family audience"

This change was also true of Heartbeat. One producer involved in its early development spoke about the production being conceived as "a kind of peak-time Emmerdale", (another highly successful rural text produced
by Yorkshire Television). In particular, he suggested that a drama based around the life of a "community policeman peddling around the countryside" offered something "light and frothy" for the "tea time slot". It came as something of a surprise, therefore, when programme makers found out that its proposed place in the schedule was changed shortly before it was first transmitted. Heartbeat's "light and frothy" dramatic scenario found itself being transferred to a post-watershed slot, an "accident of scheduling" as one put it, which meant that the tone of the show was apparently out of step with the place in the schedule it was subsequently going to occupy. The eventual movement of Heartbeat from a late Friday night slot to an early Sunday evening slot in its second series reflected the way in which the tone of the series was seen to be more in keeping with the family audience it was originally designed to cater for:

"It's now established a slot in a sense on that early Sunday evening which I think over the last few years has become family viewing time. It's a time when people aren't racing out to the pub on a Friday or Saturday night. Kids are allowed to stay up an extra hour. And it's a programme which, by and large, you can watch with your children and your grandmother, and there will be something in it for most ends of the spectrum ... And that's why it was made in the first place of course: a village bobby on the North Yorkshire moors ... It's a pleasant and gentle idea which crosses that spectrum"

(Script-editor, Heartbeat Production team)

7.3.2 Summary

The point I am arguing in this section is that, through imaginings of the audience, programme makers involved in the origination of these two dramas were seeking to foster quite specific sets of social-spatial relations in the future production. In both Dangerfield and Heartbeat, originators were anticipating the benefits of an idyllic
material setting for the pre-watershed audience, as well consciously thinking about how the social relations of these worlds would then be interpreted. This meant a desire to create the drama around middle class characters in Dangerfield, whose identities implied 'positivity' and whose roles would avoid seeing 'nasty' things, while in Heartbeat, it related to the apparently "pleasant and gentle", "light and frothy" idea of a village policeman.
7.4 Conceptions of Realism in the Development of Rural Drama

So far, this discussion has established the way in which particular conceptions of rurality were being actively developed in the origination of these dramas through notions of emulation, originality and the schedule. In this third section of discussion, consideration is given to the relationship between the development of these texts and notions of realism. The suggestion I wish to make is that each of these dramas worked with quite different senses of the real, which affected in turn, how visions of rurality were designed to be read by audiences. In the case of Peak Practice I argue that the drama was developed around 'socially realist' narratives, in Heartbeat, around a 'nostalgic realism', and in Dangerfield, around what I term 'ambivalent realism'. Consider each of these in turn.

7.4.1 The Social Realism of Peak Practice

"I don't think it's my job to comment on things. I think all I do is, I filter what is happening. Of course, it never happens, it can't happen, but what you hope to do is present a completely unbiased panorama of stories so that you pick from every level but without any particular bias of my own"

In the above comment, some degree of ambivalence is being expressed by the person responsible for devising the drama of Peak Practice about how the world comes to be represented by her writing practices. In one respect she suggests her job is not "to comment on things" but to "filter what is happening" and "present a completely unbiased panorama of stories". By the same token, the tone of this proposition is both hesitant and unsure. An "unbiased panorama of stories" is, at the same time, "what you hope to do" but "it never happens, it can't happen".
Indeed, on one level, what gradually becomes evident when reflecting on the development of this production is the originator's desire to integrate setting into narrative: to offer plots and characters that were bound up with the place in which the production would be set. Speaking about how the themes of the series were developed, a considerable amount of time was spent by the originator stressing her desire to explore a range of countryside themes, and arguing that the stories she devised for the drama were "definitely location driven". At the same time, the "panorama" of stories that she hoped to attain became, in practice, a thinly veiled attempt to open up a very specific set of ideas about of the countryside. This is how the writer described her proposal for the series:

"I talked about the different styles of stories we could have, the political situation, whereby these villages are quite impoverished, and the bus services are very poor and if you're unemployed and you live in a village you've still got to get into an unemployment office once every two weeks. So there was all that. What we didn't want to do was go down what Dangerfield decided to do, which was the middle class route. An awful lot of their stories are middle class. We wanted to go down the working class route".

The key theme to acknowledge in this comment is the way in which the originator's conception of the drama manifestly attempted to elevate an anti-idyllic, non-middle class narrative of the countryside. The writer's approach was to align her representations to working class interests - at least one commonly accepted marker of social realism (Williams 1977; Jordan 1981) - and the way in which their social lives in the countryside were effectively politicised.
Construction of local working class identities was certainly a clear theme picked up in the textual analysis, although as she was to suggest, this desire to construct a range of discourses of rurality which avoided the "middle class route" was, at the same time, set against her decision to structure the series around main protagonists who were doctors. The originator was quick to add that this "invariably led" to middle class stories, with "the working classes passing in and out of the lives of the regulars" a theme of the series that she was clearly uncomfortable with:

"Okay, we have got middle class stories but we really wanted to deal more with people like ... people who find themselves cut off from life and farm labourers who earn very little, and people who end up living in caravans and that sort of stuff"

Interestingly, at least part of her reason for choosing the medical profession lay in another strand of realism and comment. Just like another of the creator's drama series, ITV's Soldier Soldier, which drew on her own experiences of being soldier's daughter, Peak Practice would based around her own experience of being a nurse. This sense of biography gave her the opportunity to present a "authentic" portrait of the professional whilst giving her the opportunity to express the "horror" she felt in the late 1980s at "recent changes in GP fund holding and all the rest of it". Peak Practice's medical theme was, as she put it, a way of "exploring some of the implications of that". It is worth noting in addition here that this trajectory of change in the health service was defined at the time by the policies of a new right agenda, again linking the originator works to another marker of social realism, namely, its close alignment with left wing values (see again Williams 1977).
As such, the emphasis of Peak Practice in its early incarnation was clearly bound up with a desire to construct a very particular type of real, an aim that also filtered down into her pre-occupations with the shooting location for the series. Indeed, once she had been commissioned to write the first series for the drama on the basis of this treatment, she and another senior member of the team actively tried to identify locations for the series that would accommodate a range of discourses of rurality:

"The first day we went to look around the Belvoir Valley ... [which] ... is very lush and pastoral and there's a farm there with long-haired cattle and big horns and all that. And that sort of got us off a bit, we're thinking, 'got this is great'. But I think ... [if we had chosen this location] ... it would have turned out ... a little bit more sentimental and idealistic. And then we went to the Peak District and it seemed that the countryside was a lot more varied because we could have industry. We had factories, we used them in several stories. Old mills, we had rivers, we had mountains, we were still within the reach of the city if we wanted it, Derby. We had quite big towns around. We had very beautiful little villages, we had absolutely everything"

In this case, the notion of creating a series which fostered the aesthetic qualities of the countryside were clearly underwritten by a desire to root the spatiality of the programme in a number of alternative views of the countryside as well as fostering within it impressions of urbanity. While the series was clearly going to be about harnessing the visual potential of its chosen location, this was not flatly interpreted as a desire to idealise the countryside form. Quite the contrary, it was about using its differences as a basis for exploring a range of narratives about the Peak District.
7.4.2 Heartbeat’s Nostalgic Realism

The vision for Heartbeat created by its originators displayed a different sort of social conscious than Peak Practice, although the way in which the themes of the drama were injected into the production from the outset were also bound up with a conception of the real. Understanding the shape and constitution of this production owes much to the vision of rurality created by the series of books on which it was based. These books, like the TV series Peak Practice, developed out of the creator’s own biography. As the author explained:

"Any writer must draw on their own experiences and their own feelings and whatever. So obviously that’s why I originally made him a country policeman, the central character a country policeman. I’d been a country policeman, I was working this area. So I suppose in that sense it was autobiographical."

For the author of these books, the scenario of a constable in a 1960s rural setting granted him an opportunity to speak on a topic with which he was familiar. Furthermore, many of the characters which the author created, or which were developed through to the series were, according to him and others, based firmly on reality:

"The writer has to be aware of producing stereotypes, but in point of fact in a rural community of that time those people were there. And I do get correspondence and telephone calls and comments in the street and they say ‘I knew people just like that’. I think Yorkshire ... [television] ... have developed this sense of community and respect that’s there to see in the books. Some may say ‘well that’s a very stereotypical view’, but that was what it was like: people doing a kindness to each other. In village’s everybody knew everybody then. You had people like that. There’s nostalgia in that, but it doesn’t make it wrong"
The development of the series by Yorkshire Television was, in many respects, remarkably loyal to the substance and tone of Peter Walker's rurality. Not only did the series go on to build much of its drama around similar characters and settings, analysis of the original proposal for the television series, made available during the process of interviewing the executive producer, reveals the way that the writer responsible for developing the idea for television explicitly aimed to replicate this sense of nostalgic realism in the series. His vision for Heartbeat was one of creating a highly desirable and unproblematic mode of rural existence that had come to be overrun by the pace of contemporary social change. As he writes in his proposal:

"The series takes place against a wider background of revolutionary, not to say catastrophic, social change. It is set in the years that immediately preceded the collapse of Britain's traditional village based communities that has taken place in the last 25 years. The lead character, Nicholas Rhea, whether or not he realises it, is witnessing the last years of the old way of life, a way of life that had persisted essentially unchanged for centuries only to disappear almost without trace in the space of a single generation"

This passage, written in the introduction to the proposal, clearly begins to outline a vision for the series based on a yearning for a time lost. In this sense, the writer evokes this nostalgia by appealing to wider processes of historical change. He gestures at the way the series will evoke a rurality based around "the old way of life" which has "disappeared almost without trace" in the face of "catastrophic social change". For the author of the proposal, the use of a countryside community that was "barely on nodding terms with twentieth century" was about getting to a set of human relations that were infinitely
more desirable than the present, while, at the same time, being entirely authentic. Indeed, Heartbeat was to be about evoking a highly distinctive set of social-spatial relations forfeited by the experience of modern history:

"[I]t’s about real country people, living in a real world with an existence unique to itself. Through its wealth of characters it highlights enduring human values - all too often obscured and marginalised by the pace and pressure of contemporary life"

In this particular comment, the writer emphasises the sense in which these social relations were seen to be as much a reflection of setting ("an existence unique to itself") as they were reflection of particular point in time ("human values often obscured and marginalised by... contemporary life"). The original plots and characterisation that were devised for the series were driven by this desire to reconstruct these values. The programme’s emphasis on the practices of a village policeman, for instance, was seen to register not so much with notions of rural crime but with ideas about rural social cohesion and the integration of figures of authority into a cosy and unproblematic social hierarchy:

"The police are portrayed more as we prefer to remember them - individuals of, and involved in, their communities, people familiar, approachable, worthy of respect as much for their human qualities as their professional status. Although the coppers in 'Country Constable' may be considered anachronisms by today’s standards, through them, anyone over thirty must be hauled back to a remembered time when the public’s relationship with the police was simpler"

The sense in which the Heartbeat’s originator sought to present its construction of the village policeman as a part of an unproblematic, if not idyllic view, of rural social hierarchies stands in marked contrast to the
concerns of Peak Practice. Heartbeat’s main protagonists were regarded as part of a rather cherished cohesive social order by its originators, while in Peak Practice they stand as markers of a partly failed attempt to originate a series which steered away from a middle class narrative of countryside. What is also of interest in this conception of the Heartbeat was the way its themes were also being related to a sense of audience appeal, the idea of the contemporary audience looking back on sets of social relations that had been lost to the experience of time. As the proposal puts it above, “anyone over thirty” would be “hauled back to a remembered time when the public’s relationship with the police was simpler”. In its words, the drama would be about emphasising “enduring human values - all too often obscured and marginalised by the pace and pressure of contemporary life”. Heartbeat’s rurality would, in short, be about bringing to the screen a time and place which had been lost to the experience of modern history.

7.4.3 Dangerfield’s Ambivalent Realism

The development of Dangerfield rests on a slightly different conception of realism than the other two dramas, one that points in two conflicting directions. The important theme at work here concerns the way in which the drama’s setting in the Warwickshire countryside was envisaged, from the outset, to be divorced from the main thrust of the drama. Apparently, "Dangerfield wasn’t meant to explore the countryside ... it was a drama about a police surgeon ... with the countryside as the background". Whereas Heartbeat and Peak Practice, in their different ways, aimed to develop the social relations of the series out the settings in which they took place, Dangerfield sought
to separate the accuracy of character and storylines from the fictitiousness of the setting. In this, the countryside was not meant to be interrogated by the series. It was merely a canvas against which the more the substantive themes of the drama were conveyed. As the originator puts it:

"I really used the countryside as a back drop. You have to be totally honest about this because it wasn't meant to explore the countryside because really it was the backdrop of the series"

From the outset, then, the countryside backdrop was divorced from the realism of the drama. For its creator, the drama's realism could only be found in the social practices of its main character, the police surgeon. According to him, while he "did a lot of initial research with a police surgeon" in order to give the series credibility he "didn't go into Warwickshire to research the programme" because the series was designed to be "work driven". Dangerfield, he suggested, could have been made "in any setting".

While this research made the series "plausible" to audiences, the function of the setting was designed to appeal be an idyllic fantasy for the viewer. According to the originator it forged out a "window on the world" which would not try to show "the countryside as it is, but as it would like to be seen". In this sense, he was keen to emphasise the way in which the drama would be deliberately selective, if not misleading, about the world in which the drama was set. For him, the issue at stake in representing space was not about fidelity to an objective reality in the way that the practices of the police surgeon had to be. Instead, it functioned within the realm of television
entertainment where fantasy becomes a necessary feature of the text's form:

"Television opens up these places and makes them a little bit chintzy ... charming places, idyllic places but all a bit twee. Because the reality is never like that. And it's important to distinguish between fantasy and fact. It's nice for entertainment that people think of these places in television terms as being attractive, but if they were to go there in reality they would see it entirely different ... and I don't know whether it matters really. Does it really matter that television paints a rosy glow in country based series drama? It doesn't matter because if people enjoy it, so what? But in real terms it can be misleading. But then again the question: does it matter?"

The issue of realism clearly informed the development of Dangerfield's rurality, but it depended on which aspect of the text the originator was concerning himself with. The desire to achieve fidelity to the work practices of police surgeons was not in any sense seen to be bound up with the place in which the drama was set, nor did the setting demand any loyalty to its material referent. As far as this latter point was concerned, it all depended on what the text was designed to achieve. While in different ways Heartbeat and Peak Practice attempted to reflect a real when originating these dramas, Dangerfield was wilfully trying to subvert it for the pleasure of its future audience.

7.4.4 Summary

This section has argued that the three dramas were originated on basis of three quite different senses of realism. It began by addressing the production of Peak Practice and its efforts to inject a socially realist narrative of countryside. In one respect, this related to the biography of the creator and her desire to draw on her
own experiences of working in the health service. Coupled with her own implicit desire to comment on social issues through the texts, it is easy to see how the 'beeches in turmoil' narrative came to emerge. Furthermore, the originator saw the rural setting as constituting a particular set of social relations, which again she wished to explore.

However, this effort to open up the text to a commentary on the material rural experiences of non middle class characters nevertheless wrestled with a story world that positioned professional main protagonists at the centre of the narrative. It could be argued in this respect, that this emphasis explains why the working classes in this drama are invariably constructed as problem creators in relation to the lives of the middle classes. That is, if the drama is built around problem solving professionals, but undercut with a desire to represent other social groupings in these rural worlds, a plausible way of representing them is to position them as the instigators/bearers of a problem that can be resolved by main protagonists. It was also noted the way this sense of realism affected a conception of material realism, fostering a variety of urban and rural visions. On the basis of the readings made in textual analysis, it appears that the original emphasis continues to be carried through into recent episodes: images of factories and mountains, beautiful villages and urbanity all appear to be at work in these texts.

A conception of realism was shown to be markedly different in genesis in Heartbeat. In this case, the argument centres not so much on social realism, but upon what was termed 'nostalgic realism'. Here, originators
were also shown to be concerned with reflecting particular narratives about the countryside, but in this instance, in a way that celebrated an infinitely more desirable, but ultimately lost, set of social relations. The suggestion is that Heartbeat based its constructions of rurality around a sentimental view of the 1960s countryside because these relations were thought to represent not so much a false reality, but one that had disappeared through the passing of time. Again, there is also a strong element of autobiography in the conception of this drama. The imagining of past times certainly appeared to construct this rural world with a sense of nostalgia that I picked up when inspecting these dramas. However, I do believe this original vision was quite different to the conflict-ridden worlds of crime, social difference and prejudice that I also consistently drew attention to. In Chapter 9 it will be shown how the creation of these conflicts emerged among the contemporary production teams.

The final section of the discussion considered the production of Dangerfield. In this particular case, the suggestion was that the production of this drama was founded on a functional separation of space from society, whereby the originator sought to elevate its construction of social practice as real, while simultaneously consigning the drama’s setting to the realm of fantasy. This construction of the text was termed ‘ambivalent realism’, a process by which the space of the text is, on the one hand, presented as socially convincing because it reflects social practices which could, quite feasibly, be happening anywhere, while at the same its representation of the material setting was presented as false because it was designed, from the outset, to be a picturesque fantasy for the viewer. My own reading of these dramas, however,
suggests that the rural inflection to narratives was particularly strong in certain episodes (for instance, the episode *Eden*). Clearly this drama may have undergone certain transformations as it went into production, a theme that, again, will be explored in Chapter 9.
7.5 Effective Storytelling

Set alongside these ideas of emulation, originality, the schedule and realism, those involved in origination also sought to develop particular relations of setting and character through wider protocols of storytelling. Four themes appear salient in this respect, all of which were drawn attention to in the textual analysis. First, the creation of social-spaces in which information could be exchanged between characters. Second, the relationship between main protagonist identities and the development of stories. Third, the importance of incomer identities for the development of stories. And finally, the idea of exploring themes of universal human appeal.

In the first case, programme makers in Peak Practice and Heartbeat involved in the origination of these dramas spoke about the importance of a village setting for the exchange of information between characters and the progression of plots. Village spaces, they suggested, allowed character interaction to be facilitated with ease:

"Cardale had that 'meet and greet' factor. Characters would be able to bump into each other in the surgery or the pub and speak. Things could happen"  
(Originator, Peak Practice Production Team)

"The village is ideal for dramatic development. It has all the ingredients the medium demands. Characters need plenty of opportunity to come into contact with each other. What you had in the case of Aidensfield was an environment conducive to interaction. You had the pub, you had the green, you had the shop. Places where information could be shared ... stories developed"  
(Producer, Heartbeat Production Team)

It was in these community settings that characters could apparently form personal and professional relationships with each other, which would in turn, act as the catalyst
for the events taking place. But as the originator of Dangerfield also suggested, in a point that echoes my own reading of media social spaces, the village setting is by no means special in this respect:

"As a writer thinking about drama you need to provide an environment where your characters are forced into constant contact with each other, in such a way that their problems can emerge and evolve. It could be a village, like the other dramas you are looking at, but it's not necessary. Many dramas, whether that's Brookside ... [Channel Four Television] ... or Coronation Street [Granada Television], they are all built around environments where people are given plenty of opportunity to speak. Dangerfield has that too, you see, his work place, his home ... There's an awful lot of talking on television, probably too much".

Second, the professional identities of main characters in all three dramas granted protagonists the opportunity to demand and deliver information from and to others as a matter of course. As a senior member of the Heartbeat team suggested when speaking about the production's decision to give Nick's original wife the identity of doctor:

"You need characters who can enter into the lives of other characters. Nick's wife had her hands in the sink in the book. She couldn't do anything. As the local GP she became directly involved in the storylines. This is also the case with his new love, Jo. She's a schoolteacher. She has power and authority within that community"

Ideas of the social power of professionals to intervene in events and be party to information appeared to be an important reason behind the use of professionals in these dramas. If main protagonists needed to be active in the exchange and development of information to control events, ability to be this was seen to be a characteristic of professional identities. According to one interpretation by these producers, however, the problem solving identity
of main protagonists developed out of the control of these events was just an outcome of the wider story form within which these characters operated. That is, an outcome of its series narrative design. Such a structure demanded the creation of problems that could be resolved by leading characters over the course of episodes. Their problem solving powers were apparently dictated by the structure already laid down:

"In developing a series such as Heartbeat it’s all about having strong lead characters who can overcome what life throws at them. That’s demanded by the medium. They have to be seen as problem solvers: heroes who’ll save the day in fifty minutes, whether that’s a superhero dustman or a superhero doctor”
(Producer, Heartbeat Production Team)

At the same time, it appears that ability to problem solve was seen to be a characteristic feature of professional identity. As the same programme maker continued: “Nick is a problem solver, because that is what a country constable does. He solves problems in the community”. Similarly, a senior producer involved in the development of Peak Practice suggested to me,

“It’s the nature of the beast that your main characters will close the story successfully, but there’s no particular reason why it has to be doctors”

...but also then added:

“Your ‘professions’ are especially good for storytelling purposes really because there is an ability there to deal with things, isn’t there? Make life better”

Third, the incomer identity of leading characters was seen by the producers of Heartbeat and Peak Practice to provide opportunities for developing conflict within the story worlds. It created a scenario against which
suggests that the rural inflection to narratives was particularly strong in certain episodes (for instance, the episode *Eden*). Clearly this drama may have undergone certain transformations as it went into production, a theme that, again, will be explored in Chapter 9.
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"Cardale had that 'meet and greet' factor. Characters would be able to bump into each other in the surgery or the pub and speak. Things could happen"
(Originator, Peak Practice Production Team)

"The village is ideal for dramatic development. It has all the ingredients the medium demands. Characters need plenty of opportunity to come into contact with each other. What you had in the case of Aidensfield was an environment conducive to interaction. You had the pub, you had the green, you had the shop. Places where information could be shared ... stories developed"
(Producer, Heartbeat Production Team)

It was in these community settings that characters could apparently form personal and professional relationships with each other, which would in turn, act as the catalyst
for the events taking place. But as the originator of Dangerfield also suggested, in a point that echoes my own reading of media social spaces, the village setting is by no means special in this respect:

"As a writer thinking about drama you need to provide an environment where your characters are forced into constant contact with each other, in such a way that their problems can emerge and evolve. It could be a village, like the other dramas you are looking at, but it's not necessary. Many dramas, whether that's Brookside ... [Channel Four Television] ... or Coronation Street [Granada Television], they are all built around environments where people are given plenty of opportunity to speak. Dangerfield has that too, you see, his work place, his home ... There's an awful lot of talking on television, probably too much".

Second, the professional identities of main characters in all three dramas granted protagonists the opportunity to demand and deliver information from and to others as a matter of course. As a senior member of the Heartbeat team suggested when speaking about the production's decision to give Nick's original wife the identity of doctor:

"You need characters who can enter into the lives of other characters. Nick's wife had her hands in the sink in the book. She couldn't do anything. As the local GP she became directly involved in the storylines. This is also the case with his new love, Jo. She's a schoolteacher. She has power and authority within that community"

Ideas of the social power of professionals to intervene in events and be party to information appeared to be an important reason behind the use of professionals in these dramas. If main protagonists needed to be active in the exchange and development of information to control events, ability to be this was seen to be a characteristic of professional identities. According to one interpretation by these producers, however, the problem solving identity
of main protagonists developed out of the control of these events was just an outcome of the wider story form within which these characters operated. That is, an outcome of its series narrative design. Such a structure demanded the creation of problems that could be resolved by leading characters over the course of episodes. Their problem solving powers were apparently dictated by the structure already laid down:

"In developing a series such as Heartbeat it's all about having strong lead characters who can overcome what life throws at them. That's demanded by the medium. They have to be seen as problem solvers: heroes who'll save the day in fifty minutes, whether that's a superhero dustman or a superhero doctor"

(Producer, Heartbeat Production Team)

At the same time, it appears that ability to problem solve was seen to be a characteristic feature of professional identity. As the same programme maker continued: "Nick is a problem solver, because that is what a country constable does. He solves problems in the community". Similarly, a senior producer involved in the development of Peak Practice suggested to me,

"It's the nature of the beast that your main characters will close the story successfully, but there's no particular reason why it has to be doctors"

...but also then added:

"Your 'professions' are especially good for storytelling purposes really because there is an ability there to deal with things, isn't there? Make life better"

Third, the incomer identity of leading characters was seen by the producers of Heartbeat and Peak Practice to provide opportunities for developing conflict within the story worlds. It created a scenario against which
character relationships could develop thorough their differences to locals.

"The arrival of a new doctor created tension from the start. Here was this new doctor who thought he could come in and take over the place. It was the dynamic behind the whole of the first series ... Now what to do we have? Doctors swanning in and taking over the village."

(Originator, Peak Practice Production Team)

"We wanted to play on this idea of a young police constable coming to Yorkshire with his wife and open the drama up to that"

(Producer, Heartbeat Production Team)

Similarly, and in something of a contradiction to the idea that Dangerfield had no rural inflection, the originator of this series suggested that,

"The drama in Dangerfield was designed to come from his dilemmas in negotiating the rural constituency. I wanted him going out there ... [in the countryside] ... as much as possible, to get involved in communities. That was the catalyst"

Fourth and finally, those involved in each of the three dramas spoke about the need to create good stories which had at the heart of them universal themes with which the audience could identify. This bears much symmetry with the application of Levi-Strauss' ideas in media studies, as noted in Chapter 3. In particular, both Dangerfield and Peak Practice producers spoke of the way the medical strand to the dramas touched on issues that audience could invest in. As Dangerfield's originator suggested, the series was about developing the 'drama of life and death ... [because] ... "we all can relate to that, can't we?". Similarly, the originator of Peak Practice spoke morbidly of the "recognisable dilemmas of illness and death".
7.6 Summary

This chapter has discussed the processes of origination across the three dramas. It has argued that these productions were formulated around a range of concerns that attempted to marked out their drama's rurality in different ways. It is clear, for instance, that the emphasis of these dramas on rural locations based around professional main protagonists rested in part on a desire to reproduce the audience through a process of emulation and difference. Working alongside this in Dangerfield and Heartbeat, was a desire to service the needs of the audience in the schedule within which the benefits of an idyllic material setting, combined with the display of professional main characters, were anticipated.

All three dramas attempted to evoke in their development different ideas of realism. In Peak Practice it was bound up with a socially realist portrait of life in the country. This vision sought a range of different images of urban and rural settings and one that wished to develop, from the outset, storylines around non middle class identities, even though the drama's main focus was acknowledged to be on an established cast of middle class characters. In Heartbeat it worked from a more nostalgic precept, not so much false, but rather to evoke memories of long lost and cherished village communities. In Dangerfield, realism worked through a separation of space and society, a desire to build up a fantasy image of material setting imbued with a realist portrait of occupational practices and dilemma.

In Peak Practice and Heartbeat, village based dramas were also seen to fit in with ideas of effective
storytelling in television, although this view was contradicted by the originator of Dangerfield. Similarly, the professional identity of characters was thought to allow characters to access information in these story worlds, although there is some ambivalence as to whether their identities as 'problem solvers' is solely an instrument of narrative form. Incomer identities were also anticipated to be important to the drama by originators, as was the way in which these texts were designed to treat universal dilemmas that audiences could relate to.

This analysis, then, provides the context behind origination of these dramas, and how the rural identities at work in the textual analysis were initially defined. Discussion now turns to the contemporary practices of creating these images and narratives. The subsequent chapter considers how current practitioners involved in their productions sought to foster in the text particular impressions of material setting. The final section of empirical discussion, Chapter 9, then goes on to explore how programme makers attempted to develop these dramas around different configurations of character and conflict.
Chapter 8

Creating Setting
8.1 Introduction

So far this discussion has explored some of the contexts behind the creation of these dramas. The objective of the following chapter is to show how the wider production team takes these initial visions forward. In particular, the focus of the following discussion addresses the thoughts and practices as they go about creating a sense of material setting. It considers how programme makers go about creating, and rationalising the creation of, these senses. Discussion approaches these issues by moving through each of the key stages of the production process. It begins with an overview of the script-writing function and considers how writers, script-editors and producers think about setting when designing scripts and storylines. It goes on to consider how these ideas are developed on the location shoot, and then how these images are organised and treated in the relations of post-production.
8.2 The Script-Writing Function and Setting

As already established in Chapter 6, script-writers do not constitute formal members of the production teams on television drama. They are freelance, commissioned by the respective television company to work on either one or a handful of specific episodes per series. To briefly illustrate this point in relation the dramas under question, consider Figure 8.1, which profiles the number of writers who worked on Heartbeat over its first five series.

**Figure 8.1 Heartbeat's Writer Profile**

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*0.5 Co-authored script between Critchley and Walker*
Over the sixty episodes comprising these series, the drama employed twenty-three different writers, with nearly half of those writing only one episode each, and no single writer writing more than three episodes in any one series. This emphasis on the many rather than the few was a trend repeated in the two other dramas at the time of the study, a situation at least partly borne out of the idea that a high turnover of new writers on a series helped to inject originality into a long running production formats. At the same time, the script-writing process in these dramas was regulated by script-editing teams whose task it was to guide the work of writers in relation to pre-established themes for the production. As a result, the script-writing function was often constructed in a contradictory way. On the one hand, script-editors would speak of the need for writer conformity,

" ... [Writer's] ... can't just go away and write anything"
(Dangerfield production Team)

"We keep very close control of what the writer is saying."
(Heartbeat Production Team)

"What we've been able to do is pick a few targets for ... [the writers] ... to aim at."
(Peak Practice Production Team)

On the other, these same producers elevated notions of writer originality and independence,

"The whole thing has to go through consultation and discussion but at the end of the day the writer goes away and writes it, and has to be free"
(Dangerfield Production Team)

"The point of employing different writers is that they'll bring something original to the series ... We wouldn't interfere unduly with what it is they're here to do, which is to write a story for us"
(Peak Practice Production Team)
While such interpretations of the script-writer's role might point to an underlying tension at the heart of these productions, it is also worth noting from the outset that notions of writer conformity and independence were often reconciled through the ideal of collaboration. According to this logic, the production of meaning was the outcome of a fusion of ideas, brought to fruition in a script and bearing the marks of a range of different authorial voices that have come to agree on what a script should be doing. As one script-editor involved in the production of Dangerfield suggested,

"Well it's collaborative, hopefully. I mean, that's when the process works best ... What we did in this project is get all the writers for the first six episodes and talk, talk about potential, so it's more of collaborative process. But curiously it becomes more focused. Because you start throwing ideas around and everybody kind of contributes, but you end up actually honing it better. People then know what they're talking about, instead of not quite grasping what it is, and going off in their own direction in isolation"

Typically, in the run-up to a new series, script-editors will work with producers to design some possible episodic themes, as well as how they wish established characters to develop (i.e. serial storylines). They will then approach a number of writers with a view to writing an episode and invite theme for a 'script conference' in which the writers are introduced to the production and possible series themes discussed and refined. Writers will then go away and develop a script idea, which is then subject to a constant review process through the script-editor. This process, then, is called 'collaboration', but as will now be demonstrated, it appears strongly built around control of the individual writer's work by the established production team.
8.2.1 Images of Setting and the Escapist Audience

It is possible to see how these relations between the writer script-editor and producer were often critical to the drama's sense of material setting. It is clear, for instance, that some writers actively engaged with notions of a picturesque rurality as an attempt to accommodate within their work a broader style of production developed by permanent members of the production team. As one writer explained:

"You're constantly pulling yourself back, or being reminded ... [by the script-editors] ... of ... [the rural setting]. There was a desire in ... [an episode] ... to include a story of one of the subsidiary characters buying a house in the country. That was supposedly serving the dual purpose of keeping the actor playing that part happy because he'd been promised a meatier storyline and getting in the pretty pictures.

(Dangerfield Production Team)

According to this writer's interpretation of Dangerfield, having a countryside backdrop written in to the script was about satisfying the production's desire to "get in the pretty pictures" a theme which he found himself "being reminded" of and "constantly pulling ... [...] ... back" to. Similarly, as one writer involved in the production of Peak Practice recognised, at least part of his job was about "understanding that glow, that world ... [the production] ... are after, that quite beautiful, warm world".

If a significant factor at work in these constructions was therefore about writers' accommodating established production styles, then establishing these styles was, like the originators, closely related to programme makers' attempts to align textual form with the perceived needs of
an imagined audience. On a formal level, this process of alignment was the product of the permanent production team's ongoing reflection on the output of structured in-house audience research, conducted by the television company and designed to objectify viewers' likes and dislikes of given texts. In this respect, ongoing audience research appeared to consistently identify notions of a picturesque rurality as fundamental to the success of the drama. As the following script-editors and producers from Dangerfield and Peak Practice suggested:

"From the audience catchment area it became apparent that one of the reasons why people watched it was because of the beautiful Warwickshire countryside".  
(Dangerfield Production Team)

"The brief for this series ... [from audience research] ... was to make it much more rural ... much more pretty shots of Warwick and the castle".  
(Dangerfield Production Team)

"If ... [the audience] ... don't get enough scenery in a particular section of the series they complain about it. They let us know in the audience research".  
(Peak Practice Production Team)

Interpretations of a drama's appeal in audience research, then, attuned the script-writing function to the importance of "pretty", "scenic" and "beautiful" images of the countryside. At the same time, it appeared that script-editors and producers share the same view through their own informal conversations with audiences and other members of the production team:

"A good episode of Peak Practice should have lots of landscape because everyone says: 'the landscape is the real star of the show'... quite a lot people do say to me they watch it for the scenery".  
(Script-editor, Peak Practice Production Team)
"[My friends] ... are not interested in the story. They're more likely to say 'wasn't that beautiful, that shot where the man's standing on the cliff and is about to throw himself off, and you see the valley spread out beneath him'".

(script-editor, Peak Practice Production Team)

"I know our rather stunning location is a massive part of the drama's success, because when I speak to people they tell me".

(producer, Heartbeat Production Team)

In seeking to rationalise these desires, these programme makers were quick to link images of rurality more generally to notions of an escapist text. As was demonstrated in the theoretical discussion in Chapter 2, it was the 'uses and gratification' tradition of television studies in the late 1960s, early 1970s, which originally expressed this idea in academic terms: in principal, the notion that television viewers watch particular output in order to suspend their conditions of everyday existence. Media producers working at the script-writing stage of the three dramas consistently drew on this idea to think through the relationship between images of a material, and an exclusively exterior, rurality and audience needs. According to one member of the Peak Practice Production Team these visions took people, "out of their everyday life", in Dangerfield, it was said they gave the audience something they could "switch off with", while in Heartbeat they were described as simply, "escapism".

It follows that if media constructions allow the viewer to "switch off", or be taken out of their "everyday life", investment in these escapist worlds is always partly defined by the social conditions being supplanted. For these programme makers, a propensity for the countryside was bound up with the aspirations of the urban dweller and
the way that urban life was seen to have robbed audiences of their basic need to experience landscape. These images of a rurality were therefore what Richard Dyer (1977) and Christine Geraghty (1991) would call 'utopian solutions', providing the audience with a set of alternative scenarios of social life to contrast with, and compensate for, the limits of their everyday existence. Such ideas were also evident in the comments of those involved in the design of scripts:

"Most of television is watched by people who live in cities, um, a massive majority of people who watch television live in inner cities and don't see a green field from one day to the next. So you know, you're looking to create those opportunities."

(Script-editor, Peak Practice Production Team)

"Well most of the people do live in cities whether through choice, or because they were born there ... [] ... That's why these rural dramas are so successful, escapism for the townies. We use the fact that we're in these areas. They can just lie back and take it all in."

(Script-editor, Heartbeat Production Team)

In a recent discussion of the city in film, Lapsley (1997) has made a similar point, highlighting how both cinema and television has often tried to create a "space set over against the city" (p.197). In his analysis, Lapsley draws on the example of Nicholas Roeg's motion picture Walkabout (1970) in which the main protagonist,

"confronted by the horrific urban environments of early capitalism ... retroactively constructed the rural as a lost inheritance where existence went with the grain of being".

Lapsley 1997 (p.196)

Media producers of the three dramas clearly constructed this sort of experience on to contemporary audiences as a way of rationalising these texts' appeal. The spatiality
of the text was seen as a distant, purer, forfeited zone of existence, arousing and satisfying a very basic set of human needs that their own situated lives could not deliver. As one script-editor put it:

"When ... [Peak Practice] ... goes out, when this is transmitted on January evenings, people are sitting by their fires. They're not in Landscape, but it reminds of them of landscape ... open space, and mountains and streams. And it's important for them to see it; it reminds them of it. We're happy to live in homes and work in the city, and we're happy to do our jobs and happy to stay in this room for more or less 12 hours a day, but we still need to see landscape and to experience Landscape ... [] ... I saw Dangerfield last Friday, which was about the woods and environment and animals and living with some harmony. We all feel that we miss that in our lives, living in harmony with the environment whether we can achieve it or not ... But as I keep saying, I think, there is a difference between what our psychological needs are and the landscape and memory and all that sort of thing, and what the reality is. I think there is a deep psychological need for landscape, which is to do with us as complex human beings and I think this is tapped into with Heartbeat and Dangerfield, and certainly Peak Practice".

(Peak Practice Production Team)

There is symmetry here between Cloke and Little's (1990) idea, following Raymond Williams, that the countryside might be seen as a "permanently effective need" (p.20), and it is in comments such as the one above that I have found some quite laudable intentions behind the creation of these images. The impression that some producers give is that they were almost serving a critical human purpose when putting these images together. That they service fundamental needs beyond the viewer's immediate grasp.

In a practical sense, this desire to service the needs of the audience meant, quite simply, that script-editors conspired to quantitatively increase the number of scenes set outside when a script was deemed to be too interior:
"Certainly one of the things we are aware of is if we get a script that is very, very interior. We'd be aware of that and say, 'yer know, we're not getting outside and we're not actually seeing much and can any of these things be moved'?

(Heartbeat Production Team)

"That's where the executive decision making comes in, it's like 'no you can't ... [have it inside] ...!' It has to have this rural aspect'. I mean, just pragmatically, the incorporation of the rural aspect is a significant executive decision: ... [mimicking executive] ... 'one has to be aware that this is the reason it's watched therefore please try and incorporate it'.

(Dangerfield Production Team)

At least part of this process of intervention by those overseeing the development of scripts team was bound up with the monitoring of writers who, for them, appeared either unaware of, or lacked an interest in, this element of house style. Indeed, some script-editors were quite distressed to find that some writers did not appreciate the 'production value' of the countryside for the series. As one script-editor working on Peak Practice expressed:

" ... [Writers] ... will come and do it, but they kind of think they're slumming it in series drama. So we're the ones pushing ... [the countryside] ... saying 'oh can't we set this outside in Cardale Square?' And they'll say 'No'. Why would they be having this conversation there?" And we have to think of a reason just because we think well, it's terribly important"

It is clear therefore that a desire to encourage a sense of rural setting was actively, although not exclusively, at work among those at work in creating scripts, and that this desire was routed around an idea of reproducing and servicing an imagined audience. As the following section will now show, this emphasis was also developed out of another script-writing concern, the creation of story.
8.2.2 Images of Setting as an Outcome of Narrative

In spite of these thoughts and practices, images of setting were not, apparently, the central pre-occupation of the script-writing function. A recurring comment expressed by practitioners involved in this stage of the production process was that developing the drama's storyline was their primary undertaking. According to this line of reasoning, these dramas may aspire to elevate images of setting as an important production theme, but they could not survive on images alone: "That's why it is called 'drama', things happen" said one person involved in the writing of scripts for Dangerfield: "It's not an endless reel of pretty pictures", he added. Similarly, a writer on Peak Practice suggested that, "Imagine seeing just shot after shot of the Peak District, you'd be bored silly in couple of minutes". However, the tendency by some members of the production team to set up this division between the images of setting and plot can be overplayed. The vision of setting created by productions, it appears, was inextricably tied to the sense of narrative being developed, even if this was often only implicitly recognised. Two points appear of particular note in this respect.

First, developing idyllic images of rurality was often actively created where a particular strand of narrative was being developed. So for instance, consider the following vision written into a script from Peak Practice, introducing one of its scenes from the episode Sharp Practice in Series One:

'The Titles over a panoramic view of Cardale starting at one end of the high street and working towards the other. Trevor is opening up the village sub branch, a
postman is on her round, the bakers van is pulled up outside the village shop, a mother walks her child to school. We travel on past the pub which is getting a delivery. At the village school a group of mums and kids are arriving.

The writer responsible for the script was quick to underline her authorial intention behind the image subsequently created, suggesting that the director understood "exactly what I was doing", creating a "beautifully shot" scene that afforded the "big" landscape of Critch its "lyricalness". The writer's desire to play up the 'lyrical' nature of countryside was, in turn, meant to foster a broader vision of community and social cohesion. As she explained, the scene was quite explicitly designed to "spend 30 seconds going down from the hills and the back of the village" in order to "chip away at the idea that this was cosy England". Similarly, consider the following scene-setter from Dangerfield, extract from the script to the episode Eden:

'A shaded area of trees ... Sunlight filters into the shaded area ... Al, walking from the wood. She carries some ferns and wild flowers. She smiles at Paul. Off ... [camera] ... the sounds of the birds, plus the clucking of pheasant somewhere"

The subsequent image created was one directly considered by this research (see Figure 5.30) According to the writer of this episode, the scene was, "basically designed to show the main character communing with nature in her own sort of way". It was about, "showing her in her rural idyll. That was the message to that". This example is an interesting one for it highlights how writers in Dangerfield were integrating setting with narrative, an idea that would appear to contradict the suggestion by the originator in Chapter 7 that the rural setting to Dangerfield was 'simply a backdrop'.

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Programme makers would also speak of the way particular narrative demanded a visual effect that developed less than welcoming visions of rurality. They spoke of "stepping out of that image from time to time" (Peak Practice Production Team), "leaving that framework", (Dangerfield Production Team) "providing that contrast" (Heartbeat Production Team). So for instance, one script-editor on Dangerfield when speaking of the same episode mentioned above, Eden, suggested that:

"Obviously it's necessary to stand back from that at times. We're doing one at the moment about Al, where Al has gone to live in the countryside and she's stuck out there all on her own in the wilderness with this loner. And that was worked out by myself and the writer, to use these woods. And it's dark and lonely and everything else. It's a symbol of Al's rural idyll gone wrong. It's not a new message really, but I think it's been done quite well".

(Dangerfield Production Team)

Second, the use of rural images was seen by those overseeing the development of scripts as a way of diffusing the relations of conflict being created, an idea that was envisaged also by the originators of Dangerfield and Peak Practice. For some, the stories developed out of the writer's pen were potentially damaging to the loyalty of these audiences who were imagined in turn, as a "sensitive", "shockable" and "conservative" pre-watershed audience (even though, as discussed earlier, Dangerfield is regularly, and Peak Practice occasionally, transmitted after 9pm). Programme makers often replicated the thoughts of originators in this sense, constructing viewers' social identities variously as "old", "middle-aged", "family", "young", "children" and "female". Designing scripts in such a way that they included plenty of images of rurality was thought by many to soften the relations of conflict being created, thus maintaining a positive reading of
their story worlds among pre-watershed audiences. It ensured a lighter a treatment of themes:

"One of the things is that Heartbeat’s a family show, with family appeal. You have to look at that and think, is this particular scene going too far?" So, yes, you may say, 'can we not soften this scene up a bit by setting this bit outside or whatever?' Yer know, we have to be careful. Rather than in some dingy house, let’s have it outside and let ... [the location team] ... develop it from there. It softens the focus."

(Script-editor, Heartbeat Production Team)

"You can’t startle audiences for this kind of show. One of the stories was about a GP who had Aids ... [] ... Now people like my mum and dad who are so soft hearted will be watching and they do react very badly to things like gay life and all the rest of it and they'll sit and watch that quite comfortably ... [] ... It becomes less objectionable when it has a nicer background, doesn't it?"

(Script-editor, Peak Practice Production Team)

Indeed, some programme makers involved in creating scripts remained relatively unconcerned about the potential bleakness of their stories in the knowledge that picturesque images of the countryside would be sewn into the text. Not surprisingly then, dramas which consistently combined unscenic settings with unsettling narratives were seen to be high-risk formulas for reproducing the audience. As a senior member of the Peak Practice production team put it:

"We drop ... [stories] ... into this pretty place which somehow makes my ironing lady think it's okay. Which is why it's got 14 million viewers or 12 million viewers and not 8 million viewers. That's why Beck, ... [BBC-TV] ... which is a person tracing missing people in the King's cross area opened to 8 million people and dropped to 5 in one week. Three million people turned off! But we have tackled in Peak Practice missing people and all of a sudden it’s okay. It becomes cloaked in a rural idyll"
Some programme makers were less than enthusiastic about this emphasis, expressing a genuine sense of frustration about the effect these images of the countryside had over the storytelling process. As writer involved in the production of Peak Practice lamented, stories were often obstructed and diluted by the drama's emphasis on idyllic images of rurality:

"There was one terrible episode where we go canoeing and we got the rushes and we didn't know who any of the bloody characters were because the director had been so busy giving these wonderful waterfalls ... [ ] ... you didn't know anything. The director I'm working with now is quite funny because he keeps saying 'I'll do the pictures, you do the words'. And you see them saying things like, 'Cor, look at the depth in that, it's wonderful isn't it? Look at those colours, they're so rich', sometimes you don't want depth. Sometimes you want something which skims over things, you want blur, you want confusion. Sometimes you don't want lush colours. Sometimes at the end you don't want that image to be the sun setting beautifully over Cardale. Sometimes you want it to be pissing down with rain and people missing the Bus. It's like, don't watch it with a hairdresser because they'll go at the crucial moment 'Oh, I don't like the way his hair's flopping in that one'. You are battling with everybody's perception of their role in drama"

8.2.3 Summary

The suggestion that I am making in this section, then, is that creating space for the subsequent encoding of (predominantly idyllic) images of rural setting was an active part of the script-writing process. This appeared to work in three ways. First, programme makers would actively emphasise the importance of these images through formal and informal imaginings of audience identity and need. In this case, in-house market research was consistently highlighting that these images should be created in the production process, a theme that concurred
with producers' own hunches about the appeal of the texts. In this latter case, it was shown how notions of an escapist urban audience were at work within producer interpretations of the dramas. So too were these notions sometimes linked into an intrinsic human need for rural landscapes. These texts apparently serviced the needs of a displaced audience. As the previous comments suggest, script-editors would often 'intervene' in the script-writing process if these images were underplayed.

Second, these images were the outcome of programme makers attempting to develop particular narrative strands in these dramas, a theme that partly explains why rural images are not exclusively idyllic in form. Third, images of material rurality were seen as a device for softening the effects of conflict, a continuation of a theme noted among some originators. The idea here was that if narrative was potentially unsettling for the audience, then idyllic images of rurality could act as an insurance against this. As this section has shown, however, inclination to emphasise images of rural setting was by no means universally present among some producers, nor was a focus on positive constructions of setting universally desired.
8.3 Shooting Setting

"I think a lot of it happens by accident ... I mean we don't plan a view of the countryside which we then give to the viewers. They take that from what we do"

In the above comment a programme maker involved in the design of Peak Practice's setting expresses, in a sentence, a key argument of consumption orientated criticism in media research. Apparently, creating images is not about handing over a meaning to the audience. It is audiences who are responsible for the meaning made from the text. It is interesting then to find this same person, only moments later, making the following comment when expanding further on his role in the production process:

"I'm looking to get some countryside in. I'm looking to see where we are. I'm looking to get some geography into the show and I'm looking to make it look like Peak Practice and not The Bill if you like"

Ideas such as 'looking to get some countryside in', 'looking to see where we are', and 'looking to make it look like Peak Practice' do not sound like the comments of a person about to concede the meaning making process to audiences. The argument in this section of discussion is that media producers involved in the recording of these dramas on location actively sought to develop particular visions of the countryside, of a broadly idyllic nature, as they went about the business of recording these dramas. Discussion begins with a consideration of the work of location managers and production designers and then goes on to consider how these images are taken on and developed by the work of directors and other members of the crew.
8.3.1 The Pre-Shoot Relations of Setting

In all of the dramas under scrutiny, one of the consistent ideas expressed by programme makers responsible for selection and preparation of settings was that their role involved 'thinking in pictures'. It is interesting that, considering the small number of people involved in the development of scripts in comparison to those working on the preparation and recording of images, this need to think in pictures was, for them, dictated by their production's overwhelming, and somewhat misguided, concern with plot. The suggestion by one member of the Dangerfield Production Team that the drama "already had too many people concentrating on narrative" when in actuality its success depended on "images", was an indicative train of thought among designers and location managers. As a location manager on the production of Heartbeat put it:

"This drama survives on its settings. Everyone knows that, but we're about the only people who really think about what that means"

For these programme makers, a key concern was "thinking in terms of the wide shot" (Dangerfield Production Team), by which it meant those images which capture settings from a distance, such as establishing shots. More specifically, it was about providing opportunities for picturesque images of rurality:

"The best places you can be are, certainly farms are perfect for this, the best places you can put a director is somewhere you can stick a camera absolutely anywhere and he gets a nice shot. And at this particular farm where we're going to you've got that. You can literally turn the camera 360 degrees, and apart from a couple of area which are dull, which we'll do up a bit, you've got these really good set-ups."

(Location Manager, Heartbeat Production Team)
"If you can get a house in which has got the most amazing views ... yer know great views and lovely fields and this sort of thing. Yer know, country lanes, dry stone walls, farmers with their sheep, cows, everything. Sorry I'm deviating, but that's basically the formula"

(Location Manager, Peak Practice Production Team)

In this last comment, the programme maker draws on a range of signifiers of rurality to constitute his formula, including within this a symbol of regionality, in this case, the stone wall. Location managers and designers consistently spoke of the importance of playing up a sense of regionality in their location choices. One member of Heartbeat production team spoke of the "strong Yorkshire stamp" over his choices of images. Another in Peak Practice claimed that she "consciously" looked for locations that "bring out the Peak District". "Regional identity", she said, "I think is very important in a drama series". Similar emphasises were at work in Dangerfield:

"We established the exterior of the Dangerfield surgery so we got good shots of the castle that way and the church in the background here, so the exteriors are all, you know, plenty of pretty Warwick"

(Location Manager, Dangerfield Production Team)

"The location manager and myself working with the directors and the producers try and re-emphasise ... [the countryside] ... in the way its dressed, and conditionally the locations are fine. You had it there in the timber construction of Al's flat, which is Warwickshire, isn't it? And we see it again in Dangerfield house. So absolutely, we've re-emphasised what is, in fact, a crucial part of the storyline: the rural feel in the architecture we film in"

(Product designer, Dangerfield Production Team)

While the script-writing process feeds quite directly into this stage, creating opportunities for location managers and designers to embellish a scene with a fetching backdrop, the script in no sense acts as a hard and fast
set of prescriptions about how an image should be constituted. Rather, it is seen as the location’s ‘first draft’ by practitioners, often altered in such a way as to emphasise the drama’s rural setting further:

"Very often you'll move scenes around in order to use the area more. If they write something that either doesn't exist or you can't get a version of, yer know, if they write ‘a river’ and there isn't a good river you might say 'well don't use that, yer know, let's use a hill, there's a good view here, why don't we set the scene here instead of there?' Because that's about, that's about trying to make the most of the area and just get the best pictures on the screen"

(Location Manager, Dangerfield Production Team)

For all of these practitioners, this process of 'making the most the areas', had little to do with an authentic rurality. The common term used across all productions was that of "cheating". These visions of the countryside were not about showing the area as it is. It was about elevating a picturesque vision of the countryside and concealing the alternatives:

"We do not say anything bad about Derbyshire. We don't shoot in Derbyshire slaughter houses or whatever else. We shoot with beautiful hills and broken moors and pretty cottages"

(Location Manager, Peak Practice Production Team)

"Derbyshire isn't as beautiful as we shoot it, but we don't shoot the crap bits of Derbyshire, we shoot the pretty bits of Derbyshire"

(Production Designer, Peak Practice Production Team)

"I should have a fairly good eye for what a designer can do for a location, you know there's that angle and that angle, and if we foreground a bit of scenery here to block that cooling tower over there we've got it yer know. So those sort of conversations go on"

(Location Manager, Dangerfield Production Team)
While programme makers said that they "occasionally landed on a location" where there was "no point in looking any further" (Heartbeat Production Team), more often than not producers would go to extraordinary lengths to put together their images. 'Put together' is the truly accurate term here, since a single location in the text could be made up of a variety of material locations stitched together seamlessly by the editing of images:

"Well we often have to cheat it and have a different interior and a different exterior. I mean Dangerfield's current house is split like that. The front of it works and the interior of it works but the garden just wasn't, we couldn't quite get a view of the castle in the background so we just cheated a few doors up the road to a better garden"

(Location Manager, Dangerfield Production Team)

Location managers and designers rationalised their propensity for these images in a number of ways. As the above comments suggest, the framing of a particular view of the countryside was bound up with personal judgement on what was considered beautiful. Invariably shots were chosen because practitioners considered them "attractive", "nice", and even "gorgeous". Allied to this was the way in many lived in the surrounding area, or claimed to know the area well. "Making the most" of an area was at least in part about personal attachment to regional ruralities; a desire to show something of a location of which they were proud. Like the script-editors in pre-production, many also spoke of picturesque images as a production theme that had been identified by audience research or that way they had been instructed by more senior members of the team to emphasise them: "That's what the producer wants to push" said one in Dangerfield "he wants to push the beautiful landscape, the beautiful surroundings". Furthermore, like script-editors, this was rationalised
through their own conceptions of audience needs and the notion of an urban audience gazing at images from afar. One also spoke about the importance of "an identifiable setting ... a setting that the viewer can relate to ... a localised area" when reflecting on the village setting of Heartbeat. Others linked their efforts to an apparently self-evident reason for being there in the countryside in the first place. A location manager on the Heartbeat team, for instance, said that, "what the hell are we doing here if we aren't going to use the landscape?". In fact, this particular person's fear was that viewers might sit there watching and thinking that there wasn't enough rurality in the show. As she put it:

"You don't want people sitting at home saying 'where's the countryside?' Otherwise the audience will be thinking, 'why are we watching this? Is it ... [BBC TV's] ... Casualty?"

Furthermore, while these programme makers expressed a preoccupation with image this did not mean that that they entirely failed to engage with plot. Some saw the use of landscape shots as a way of emphasising the effect of a particular narrative:

"We've got a scene with a barman who goes up to kill himself, and he sits on the rocks with a bottle of scotch and some pills, and it will be the most fabulous view that you've ever seen. But it gives you a counterpoint as well. Because it's far more emotional to, in a way, to have a view like that when you want to kill yourself"

(Production Designer, Peak Practice Production Team)

At the same time, it is also important to note that, while this emphasis on playing up the relations of material setting in a highly positive fashion was a central pre-occupation of these practitioners they also
mentioned the need to step out of these worlds at times, an idea that was not really apparent at the script-writing stage. The relationship between plot and image was important here:

"We might spook it up a bit from time to time...Yer know, say that Paul is at the scene of a murder, you might say well, let’s not have it in daylight, let’s stick him in a wood at night"

(Production Designer, Dangerfield Production Team)

Interestingly, in the case of Peak Practice, the ghost of the past was actively at work in thoughts of designers and location managers. Earlier it was shown how the originator wanted to open the setting up to a range of different visions of the countryside, from the factory as well field, the old mill as well as the mountain. One member of the production spoke of the way the series had temporarily pulled away from that premise, to the detriment of the series as whole. In the latest series plans were apparently afoot to re-emphasise this idea:

"In the fourth series I think it became much more Disneyfied. It was much more of a rural idyll with these charming tumbledown cottages and stuff whereas the original idea I think was to give it a bit of edge, give it a kind of post-industrial feel ... I think this series ... we've tried to give it a bit more edge. And it's not so pretty. I think we all felt that the last series was presenting a kind of Disney version of Peak practice. Cardale was this kind of fantasy Brigadoon town. We've been desperately trying to get back to what made the first and second series really good.

(Location Manager, Peak Practice Production Team)

This idea of 'desperately trying to get back' to what made Peak Practice 'good' can be translated as 'returning the series to what made it so popular'. As audience ratings in Figure 1.1 and 3.15 reveal, the number of people watching this drama dropped significantly in 1996.
In trying to re-establish earlier audience ratings, many of the production team were revisiting the original premises of the drama. This process appears to have worked, for subsequent series figures reveal significant increases in numbers viewing. Interestingly, if this assessment is valid, then it does raise the question as to what degree audiences necessarily desire highly idyllic portraits of rurality.

8.3.2 Recording Sound and Image

With the above themes in mind it is certainly the case that once these locations have been put together, location managers and designers do not hand these choices over to the cameraperson for recording in a different fashion. They actively emphasise to them the need for particular shots to be recorded:

"I might mention to Richard ... [camera] ... I may say to him 'well look, we need to give it a bit of wide shot in this episode""

(Production Designer, Peak Practice Production Team)

"If there's a scene that's scripted for sitting inside or something I might say to the director: 'look, why don't we put this in Warwick castle? We can get a lot more value'. If it suits the mood of the scene. So I can suggest locations that the writer may not have thought of"

(Location Manager, Dangerfield Production Team)

Indeed, this stage of production guards its production style jealously. When a director is hired to record the drama, designers and location managers are often quick to instruct them about house style, even though theoretically it is the director, what some would call the 'auteur' (e.g. Caughie 1981), who is employed to guide the look of individual episodes:
"If a director comes along and wants to use something that I don't think is Peak Practice I will try and steer him away from that. There are things which I won't shoot. There are houses I won't look at because I don't like the look of them. There are houses which I think are Peak Practice, and houses which aren't. It's all about the building stone, the style of the house, the colour of it, the sort of landscape that it's in. It's very specific, but almost indefinable because it's all about my taste essentially".

(Production Designer, Peak Practice Production Team)

"On a series like Heartbeat you're very aware of what we call house style. So if you think a director is straying away from that you may start to say 'well, hang on a minute here', yer know"

(Location Manager Heartbeat Production Team)

In most cases, however, directors are deliberately employed by the producer on the basis that they can work within the parameters of the show's overall production style. Conversations with directors confirmed this point. Most offered a conception of the drama's look that fitted in with those of the designer and location manager. For instance, a director frequently involved in the production of Peak Practice suggested that,

"The show has a look which is a slightly romantic, rather lush image in terms of our lighting and directing style. But it's based around showing off the area. The show's always been about the countryside in terms of the hills, the landscape, the geography. It's terribly important to the show, it's another character"

As he went on to suggest: "We shoot Derbyshire at it's best. We never shoot on a flat if we can shoot on a hill". Similarly in Heartbeat, a director suggested that he "managed to make cold and wind and rain and snow look beautiful" and that, in comparison to his experience of working on an "urban series like The Bill", he took every opportunity to use the wide shot. Furthermore, while the designers and location managers had some purchase on the
shot choices of director, many directors were apparently quick to seize opportunities to alter agreed locations in a way that played up the rural setting:

"If it's a nice day there's a good couple of directors who will say 'let's take it outside and go and see the scenery'. If they can they will bring it out and see it all. I mean what are we filming in the Peak District for if we're inside somebody's front room? Even with a good view out of the window you don't get to see it."

(Producer, Peak Practice Production Team)

"We never shoot an interior scene. Okay we have lots of interior scenes because of the cost of shooting, because of back up and whatever. But I'll tell you, after a bit, if the weather's going well or whatever, the directors go 'put a mug of coffee in her hand and they can have conversation on the back terrace'. Yer know 'let's not have this in reception. Let's have them approaching the front door'. We are outside as often as we can. And we deliberately do it"

(Location Manager, Peak Practice Production Team)

As the last statement shows, the propensity to place doctors on the Beeches' terrace, as noted in the textual analysis, is clearly bound up with this idea of emphasising the rurality of the dramas.

Directors of these dramas appeared to operate with similar rationales to other programme makers when thinking about this need to encourage idyllic images of rurality. Comments such as "shoot[ing] Derbyshire at its best", for instance, are closely bound up a countryside aesthetic in which the beauty of the setting is framed by particular shots. "We're going to have a crane shot coming down over the school" one Heartbeat director said on location, and added "to capture that rather stunning view". Notions of escapism also appeared to be at work, built again around a construction of the urban audiences. Interestingly, these
were sometimes expressed through directors’ own urban identities. They transferred their own social-spatial conditions of existence on to the needs of the audience:

"I've never lived in the country. I don't come here very often and see it. It's undoubtedly more beautiful than London. I expect that most of viewers also live in cities ... There is that need, I think, to open these worlds up to people like me."

(Peak Practice Production Team)

Figure 8.2 Shooting Setting on Peak Practice

Allied to this was an appreciation on the part of directors that, according to audience research, the rural setting was an accepted element of the production success. Moreover, directors consistently offered the 'what are we doing here otherwise' logic to their practices:

"What's the point in being set in Warwickshire if you're not going to see the countryside?"

(Dangerfield Production Team)

"I mean there's no point doing an episode of Peak Practice and setting it all in somebody's kitchen and
not being able to see out of the window. If you're doing something inside you're looking for views through windows, if you can ... So yes, I'm looking to get the best out of the area"

(Peak Practice Production Team)

"It's, we have three major stars and ... [the countryside] ... is the fourth star. Without it, you might as well do it in closed rooms"

(Heartbeat Production Team)

From a technical perspective, views of the countryside also offered a way of bringing characters more sharply into focus. One director working on Peak Practice suggested that if actors were "set against a hill they stand out very clearly ... [but] ... if you stand someone in front of grey sky you can hardly see them". Furthermore, directors also appeared to engage with the narrative effects of setting. In a continuation of the idea outlined by those involved in scripts, directors also argued that particular sorts of images of rurality were able to lighten up the negatively of a storyline:

"I'm doing one about a paraplegic who's a farmer and so part of this week we've been looking at farms and we've boiled it down to two farms. And one is a fairly bleak farm ... it's a very brooding house and it can be quite dark and the other side of it is quite barren and so the feeling would be that it would be very desolate, very cold, very windy. Do you want to feature that in your story? The other farm is warmer, a little cosier. It's not so exposed. That gives you the illusion that it is actually more manageable, more contained and so you are making the rural aspect very, very important"

(Peak Practice Production Team)

In this particular case, whilst acknowledging the potentially different senses of narrative that the setting could offer, it was the producer who 'helped' him make the final decision, an executive intervention based solely on the ideas of audience appeal:
"The content is frankly fucking bleak. I had a conversation with the director who's about to shoot in a week's time and he and I had a long conversation because he's got two potential farms for the next location and he goes 'well I've one this one I prefer Michelle, but it's a bit bleak and a bit this and I got this other one, oh you know, the sort of cozy farm house' and I went 'cosy farm house' because that is what my audience want, because somehow if the story is bleak but they're in a cozy farmhouse it becomes palatable. Where we score brownie points with the public is putting it in a nice place. Now that devalues that sound to you that I'm devaluing the rural aspect. It doesn't in terms of the TV audience. It gives it another gloss really. I mean, otherwise it would just depress the pants off most people"

Mention too must also be briefly given to the work of the sound, lighting and camera team in the creation of these images. In terms of the former, the sound-recordist's principal role is to ensure that dialogue between characters is clear. Production teams rarely revisit a scene twice. Within this, the sound-recordist, with the help of assistant director, will go to great lengths to make sure that a scene is conducted in complete silence, as I found out to my great cost and embarrassment (see Chapter 6). But this is not just about ensuring clear dialogue. It is also apparently about establishing a particular 'soundscape' (Smith 1994) of the countryside. As one sound-recordist on Heartbeat put it:

"Ideally, what you want is the sound of birds tweeting in the background. You don't want the sound of a plane going overhead. You certainly don't want the sound of traffic. This is a sleepy village after all"

At the same time, sound-recordists are aware that once the recorded images are handed over to post-production, sound-editors will invariably lay down their own rural soundscape. Recordists try to anticipate this, in fact. Periodically they will record a handful of what they term
"atmospheres", or 'atmosses' by which it is meant examples of sounds from the location that are recorded independently of scenes with a view to their use in post-production. As the same sound recordist on Heartbeat goes on to explain:

“I’ll record the sound of all interiors and exteriors once the scene has been shot and everyone has gone off to lunch. I’ll then add a few more atmosses for them ... [in sound editing] ... yer know, plenty of birds so that they can give it that rurally country type thing”

The lighting and camera team also make important interventions in the creation of these drama’s sense of setting. While the type of shot used is strongly dictated by the choices of the director, all camera persons' gestured at the importance of location to the drama’s appeal, and in particular, the significance framing scenes with slow developing shots as a way of achieving this. Furthermore, camera persons' also spoke of the way they consciously placed 'filters' on the lens of the camera to help soften the image being presented, and in Heartbeat, one which helped fostered a “grainy look" to make the drama look “old-fashioned". This softening process was apparently crucial to the way series drama looks more generally. According to one involved in Dangerfield this was less to do with creating a particular vision of rurality as reproducing the conventions of the genre:

"A series needs to have that filmic look otherwise it will look too sharp, too 'now'. If you watch Eastenders, that's all shot on video like us, but that's not softened, so it gives you the impression that this is hard-edged and contemporary ... live. By adding ... [a filter] ... Dangerfield is like all of other ... [series] ... drama. It's less immediate, more like a film, more classy".
Practitioners responsible for lighting, however, were more inclined to connect this practice of softening the image to obtain a particular idea of rurality. Typically interior scenes will involve using strong backlighting filtered through a sheet of plastic fastened around a window (see Figure 8.3). According to one member of the production team on Peak Practice, this created "a glowing effect. It warms up the scene ... makes its feel like a cosy village."

**Figure 8.3 Programme Makers Creating Soft Images**
8.3.3 Summary

This section begun by showing how ideas of setting have been developed by those at work in the pre-production stage of the drama. Again, what is clear is that ideas of an idyllic rurality, and working in relation to this notions of regionality, are commonly at work here, both key identifications in textual analysis. It demonstrated the way that script directions were often changed, and disparate material locations stitched together, to embellish the drama’s sense of rurality. These emphasises were rationalised according to a number of logics, from aesthetic judgements over images of rurality to ideas of narrative effect. In this latter respect, programme makers also again acknowledged the need to occasionally step aside from an idyllic vision rurality. In the case of Peak Practice, there is clearly a sense among some that less than idyllic images of setting were an instrumental part of this drama’s previous success, a theme that had been increasingly overlooked. The more consistent theme to emerge within and across discussions, however, was the desire to develop these series’ visual look around highly positive constructions of setting.

Similar concerns were at work among those directly responsible for recording these sounds and images. In particular, it was demonstrated how directors, with some encouragement from the production designers and location managers, actively sought to emphasise these dramas’ sense of idyllic setting. Again, these practices were developed out of such factors as aesthetic judgements and ideas of narrative, but also in relation to the technical demands of recording images. There was also evidence here of senior producers overriding attempts to foster alternative
visions of the countryside. Issue of sound and lighting were also considered, where soundscapes of idyllic rural quiet and nature and encodings of soft and grainy images, both noted in the textual analysis, were also in play.
8.4 Setting in Post-production

As suggested in the Chapter 6, once the images have been recorded they are then put into the stages of post-production. This section considers two principal stages in post-production, namely the practices of picture-editing, and those of sound-editing. Again, the intervention that these practitioners make, and the way they interpret them are inextricably bound up with fashioning particular of visions of the countryside in the text.

8.4.1 Picture-Editing

Picture-editing, as the term implies, involves the selection and arrangement of images. While at one level this process will involve the editor following strict protocols of storytelling, placing images together in such a way that the story makes sense, the editor nonetheless has considerable license to choose from a variety of images that the director has recorded on location. Even though the director, in principle, has editorial control over which images are included, it is rare for a director to be party to all stages of this editing process. Often editors will initially piece together the images alone. According to one involved in the editing of Heartbeat, over and above making sure a story unfolds logically, this is a highly interpretative process, demanding aesthetic judgements to be made over which shots to include:

"Everybody thinks 'oh you're editing, that's cutting things out'. But it isn't. It's putting things together. It's completely different, its creating ... I look for the nicest shots and then put it together how I think it should go"

In different ways, this idea of looking for the 'nicest shot' was often linked to shots that offered picturesque
images of setting. Editors often spoke of emphasising the beauty of the drama’s location when cutting images together. At the same time, this practice had as much to do with the technical demands of editing the drama as aesthetic judgements over how the countryside should be presented. All of these productions have strict episodic lengths. Typically, if a drama is running under time after all the relevant plot information has been conveyed, then editors use countryside views to make up the episode’s length:

"Very often you get can you extend the pretty shot. And in fact I've done that in one episode. I've borrowed from another episode which is over length, I'm going to move it to another episode, because it's a very nice shot and it makes up time."

(Heartbeat Production Team)

"You can hold them much longer. You see, you can just put pretty music over them and I sort of sit here, because I used to do that with All Creatures Great and Small, and on Howard’s Way. We would have a musical boat sequence [BBC TV’s] if an episode was under running"

(Dangerfield Production Team)

At the same time, if dramas are running overtime these patient views of landscape will often be the first to be cut from the dramas although this is not always the case. Some editors, for instance, spoke of ‘clipping’ interior scenes as close to the dialogue as possible so that scenic views could remain in place. At least part of this practice was because wide views of the countryside, such as a panning shot from a crane, are particularly expensive shots to produce. Editors will be well aware of the waste of limited resources this implies:

"If it’s a choice between squeezing the length of an interior scene or losing a crane shot, I would clip the interior scene definitely. Lose a couple of lines at
the end of scene which doesn't ... [advance plot] ... We're talking a thousand pounds down the drain when a ... [crane] ... shot like that gets thrown on the editor's floor, possibly more.'

(Heartbeat Production Team)

Moreover, the use of these shots was also thought to give the audience breathing space in experiencing the narrative. According to one, there was nothing worse than the audience being swamped with information. Inserting these slow developing shots of the countryside gave the drama a rhythm allowing audiences to gradually take in the implications of each plot event:

"Very often it becomes too congested. You end up with the plot and that's it. So what you can end up with is just this constant running, you know, with information being thrown at your audience all the time without any breathing space. So then you've got to think, it's going to fast, they're not going to keep up'. Then you have to start putting back your breathing spaces, your pretty driving shots."

(Dangerfield Production Team)

This idea of going to fast also appears to be connected into particular judgement about conveying a sense of village life. According to one member of Heartbeat Production team, for instance, where as urban dramas would have a succession of rapid shot changes in the scenes to give the audience the impression of "urban tension", a rural drama like Heartbeat would have significantly less changes in order to convey as, he put it, that "sleepy village sort of thing":

"You know you tend to use more developing shots or slow camera moves around tracking shots like that ... If it's something happening in a village it'll just be a lot slower. It'll have these big developing shots"
8.4.2 Sound-Editing

Important interventions in the construction of setting were also at work in the practices of sound-editors, those practitioners responsible for adding background sound to each individual scene. Apart from the dialogue exchanged between characters, most other sounds heard in these dramas are laid onto visual images in post-production. While these sounds are sometimes drawn from 'atmosphere' sounds recorded by the sound recordist on location, in most cases, they are applied from libraries of sound effects that have been bought in by the production team from companies who specialise in developing sound effects for film and television (see Figure 8.4)

**Figure 8.4 Examples of Rural Audio Tracks listed in libraries of Dangerfield, Heartbeat and Peak Practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicken:</td>
<td>Loud clucking, farm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cow ambience:</td>
<td>Small group mooing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cow stampede:</td>
<td>Herd of cows approaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country, day:</td>
<td>Light Breeze, voices and birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country, wind:</td>
<td>Howling and whistling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country ambience:</td>
<td>Residential ambience, early morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country ambience:</td>
<td>Birds, flies, woodpeckers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country, birds:</td>
<td>General ambience outdoor birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm compressor:</td>
<td>Start, run, stop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm milk tank:</td>
<td>Milk being stirred in tank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm wheat:</td>
<td>Wheat being poured into silo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmer:</td>
<td>Man whistling as he passes bracken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village ambience:</td>
<td>Clock chiming, birds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting that the sound recorded on location are not considered desirable in the preparation of images for transmission, for central to this process of sound editing are ideas about achieving a realistic portrait of rural locations. In one respect, the sound recorded on location was, according all of those interviewed, rarely what they,
and apparently the audience, ‘expected’ the countryside to sound like. For them, sound-editing was the process by which the countryside was made to sound “what it should sound like”, rather than “what it sounded like on location” (Dangerfield Production Team). “It sounds bizarre” said one involved in the editing of Peak Practice, “but my job is making ... [locations] ... sound more real than they actually are”, an idea that has echoes in it of Baudrillard’s ‘more real than real’ hyperreality (Baudrillard 1981), (see Figure 8.5).

**Figure 8.5 Sound Editing in Heartbeat**

The role of the sound-editor points in two directions in this respect. First, making sure there are not any sounds residing from the location shoot that they consider to be “unrealistic” or “not what you would expect”. Typically this means that scenes are surveyed for the lingering sounds of traffic. As one put it: “We don’t want the sound of the M6, we want to create the impression that this is real countryside” (Dangerfield Production Team), or in the
case of Heartbeat, "a village like Aidensfield would not have the sound of traffic buzzing around".

Second, adding in "realistic" sound, a process connected into a series of claims by editors of the production expert knowledge on this matter. On the one hand, some constructed the authenticity of editing choices through the expert knowledges of others, (typically those considered authorities on the sounds of birds) who were frequently consulted over whether the audio applied to an image were correct to the period, the season and the region. Allied to this was the way that sound-editors purported to speak from experience of living and travelling around rural areas. As one put it on the production of Heartbeat:

"If I was unlikely enough to have never been to the countryside I would be a bit lost. But I lived there you see, so I know what open moorland will sound like. I know what a woodland atmosphere would be"

These expert and experiential knowledges of rural soundscapes come together in a practice that tries to service the audience with a sound experience that fits in with their presumed expectancies of the rural:

"It's painting a picture with sounds ... I mean, sometimes the sound I hear, that's been on location, to me its great. But it's bland. There's nothing on it. From the television audiences point of view they're going to sit at home watching two people chatting and they would expect to hear a woodland atmosphere or some sheep so you think, "I'll put a bit of sheep on that", cos the sheep are there, but they're being mysteriously quiet. You know they're all eating! So you think 'we do need a few sheep'... it's what people expect to hear. So you're highlighting them, if you like. I've got a terrific library of effects which I've built up over the years"

(Sound-editor, Heartbeat)
Finally, while I only managed to speak to one musical arranger across the three productions, the person responsible for music on Heartbeat, some interesting comments were raised here in relation to the construction of rurality. In this particular production, it has already been noted how the sounds of the Sixties are often interwoven in relation to narrative events. Interestingly, the logic behind the use of this music developed quite early in the development of the series because producers were worried about viewers not being able to identify the period. The problem, according to this programme maker, was that the rural setting for the series was essentially timeless in look:

"Goathland, or should I say Aidensfield hasn't changed much for a thousand years. And if you go there now it still looks the same ... to make sure the audience was aware of the period we started putting on the odd soundtrack. Yer know, when Nick was on his motorbike. It kind of grew from there. It's quite funny really because we do get viewers writing in from time to time saying things like, 'it used to be such a nice show but now you're ruining the image of the countryside', which I've never really understood"

As I argued in the textual analysis, playing these sorts of tunes could plausibly upset notions of an idyllic tranquil rurality, and it is clear according to the above comment that not every viewer is enthusiastic about Heartbeat's taste in music. However, just as I also noted the way these sounds could also foster a different sort of rural idyll, so too did programme maker appear aware of its positive potential:

"Well the kids will like ... [the music] ... , and mums and dads will remember it and sing along, so it's nostalgic in its own kind of way. We have these catchy sounds which lift the overall tone of the show I think. Everything seems a little happier in effect ... Nothing seems too bad played to Fleetwood Mac ... I think it
creates a bit more of a community feel for that kind of setting”

8.4.3 Summary

In summary, it is clear that the thoughts and practices of media producers in post-production are again quite explicitly bound up with efforts to construct particular ideas of rurality. Through the editing process, an emphasised sense of rurality appears, in part, the outcome of aesthetic judgements on images, wider demands on programme length, conveying plot information, and awareness to the monetary value of particular shots. There is also evidence to suggest that editors cut together images at different rates in order to build up a slow paced impression of rural space. In the practice of creating sound relations, programme makers seemed to actively encode and emphasise rural soundscapes that fitted in with notions of realism and audience expectancy, while in the case of music in Heartbeat, ideas of setting seemed to be simultaneously the product of trying to specify the period of a timeless rurality and imbuing these dramas with an idyllic rural nostalgia.
8.5 Summary

This chapter has considered the way that each of these drama's construct a sense of material setting as it moves through the different stages of the production process. It began by highlighting the relations of the script-writing function and the notion of 'collaboration' under which scripts were seen to emerge. It then went on to explain the way a desire to encode images of rurality was embroiled within the design of scripts. Programme makers actively encouraged writers to create space within scripts for idyllic images to emerge. This emphasis was routed, in part, through formal and informal imaginings of the audience, and their relationship to ideas of escapism and an intrinsic human need for rural landscapes. It was also related to the creation of narrative. Images of an idyllic nature appeared to be the outcome of both attempts to create particular narrative themes, and a strategy to compensate for the unsettling effects of particular story lines. This process of creating space of these images did not, however, exclusively preclude anti-idyllic visions of the rural setting.

Discussion then went to explore how these settings were encoded on location. It considered the way that location managers, production designers and directors often, but again not exclusively, sought to create idyllic images of setting, often routed through notions of regionality. Conceptions of audience identity and need, as well embellishing the effects of particular narrative were important themes to emerge, as were aesthetic judgements over the selection of images, and technological considerations surrounding the recording of exterior images for television. Other members of the location team
were also considered, such as sound recordists capturing atmosphere tracks of rural quiet and ambient nature, and lighting teams creating soft and grainy images.

Efforts to foster a broadly positive vision of rurality in the text were carried through in the post-production stage. In editing, it was shown how an emphasised sense of rurality was bound up with demands on programme timing, an inclination to include particular shots that were deemed of high monetary value, communicating notions of a slow-paced rurality in the cut rate of shots, and aesthetic judgements over the selection of images. The work of sound-editors revealed conscious attempts to create an authentic rural soundscape that serviced the expectations of audiences. In Heartbeat, it was also shown how music was used to delimit a sense of temporality for rural setting, as well to develop a positive image of the story world.

Having now established, described and explained the way that producers attempt to create an impression of setting, the focus of discussion now changes. As the textual analysis demonstrated, these symbolic worlds are also occupied by a quite specific set of character identities and relations, which are governed, in turn, by events of narrative. It is to the creation of these elements among contemporary programme makers that discussion now turns.
Chapter 9

Creating Character and Conflict
9.1 Introduction

In the previous sections of discussion, analysis has concentrated on the way relations of material setting were fostered by contemporary production teams. In this section, the focus of discussion turns to a consideration of narrative and character. Discussion begins by considering how the nature of narrative and its relationship to ideas of 'credible' drama and notions of realism. Analysis then explores how notions of the main protagonist are constructed in relation to narrative form, and within this, reflects on the extent to which, and ways in which, programme makers reflect characters as middle class. It goes on to consider how serial narratives developed around these main protagonist identities may have emerged. Discussion closes by drawing attention to the way Heartbeat and Peak Practice, in spite of a desire to create narrative conflict, often think of these dramas as idyllic constructions of community.
9.2 The Social-Spatial Relations of Narrative

Across each of the three productions, programme makers consistently highlighted the importance of narrative to the maintenance of audience interest. Without some sense of dilemma the drama would quickly lose its appeal. As one script-editor working on Heartbeat put it:

"The basic ingredients are a strong main story which will have genuine problems and dilemmas at the heart of it ... because otherwise it becomes a bag of sweets. People I think will lose interest."

The aim of this section is to demonstrate how a sense of narrative was developed in these story worlds, focusing primarily on the series narrative. It begins by reflecting on the way programme makers wished to develop challenging stories that either compensated for, or were accommodated by, the display of idyllic images. This emphasis is also bound up with a desire to mark out dramas as 'credible' cultural texts. It then goes on to explore how the chosen constructions of conflict are developed out of ideas of real rural social relations often in a way that contradicts the initial visions of originators.

9.2.1 Creating Conflict in an Idyllic Setting

On a number of occasions throughout this analysis of media producers, it has been suggested that media producers often adopted a strategy of emphasising images of rurality as way of playing down the relations of conflict. It allowed them to reproduce the drama's pre-watershed appeal. It was also the case that some programme makers expressed frustration at this pre-dominant element of production style, the notion that images of rurality somehow obstructed the story telling process. It was
interesting therefore to find that while some practitioners played up images of rurality to soften the effects of story, others sought to compensate for this emphasis by elevating the intensity of conflict. If productions wished to position these senses of setting as an important element of production style the stories being developed had to push against these images in equal measure. As one writer working on Peak Practice suggested:

"You've got to say we can only afford that lyricalness, we can only afford that nice slow pace with all those pretty pictures, if we are going to be brave, and I think when you start to get soft stories and keep all that, it all falls apart and you sort of end up watching TV thinking, 'What am I watching?'"

Demanding "brave" stories in light of these images rested on a quite different conception of the audience than earlier. Instead of reflecting on the social identities of the audience and their needs (e.g. the 'shockable granny'), the issue here concerns more general allusions to audience interest. According to the above comment, slow moving images of setting combined with soft stories were a recipe for disaster, the drama would "fall apart" in the eyes of the audience. "Brave" stories, in contrast, acted as a counter balance to these images. They kept people watching. They maintained audience interest.

Telling brave stories was not just a mechanism for coping with idyllic images, however. It was also thought of as a desirable aspect of the dramatic form. While producers wished to maintain pre-watershed audiences, so too did they wish to think of their dramas as "thought provoking" (Heartbeat Production Team), "hard-hitting" (Peak Practice Production Team) and "hard-edged" (Dangerfield Production Team). Across all three
productions, a consistent theme to emerge was that the dramatic worth of these texts - their credibility - lay in the ability to challenge, rather than pacify, the audience. As one senior member of the Dangerfield production team put it:

"I’m not someone who can do a Quentin Tarentino at 8 o’clock. But I want ... [Dangerfield] ... to be credible. I want it to be meaningful. I don’t want viewers just to say, ‘oh, how pretty let’s all go and see Warwick Castle’. I want it to be hard-hitting. It has to have that edge”

Paradoxically, while images of rurality would frustrate some of those involved in these productions, it is also the case that some programme makers saw these images as an opportunity to create these identities for their dramas. Rather than downgrading the effects of a challenging storyline, as some would suggest, a dramatic text littered with picturesque images of the countryside was a license to create them:

"You use that supposedly tame kind of framework to discuss very kind of controversial issues. You're using those limitations as a kind of plus point rather than ‘oh god we’ve got to have a shot of the countryside here, let's have Marty climbing up a tree’ ... [...] You've got a programme which is set in the kind of nice and beautiful surroundings, about a handsome doctor who lives in the country and you take that formula and seduce your viewer in to that world and then you can explore really meaty issues which have some kind of social conscious"

(Script-editor, Dangerfield Production Team)

"I think on one level ... [Peak Practice] ... is quite idyllic. I know that whatever I do will come out looking like a episode of Peak Practice ... I'm going to write it and know that its going to get cloaked in Peak Practice. But in a way that warmth, that OXO family warmth, means that I and the series can tell quite difficult stories. As long as you have that glow to it really, that idyll to it, then you can tell whatever
story you want ... the ambulance drives through the countryside which is shot through a golden glow. It's really a strange hybrid really"

(Writer, Peak Practice Production Team)

"As a writer you can get away with that much more on a series like Heartbeat. That might sound a bit strange but suppose I was writing a drama which was set in the middle of London. You haven't got the same, don't ask me why, but there wouldn't be the same tolerance. I can get away with some quite grim stuff just because it's set in the countryside"

(Writer, Heartbeat Production Team)

It is clear, then, that the working alongside earlier suggestions that programme makers often wished to play down the relations of conflict in these rural worlds through idyllic images of setting, so did they wish to advance their drama as challenging and thereby credible drama. On the one hand, this desire for strong narrative was seen to be demanded all the more because of the presence of idyllic images, but on the other, it also appears to give programme makers a certain license to accentuate difficult stories. If this appears a rather contradictory set of ideas, that is because relations between idyllic images and the relation of conflict are set in highly antagonistic and conflicting relationships with each other. Programme makers involved in these dramas often appeared to want simultaneously quite different things. For the purposes of this discussion however, the point I wish to make here is that idyllic images were seen to both demand and permit the creation of conflict in these rural worlds.

9.2.2 Realist Conflict in the Main Episodic Narrative

Working in conjunction with this predilection for strong story, programme makers also wished to develop a realist
sense of conflict within these story worlds. At one level, this worked at the level of occupational realism, a desire to create conflict that reflected the work lives of the main protagonists. It is in this sense that plotlines were given their strong crime-medical inflection. It also created an almost pedantic interest in presenting the routines of characters as authentic to the profession in question: "getting the details right" as one Heartbeat producer put it. This desire for occupational realism sometimes led to a clear separation of plot from setting. Like the originator in Dangerfield, who wished to use space as a canvas on which to paint a general set of social relations, there was some suggestion among those designing stories that a realism developed out of setting was not an indicative feature of their productions:

"I have to admit I never saw it as a rural drama, I just start with the characters and what's real for them as Doctors. If the casualty of that is the realism of rural life then so much the worse for us"

(Script-editor, Peak Practice Production Team)

"The stories could occur anywhere. The realism comes from the character roles"

(Script-editor, Dangerfield Production Team)

"I struggle to find any particular motivation or attitude towards the countryside. I begin with the main police story and the characters"

(Writer, Heartbeat Production Team)

While some gestured that the dilemmas of doctors and nurses had little to do with ideas of setting, the predominant idea was that the nature of conflict was inextricably tied to ideas of space and time. In Heartbeat, for instance, those responsible for developing storylines often suggested that, in different ways, the conflicts at work were true to the drama's period and location. Indeed, this idea constitutes a formal part of
the series’ ‘Writers’ Brief’, a document used by Heartbeat's producers to introduce writers to the series, which states quite explicitly that any stories developed by writers should reflect the drama's sense of time and place, which it defines as “the mid 1960s” in an "isolated community a very long way from the Kings Road” (Heartbeat Writers’ Brief 1996 p.1).

While this emphasis by the production team had led to the treatment of themes firmly related to particular events of the period, (such as an often cited episode among programme makers about foot and mouth disease), the common tendency within the script-writing function was to develop conflict out of a more general, and often quite negative, set of social relations which according to them were indicative of a 1960s rural community. As argued earlier in the textual analysis, it is possible to see that many of the episodes build much of their narrative dynamic around the arousal of suspicion among villagers. Programme makers consistently expressed the way that a village community of this time would be ‘close-knit’ and that, according to one writer, there was,

“Lots of dramatic potential in developing all those kinds of suspicions that you would get in a village like Aidensfield ... [] ... yer know, this is not high Sixties, this is an out of the way community on the North York's Moors”.

On one hand, the potential for this particularly kind of conflict appeared to be developed through the use of figures of difference, coming into the village from outside and acting as a vehicle for commentary on the social relations of that time. So for example, one script-editor speaking about the episode Giving the Game Away,
discussed in detail in the textual analysis, suggested that,

"We've had episode with black characters turning up in the village, if we want to get a dramatic play of yer know racist or prejudiced reaction against them. By and large yer know a lot of people will not have seen a black person before if they're living in an isolated village community. ... [] ... you then have to face the reality that people will be going around saying 'What's a darky doing up here? He must be a wrong un!' At which point the pre-conceptions of the character come into play."

At the same time, developing conflict out of the expected behaviour and attitudes of main protagonists also apparently meant there was potential to treat conflict from within the village. Again reflecting on another text examined earlier, the episode A Long Shot a script-editor explains that,

"It's true that these were cruel communities in fact. So we develop that. I know that's sounding a bit unfair, but in the episode we're just doing there's a father who's accused of beating up his kid. Villages in the Sixties and Fifties, yer know, something like that would probably be happening. And it's in the reactions to that by Jo and Nick, by that close-knit world of Aidensfield, that the drama happens. All that nosey parking and curtain twitching".

Using these imagined community relations of space and time was not simply a way of satisfying the drama's thirst for story. It was connected back in to this idea of hard-hitting credible drama, with programme makers often adopting the role of social commentator exposing the reality of life in a world such as Aidensfield. As one put it, Heartbeat tried to, "reveal the real dilemmas of life in an out of the way community" that would, in turn, "provoke the thoughts of audiences". According to another:
"It's light entertainment there's no doubt. But I'd like to think we tell stories which allow people to absorb the rights and wrongs of life in a community like Aidensfield. We hope that it is, should I say, it needs to be in someway, thought-provoking"

(Script-editor, Peak Practice Production Team)

The major exception to these thoughts and practices at work in developing Heartbeat's episodic narratives concerns the use of the Greengrass narrative. Rather that constituting the relations of conflict in these worlds as negative, Greengrass was seen also seen as an indicative figure of his setting who provided the drama with important an element of social comedy. The Greengrass narrative was used tactically in this sense. It was designed to provide a "light hearted" contrast to the other narrative strands, an idea that bears symmetry with my own reading of the text. For programme makers, it kept the overall tone of the drama in keeping with its pre-watershed appeal. As a Producer put it:

"He's that village sort of character you would have probably got back then. Very colourful, very funny, but deeply, deeply flawed. Incredibly important to the family feel of the drama, its comedy".

Nonetheless, it was certainly the case that Heartbeat had pulled somewhat away from it originator's precepts of nostalgic realism. It is perhaps unsurprising therefore to find some in Heartbeat often regarding their dramatic worlds as anything but idyllic. Paradoxically, the accumulated effect of this anti-idyllic portrait may be far fetched at best. As a writer on Heartbeat suggested just moments after arguing that the drama "needs to have some semblance of reality to it":

"At the end of the day it is about telling a story. It would be nice to have the quaintness of the village but we have to have a plot ... If crime were surveyed over
the 70 episodes of Heartbeat it would be the crime capital of Britain. This point applies to all the programmes you're looking at. You would probably find that Peak Practice would be the illness capital of the world.”

In a different way, the development of Peak Practice also appeared to have undergone something of a transformation from its formative vision. Time and time again programme makers would speak of the way the series’ sense of realism had been gradually eroded through time. That Peak Practice’s vision of rurality had become a “work of fiction”, “increasingly ridiculous”, “a parody of itself”. Peak Practice, it was felt, had pulled away from the original premises upon which the series was commissioned, developed, and moreover, successful with audiences. At the time of this study, programme makers were consciously attempting to re-install the drama’s sense of realism, a realism that was explicitly bound up with the setting in which it was taking place:

“We met a writer, a really, really good writer … who had worked on Peak Practice since the first series, and being a fantastic writer we thought he'd be a good person to sort of include in the discussion, how the series should be. And we all knew the faults of the last series that it was in many ways very silly and so with him we dreamt up a way of making it more real. Give the Doctors more reality. Give the sense of a real village community with its own problems. Give the doctors more of an attitude to the health service and all that kind of stuff.

(Script-editor, Peak Practice Production Team)

For some of those developing the scripts of Peak Practice the issue was about returning the drama to what made it so popular with audiences in the first instance: a socially realistic portrait of rurality. Like Dangerfield and Heartbeat too, it was bound up with ideas of commentary, a wish to explore the social relations of
rural life, as well as the implications of changes in health service funding to provoke in audiences. As one put it:

"People think the countryside is just this total ideal. Yer know, no illness, no pain, no sadness or whatever. In our own small way we're saying 'life's just not like that, wherever you go!'"

It is also possible to see how programme makers in this drama consistently developed these ideas of rural realism along class lines. While the originator wished to explicitly comment on the dilemmas of working class lives in the countryside, the development of this theme was rationalised according to a different set of motivations among contemporary programme makers. One of the common remarks emerging among practitioners, for instance, was the way that middle class identities, despite being, for them, an indicative characteristic of the main protagonists, was thought to be unappealing to audiences: "absolute, total turn off" to use the words of a senior member of the Peak Practice production team. As two practitioners explained:

"I think there have been lots of Peak Practice's which have involved middle class characters and they have never been successful. There's such a large audience that they have to go for and most of those will be working class urban people. Yer know, they want people they can relate to even if they are in a different context. So there' very, very few middle class stories. I think the British have a huge problem with the middle class because they think, why should I care for this person? They're middle class, they've got it easy to some extent"

(Producer, Peak Practice Production Team)

"Middle class issues are a bit of a turn off. We tend not to major on them because there's something alienating and unsympathetic about them. I think a large part our audience isn't middle class and so that's why we have a preponderance of working class characters. The perception of England is 'well, they've
got a lot of money so they haven't got problems, have they?'. End of Subject"

(Script-editor, Peak Practice Production Team)

The suggestion here is that narratives developed around the middle classes are not popular because they represent something different from the identities of viewers (i.e. working class and urban). The audience cannot relate to them. According to some programme makers, the drama must involve characters who replicate their own conditions of existence: they must be empathetic characters. As a result, some writers spoke about the way they had been instructed to avoid middle class characters entirely, and build the stories instead around the dilemmas of the working classes:

"Apart from the doctors who are by, profession, middle class, they don't let me tell middle class stories. I tried to get one in this last time ... and one of the first things they said about the story was 'we don't want these boring middle class people, let's put them in a mobile home on some caravan site, but that's changed again. It's now going to be a house in a village"

This idea of attempting to developing conflict out of the social relations of class and setting was indicative too of Dangerfield. Like Heartbeat, this realist trajectory represented something of a shift away from the originator's conception of the series. For some, space was not simply a backdrop on which to place a set of social relations, as its originator suggested, it was inextricably bound up with the narratives developed:

"At this stage. It's taking the ... [countryside aspect] ... on board and exploiting it in terms of the generation of the storyline. You've got stories you can generate from all kinds of rural areas. Which is interesting because I thought that it was going to be quite difficult to generate stories with a kind of country
rural feel. But all of the stories do have that element in it.”

(Writer, Dangerfield Production Team)

In much the same way as the other two dramas, the comments of this respondent suggest Dangerfield was about “exploiting” the potential of the countryside to service the drama’s need for conflict. It was also about commentary as well. If Heartbeat was about interrogating the nature of rural communities, and Peak Practice about constructing a realist community allied to a focus on the working classes, in Dangerfield it was about contesting the idea of a middle class rural idyll. Indeed, those involved in the development of Dangerfield’s scripts appeared to be actively taking the original precepts of the drama – stories based around a police surgeon and his family set against the picturesque backdrop of Warwickshire, and then using this framework to problematise the social relations of the middle classes in the countryside:

“I love conspiracy theories, I love the fact that you have these beautiful shots of the countryside but underneath you’ve got all the rot and shot and crap going on underneath and you expose that, but keep it within the frame of the countryside. You kind of blow that kind of myth that the countryside is free from corruption. So you exploit that antagonism between myth and reality. That’s the joy I am going to have in the next series. I’m going to smash that middle class myth. And it's not going to be about working class people having problems it’s going to be, lots is going to be happening in the middle classes. Come the glorious revolution!”

(Script-editor Dangerfield Production Team)

It is in this sense of commentary, for instance, that a number of episodes were apparently born, from the alienation of the ‘well to do’ gentleman in Old Dog Old Tricks, to the stalking of a character with a similar
class identity in *Episode 1 Untitled*, and into Al's unsettling experience of living in the woods in *Eden*. As the same programme maker explains:

"It's very interesting how people in rural situations can get cut off. And so therefore there's lots of interesting storylines in that respect which you can easily include in *Dangerfield*. I mean there was the episode in series 3 'Eden' The forest clearer and stuff like that. The way his middle class daughter found that living in countryside wasn't quite the idyll she had supposed ... [] ... And also how villages have been broken down by the fact that you have yuppie types who kind of buy houses and just live there at weekends, so therefore the actual rural communities are getting broken down and dissipated because people are buying the properties are not living there. So you use that"

It is also worth mentioning here that representations of the main protagonist, and the conflicts that surround his personal and professional life, could also partially be seen to fit in with this sense of commentary. As the same script-editor put it, "playing against that cushy rural life, I'm going to turn our hero into an emotional wreck". In a comment that chimes with my own reading of the drama, however, his colleague was to add sardonically, "yeah, but not too much".

9.2.3 Summary

This section has made two principal points in relation to the creation of narrative. First, a desire to create 'hard hitting', and thereby credible, drama; an interesting reversal of earlier premises, where programme makers sought to tame the relations of conflict by encoding idyllic settings. In this case, images were not only seen to demand the creation of brave stories but also, paradoxically, a license to create them. Second, and allied to this, each of the dramas also sought to engage
with a realist portrait of rurality. Many of these realist themes bear symmetry with the readings of the drama which I made in textual analysis, from ideas of the local and incomer in Heartbeat, to the class relations of Cardale in Peak Practice and the vulnerability of the middle classes in Dangerfield. These conflicts clearly point to something of a departure from the originator's vision in Dangerfield, who spoke of the aspatial focus of narrative in the series, and quite a different sort of realism to that imagined by the originators of Heartbeat, where the village of Aidensfield was highly nostalgic in conception. In Peak Practice, what is noticeable again, is the way that programme makers were again speaking about returning to the socially realist focus of its original premise.
9.3 Creating the Main Protagonist

The aim of the following section is to consider the way programme makers think about and develop the identity of their main protagonists in relation to these narratives. It begins by exploring the construction of their problem solving and attitudinal competencies and the way that programme makers often acknowledged the power relations invested in these constructions. Discussion then moves on to show the way that programme makers sought to propagate a positive conception of middle class lifestyles in these texts, frequently through allusions to the escapist audience. The section closes by considering some of the rationales behind the creation of serial narrative themes.

9.3.1 The Main Protagonist as Problem Solver

"The drama comes from our characters' reactions to situation and adversity. Everything conspires to get them in front of the cameras. After all that's why they are there"

(Heartbeat Production Team)

If a key element of these productions was to invest these worlds with a sense of narrative, then as the above comment suggests, the events unfolding will be always built around the drama's main protagonists. According programme makers involved in the current production of these dramas, main protagonists cannot remain 'protagonists', let alone 'main' protagonists, if they are made distant from the events that take place. Across each of the productions main protagonists were always positioned by these producers at the centre of narrative events in such a way that they were consistently marked out as 'problem solvers'. Indeed, those involved in overseeing and writing scripts were quick to constitute
this idea of the problem solver through implicit reference to the archplot formation, where main protagonists successfully negotiated conflict through the processes of dis-equilibrium and equilibrium:

"Typically, our stories will develop in such a way that the murder or whatever will be solved by our handsome doctor and hero, Paul, and everyone can go home"

(Producer, Dangerfield Production Team)

"Peak Practice works on the basis that our main characters will be forced into a situation which they will resolve by the end of the episode."

(Script-editor Peak Practice Production Team)

"There will be a few surprises along the way but the general rule is simple: a problem occurs, Nick sorts it out"

(Writer, Heartbeat Production Team)

Again, just as those involved in the origination of these series, many at work in the design of scripts, suggested that these protagonists happened to be professionals who solved problems because the principal story form, series narrative design, demanded this. It demanded the creation of a "major problem" (Heartbeat Production Team) a "significant event", (Dangerfield Production team) a "fucker in the first five minutes" (Peak Practice Production Team) that should be resolved in turn by leading characters over the course of episode. Their problem solving function was dictated to these characters by the structure already laid down, rather than the other way around. Interestingly, in a point not raised by those involved in developing the idea of Dangerfield, programme makers on this series spoke of the way they had to go to "extraordinary lengths" to make their leading protagonist a problem solver:
"That's the problem, he isn't ... [a problem solver] .... The actual role has nothing to do with the detection of crime. A police surgeon's job is to certify death or examine a body to see if they are fit for questioning. This means we have to go to extraordinary lengths to make him just that ... [i.e. a problem solver] ... ."

(Script-editor, Dangerfield Production Team)

Even though this function of the protagonists was seen to be necessary marker of the story form, these characters were nonetheless considered particularly suited to the storytelling process since, according to some of those developing scripts, what comes with the role of Doctor, policeman or police surgeon is the ability to control, demand, contribute and receive information in a way that other social identities could not:

"Nigel Le Valliant is like Nick Berry in Heartbeat. He's a figure of authority who allows the story to develop. It'd be useless if he was a window cleaner ... [pause] ... although there would be a lot of comic potential in that."

(Script-editor, Dangerfield Production Team)

In other words, not only were these competencies a necessary ingredient in allowing stories to unfold, they were also seen as common features of these professional identities. Problem solvers needed to be active in the exchange and development of information to control events, while controlling events was simultaneously seen as a characteristic of professional identities.

This is not to say that the problem solving abilities of the main protagonists were never called into question. In an attempt to create interest in the story, the problem solving abilities of the main protagonists were apparently "regularly called into question" (Peak Practice Production Team). In developing these stories, writers and script-editors alike spoke of the drama emerging out of the
failures as well as the successes of character action and reaction, a theme picked up in the textual analysis (for instance, the episode Holding it Together). Problem solvers should not be perfect. As a writer on the Heartbeat team put it, the investment of the audience came in reading these characters as “ordinary people dealing with extraordinary circumstances” and that,

“Yes they don’t always get it right. They’re human beings, dealing with the problems life throws at them ... which is where the interest comes. They’re just like you and I really, but the satisfaction comes of course in seeing them overcome these problems, be that crime, death or whatever”.

If programme makers temper these problem solving abilities of main protagonists with an element of human fallibility, implicit recourse to the archplot formation nevertheless meant that characters dogmatically pursue their ends to a successful conclusion. Negotiating events was always on a positive trajectory for main protagonists as far as the programme makers were concerned. To reiterate the comment from a Heartbeat practitioner: “There will be a few surprises along the way but the general rule is simple: a problem occurs, Nick sorts it out”.

Allied to this idea of problem solving and episodic design, main protagonists were evidently also designed to be “positive”. Programme makers consistently suggested that the words and deeds of characters should portray them sympathetically in the eyes of the audience. In terms of solving the dramas main episodic conflict, ideas of positivity tended to be associated these characters’ sense of morality: PC Rowan was “fair”, “open minded” and “honourable”, Dangerfield was “even-handed” and “honest”,

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the Doctors in Peak Practice were "impartial", "ethical". It was also about wisdom, a feature of character identity that, in the case of Heartbeat, was thought to portray their main protagonists as somewhat fictitious. Indeed, in controlling the direction of events, a frequent association made by programme makers in this production was that their leading characters were quintessentially "1990s" in their attitudes, such as Nurse Maggie Bolton's "right on" views about race in the episode Giving the Game Away. Discussion of events at hand by main protagonists was frequently seen to be contemporary in form, even though the drama purported to be set in the 1960s. For one member of the production team this was in no sense problematical, in spite of earlier claims of realism. Rather, it was investing the stories with a dynamic that made the drama more engaging for audiences:

"I was deeply flattered by one review we had which said we had visited the 1960s with stallionous zeal. In other words, we've taken the 60s and we've been able to give, with hindsight, a prescience that probably never existed"

(Producer, Heartbeat Production Team)

Some programme makers drew attention to the social-spatial power relationships that were implied by these problem-solving identities and competencies. A member of the Dangerfield production team, for instance, explained how the series was built around a doctor who "wishes to make everything better and then move on", solving problems that, "no one else appears inclined or capable of resolving". Another in Heartbeat spoke of the drama as being "primarily about a canny Londoner who waltzes into Aidensfield one day, yer know, like a cowboy and starts running the show". He goes on to suggest that, "a lot of it goes back to the idea of the western" with everyone
standing around going "ooh, how did he do that?".
Similarly, a writer from Peak Practice suggested that the

drama created a recurring scenario in which:

"The village is basically idiotic ... [and the] ... professionals are basically very bright and intelligent
and they all come and live there ... I think there's a
degree to which the doctors do tend to solve problems
in the community ... It would be very nice for the locals
to teach the newcomers a few tricks though"

Moreover, others in this series quite explicitly drew
attention to the class relations of problem creating and

solving:

"A friend of mine has got a brilliant way of writing a
Peak Practice script. It starts off with the ill person
coming in and saying: 'bloody doctors don't know owt'
and then it just turns around to him going 'oh sorry
doctor you were right after all' And that's basically
it, yer know, there's loads of that goes on. And like
if it's a middle class character they won't have that
line. But if it's a lower class character they'll have
this line 'bloody doctors don't know owt'."

(Script-editor, Peak Practice Production Team)

Indeed, if Peak Practice had an ongoing desire to
represent the material rural experiences of non middle
class groupings in the countryside, some programme makers
were quick to add that these constructions were often
revealed quite negatively. One location manager on Peak
Practice went as far to say, in a quite matter of fact
fashion, that "the working class characters are only there
to show our middle class leads in a more positive light,
we all know that".

9.3.2 Encoding and Rationalising the Creation of Middle
Class Identities

While programme makers spoke frequently about constituting
main protagonists as problem solvers, the issue of whether
these characters were 'middle class' was actually a matter of some difference across the three dramas. In the discussions that took place with those responsible for Heartbeat, only one respondent spoke of the main protagonists as being 'middle class'. This was in made in reference to the recent use of horse riding by the drama, which was detected as a clear change of direction for the series:

"The last producer, she was more earthy. She wouldn't have allowed ... [horse riding] ... Would have said that it was too 'upper middle class' ... the new producer is more into all that. Nick and Jo on a Horse, the cars.

(Production designer, Heartbeat Production Team)

This is in marked contrast to Dangerfield and Peak Practice. "By definition", said one Dangerfield writer remarking on the leading protagonist's occupational identity, "he's middle class". As Figure 9.3 displays, scripts from both Dangerfield and Peak Practice provide some indication of the way those involved in the practice of script-writing draw on common signifiers of middle class identity and competencies to create a vision for particular scenes, from 'barbours and wellies', '4WD Subaru pick-ups' and 'Land Rovers', to 'barn conversion' homes and flats 'obviously occupied by someone with a healthy income'.

In the latter stages of the production process, programme makers were quick to recognise this theme. One location manager on Dangerfield, for instance, spoke of that "middle class comfortable bourgeois way of life" that was at work in constructions of Paul Dangerfield, while another involved in production design drew attention to the "glamour element" of the world that they "certainly don't deny" and added:
"He has the air of man with a lot on his mind. He wears a barbour and wellies"

"At a distance is a 4WD Subaru pick-up"

"A tractor and a Land Rover parked in a field ... a couple of farm workers stand near the vehicles"

(Dangerfield)

"Beth Glover is leaving her barn conversion home and walking across the lane to her surgery"

"Beth and Isabel have reached a high point on the Derbyshire peak ... Beth is already reaching into her bag for their picnic and takes out a bottle of red wine, cheese, fruit and bread. One of the items she pull out is a copy of the British Medical journal"

"The flat is comfortable, one floor of an old building obviously occupied by someone with a healthy income"

(Peak Practice)

"It goes with the way the house is designed and the way they dress. They dress sort of country smart, you know what I mean, 'country smart'. So it's like corduroys and moleskin trousers. It's sort of nice. Nice and neat"

Certainly, the presence of these constructions had much to do with the way the middle class identities of main protagonists were regarded by programme makers as central to the success of Dangerfield and Peak Practice drama with audiences; an interesting contrast to the earlier idea that these class identities wholly alienate audiences. This idea worked on a number of levels. One was to draw upon the idea of self-identification, in which the relations depicted in the programme reflect the lifestyles and tastes of the middle classes already living in the
countryside. According to one member of the Peak Practice team, some viewers enjoyed imploding middle class discourses of rurality into their own experiences, submerging themselves in the notion that they, in fact, occupy, (or least come close to occupying), some superior form of social existence:

"... The middle class rural people living that life, or not exactly that life, but the closest to that life as exists are slightly smug because we don't patronise it and we're not saying anything bad about it. If anything we putting it up as 'wouldn't this be a utopia, aren't we? So they already feel quite smug if they already live it, because they don't really ..."

(Production Designer, Peak Practice Production Team)

The suggestion here is that the rural middle classes revel in these images because it helps them reproduce the desirability and status of their own social-spatial identities. According to this conception, the media text acts as celebration of a utopian ideal that becomes extended into, rather than differentiated from, the viewer's material social life. For others it was less escapist, and more aspirational:

"... [Dangerfield's] ... just chocolate box pictures. Yer know. Big country house ... pretty people. It's a bit of escapism ... everybody has aspirations ...and I think that yer know, everybody thinks: I wish that was me"

(Producer, Dangerfield Production Team)

Such conceptions, however, were not read as works of fiction. They were seen to be placing a new set of demands on the real, "heightening life", (Dangerfield Production Team) and "extending reality" (Peak Practice Production Team) for audiences. They offered, in sum, normative, idealised conceptions of the world, locating desire in a substantive vision for the audience at large. Just as other connections between text and escapism by media
producers have done, the process by which desirable modes of social life were transferred onto the spatiality of the text was often based on the premise that these utopian worlds exist, in different ways, beyond the immediate grasp of the watching audience. According to this interpretation, the viewer's investment in middle class image rests on a substitution effect in which the text compensates for the audience's inability to attain the real thing. As one member of the Dangerfield team succinctly put it: "People like to associate with that middle class feel even if they can't have it".

This type of logic usually results in programme makers generating highly specific constructions of the audience in which the viewer is set apart from their utopian desires according to their position in space, time and social structure. It is through this process of audience positioning that middle class constructions come to be rationalised. In particular, the issues at stake here relate to notions of urbanity, class and gender. For instance, according to one senior member of the Peak Practice production team, these images of class were about the urban middle classes audience relating the text to the possibilities of their own lives:

"I imagine the implication of it can only be the middle class urban think how nice it would be to have a country retreat in the rural idyll wherever they choose it to be, Gloucestershire, Derbyshire ... "

In this case, the urban middle classes are seen to invest their desires into the middle class texts of Peak Practice because they evoke a conceivable set of scenarios for them. The inference is that the urban middle class's desire for this rural world will, at some point, be acted upon.
In contrast, these constructions were also seen to act as an escape from the specific social conditions of the urban working class: a view of the world that was beyond the limits of their possibilities. The suggestion here is that if the urban working classes can never escape the inevitability of their own conditions of existence they can at least engage with these desires through the pleasure of the image:

"... The urban working class ... have got no chance of having a weekend cottage. They've got no chance of going out there because unemployment is huge, but they use it as escapism"

(Producer, Peak Practice Production Team)

"It's for working class people. Yer know if they are sitting in their two up two down in working class area they have aspirations"

(Sound-Editor Dangerfield Production Team)

The compensatory nature of these middle class rural utopias also continues into gendered constructions of the audience:

"My theory is that women control the remote control in the house. Yer know, I'm not the archetypal feminist but I really think so. And I think that on a Friday night the women have that remote control and it's never set free. And they watch it for Nigel, the cars, yer know, the house. It's all that, harping back, but it's all that escapism. That 'I wanna be that person'"

(Producer, Dangerfield Production Team)

According to Fiske (1987), the connection between media texts and female escapism is quite common, one often borne out of a discourse of "feminine weakness" in which women are constructed as unable "to come to terms with (masculine) reality" (p.317). As he explains, escapism is seen as,
"a sort a daydreaming that allows women ...to achieve
their desires in a way that they are never capable of
in the 'real' world, a compensatory domain which
results from and disguises their 'real' lack of power"
(Ibid, p.317)

Certainly, one of the more general themes to emerge among
some producer interpretations of these dramas was the idea
that women used the text to break the mundanity and
inevitability of their own circumstances:

"It's for women with kids who can't get out, people
like my ironing lady"
(Editor, Peak Practice Production Team)

"I usually think of middle aged women who haven't got
anything better to do"
(Production Designer, Dangerfield Production Team)

"You know, I see her as a typical middle class women
who will sit down on a Friday night yer know, kids out
clubbing or whatever. This is my theory, a lot of
people may shoot me down in flames, but I think it is a
typical middle class women".
(Producer Dangerfield Production Team)

As the third quote begins to show, there is also
evidence of a class theme running through some of these
ideas about femininity and the dramatic text, a point also
taken up by one senior member of the Peak Practice
production team who claimed that the drama afforded the
middle class female viewer the opportunity to express
pent-up emotional tension:

"You've got the nice habit of middle class mothers
watching it because they get to cry, and they get to
laugh, but it's intelligent"
(Producer, Peak Practice Production Team)

And these informal conceptions of female escapism by those
at work in the script-writing process are certainly
reaffirmed by the formal mechanisms of market research,
which elevates the female viewer as a key configuration of
the audience at large. As two script-editors claimed:

"A Large percentage of the audience are middle aged
women and older, and that's what they sell the
advertising on the basis of"
(Peak Practice Production Team)

"The catchment area tends to be middle aged women ... 
post-nested, or whatever they call them"
(Dangerfield Production Team)

As the following section will now demonstrate, the idea of
escapism and female audiences also touches another
construction of class identity by programme makers
overseeing the development of scripts, that of the
romantic male professional.

9.3.3. Romantic Professionals and Narratives of Staying
and Leaving

Developing the romantic interest between characters had
little to do with writers. The romantic identities of
these characters were defined in advance by script-editors
and producers, who positioned the love life of characters
as a serial narrative to be integrated into a writer's
story idea (i.e. the episodic narrative), almost as a bolt
on. The use of this serial narrative is a tactic to
maintain audience interest from week to week. While this
is true to degree of all serial storylines, romance is
seen to be particularly useful. Programme makers work on
the basis that, with the right level of chemistry between
actors, dilemmas of love will quickly build a loyal
audience. While it is true, in one sense, that
professional main protagonists will always be the
beneficiaries of a romantic night in front of the fire
because they are drama's focus of attention, what might be
added to this is the way these programme makers link the
class relations of romance to a female audience and, in turn, their escapist overtures to the text. In all three productions, women were thought to switch on in order to gaze upon romantic and sophisticated doctors and policeman:

"... [Peak Practice] ... is what my mum, who lives in the midlands thinks, you know, romantic doctors in pullovers are like if they are lounging round Derbyshire. And as long as it has that sort of exclusive world to it that is different, that takes you out of your everyday life then it will work"
(Writer, Peak Practice Production Team)

"Women love Nick. He’s handsome, romantic ... Who wouldn’t love a Police Constable riding around the moors? He’s something of a fantasy man, isn’t he?"
(Script-editor, Heartbeat Production Team)

"... [Nigel’s] ... the romantic lead. That’s why they brought him in from Casualty. He appeals to women".
(Producer, Dangerfield Production Team)

In the case of narratives of staying and leaving, an important serial theme noted in the textual analysis, there appear a number of factors at work. First, in Dangerfield it was partly driven by the narrative potential that came of moving the main protagonist from his home in the country. “Rather than having him stuck out there in his idyllic farm house” as one script-editor was to put it, “we brought him in to Warwick to give him more town stories”. But as he was to add, the series still "took every opportunity to get him out there in the countryside". Interestingly, this use of a town setting was again built around ideas of the audience. If images of rurality in texts such as Dangerfield were often rationalised according to escapist urban desires, it is also the case that stories taking place in countryside settings would occasionally be seen as alienating. This
idea was apparently a key reason behind the creation of this narrative. As one production designer put it:

"City people identify more with the Warwick setting. It's necessary to have that element [...] I don't think the countryside always appeals to people like that, so we've brought that on a bit by moving [Dangerfield] into the town"

In Peak Practice, the history behind this narrative relates, in part, to the commitment of the actors to the drama. The actor who plays the character Andrew Attwood was apparently unsettled in the production as he approached the end of his contract. Producers simply did not know whether he was 'staying or leaving'. The development of this plot line represented a plausible way of explaining his potential disappearance from the village of Cardale, had he decided to leave the series. While this was never fully established as a reason for Jo and Nick's staying/living narrative in Heartbeat it is certainly more than a coincidence that the lead character played by the actor Nick Berry was ready to leave the series after five years.

What is important to add in relation to Peak Practice's narrative of staying and leaving was the way that practical demands for this storyline became actively integrated into a particular vision of the countryside. It was noted in the textual analysis, for instance, the way that Dr Attwood's staying or leaving narrative was built around a strong anti-urban/pro-rural construction of the idyll. According to one picture-editor on Peak Practice, reflecting on the way he edited together the images in Figure 5.42 and 5.43 this was precisely the theme he was wishing to construct:
"In one of the episodes we have, we have one of the doctors working in Manchester, desperate to get back to the Peak District. Because, yer know, it was more important to him both as a Doctor and as a person. Because he couldn't relate to this inner city where life has become brutalised and uncaring, whereas back in the Peak District, they had more time to relate to their patients and to each other and he felt he was missing out ... And that's in the episode. I've done it in such a way that is quite clearly stated for everyone to understand, that he is unhappy in that environment. There's the harsh Manchurian landscape with the Peak district, and he wants to get back to it and wants to get back to a country practice which is concerned with care in the community."

Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that some producers on this drama saw this narrative as being an archetypal dilemma of the middle classes. "It's that typical middle class problem", suggested one writer on Peak Practice, "career at odds with your home life". According to him, Dr Attwood "doesn't know whether he is coming or going" and added significantly that "this actually makes for a compelling discussion about our attachment to places like Cardale". Clearly, what begins as a practical issue surrounding the contract of a particular actor in Peak Practice, was then actively worked into a positive construction of the countryside.

9.3.4 Summary

This section has concerned itself with the creation of main protagonist identities. It began by exploring how the main protagonist is constructed as a problem solver. Four key points emerged in relation to this theme, all of which were noted in the textual analysis. First, the problem solving function of these characters was defined by the story form, although their professional identities were still seen as particularly appropriate to this function.
This point echoes the insights of originators. Second, while programme makers do appear to construct these incomer professionals as flawless, the archplot logic which they implicitly draw upon will reveal them positively by the end of the narrative (such as Peak Practice's Holding It Together). Third, they actively encourage positive dispositional competencies on the part of main characters. Finally, programme makers often identified the implicit power relations that character relations developed. Constructing conflict in these worlds revealed the social-spatial identities of main protagonists positively at the expense of others.

Discussion then went on to show how a reading of these characters as 'middle class' was actively at work in the production teams of Peak Practice and Dangerfield, but almost wholly absent from the construction Heartbeat. Encoding of these identities occurred at both the writing and design stages of these two dramas, the logic of which was related again to imaginings of the audience in the schedule and their escapist and aspirational desires. As the comments implied, some of these imaginings were also based around highly gendered constructions of the audience, a theme that was also at work in the development of serial narrative identities around male professionals. Mention was also given to way main protagonist narratives of staying and leaving were closely related to notions of the urban audience and practical issues surrounding the commitment of actors. As this section added, programme makers sought to propagate a quite positive notion of rurality through this narrative in Peak Practice, a theme that concurs with my own reading of the drama.
So far this chapter has explored the way ideas of narrative and character are constructed by these dramas. In this final section, I wish to highlight the way that programme makers in Heartbeat and Peak Practice, although wishing to creating a sense of dilemma in these worlds also wished to emphasise, and interpret their dramas as, positive visions of rural community, a theme picked up in the textual analysis. Indeed, working alongside their tendency to temper the relations of narrative conflict with positive readings and constructions of the main protagonists, programme makers in these two dramas frequently spoke about "the sense of community" (Peak Practice Production Team) at work in their story worlds, and their wish to "develop the community aspect" (Heartbeat Production team).

At least one of these reasons why such a reading of these drama may occurs relates to how the storytelling form is interpreted. An idea explained earlier, for instance, was that over the course of these series, an impression of conflict accumulates and thereby creates a negative reading of rurality (i.e. these worlds were "crime capitals" and "illness capitals"). However, an alternative view was to read episodes independently of each other and regard the storytelling form (i.e. the archplot formation) as creating a positive, rather than negative, vision of life in the countryside:

"It’s very interesting, but you could say that what Heartbeat does is protect that myth. We have this little village community which is kind of turned upside down every week, but you know that in the end everything will be okay. It’s a very reassuring idea of
life in the country, isn't it? Because most of us never have that element of closure"
(Director, Heartbeat Production Team)

Furthermore, some programme makers consciously attempted to create a sense of community within stories. They spoke for instance of the need to actively create opportunities in storylines for interaction between characters, which as one Peak Practice script-editor put it, "tells the viewer what a lovely and friendly place Cardale really is to live". The importance of visions of community was also at work in the thoughts of those recording these dramas on location. One director on Heartbeat, for instance, reflecting on the cricket pitch location chosen for a scene spoke about creating a "montage of people together, out there in the community". Moreover, practitioners also spoke about portraying characters in these dramas sympathetically, accentuating their "caring and compassionate" (Peak Practice Production Team) "nice and agreeable" (Heartbeat Production Team) sides. These latter constructions reveal a wholly different emphasis to Heartbeat's "suspicious", "curtain twitching" rural community mentioned earlier.

The need to create these visions was overwhelming related to conceptions of the audience at work among programme makers. While it is true, on one level, that creating plenty of interaction between characters is a useful device for exchanging information between characters, and thereby developing story, it is also connected again into ideas of audience reproduction and escapist desire:
"I watch Heartbeat for the same reason other people watch Peak Practice ... because every time you go back to that little nest ... which is beautiful, and everyone has a nice time there"  
(Production Designer, Peak Practice Production Team)

"The audience turn onto Peak Practice because every week they go to this mythical place, Brigadoon, Camelot call it what you will, this mythical place where they can enjoy a story and then come out of it. And every week they go back to this mythical place and they are reassured by it."

(Producer, Peak Practice Production Team)

In both these dramas, a key theme here was to rationalise audience appeal through ideas of the audience and the city. A desire for idyllic communities was developed out of the alienation and failings of modern urban life. According to this logic, the popularity of series has little to do with the challenging the relations of conflict. It stood on the viewer's desire to seek solace from their immediate urban realities. As a senior producer on the Heartbeat production team suggested when reflecting on the success of series:

"[E]verybody's desire was to get out of the City because they thought they were ugly and nasty ... Yer know there's a sort of age from twenty to thirty when people love being in London and then suddenly at thirty they think, Christ, this place is dreadful, it's soul-less, and I don't know any of the neighbours, and everyone wants to get out at a certain age, and I think that added to its appeal"

According to some, this was all to do with the expectations of the urban audience. The series' had managed to construct a plausible vision of rural social relations that tapped into the desires of the urban audience:
"[Urban people] ... would like the country to be like that. Isn't that how the country has always been perceived? It's somewhere to get away from the town. Somewhere where the pace is different. Where people have time for each other. You have this idea that, you know, a doctor walks down Cardale high street and goes 'Hi, how's it going? Is your headache better?' I mean you believe it, you want to believe it because we all want to think that"

(Picture-editor, Peak Practice Production Team)

Notice too in this comment the way that professional identities are registered within these conception. It was about constructing a place where people had time for each other, where caring doctors stopped people in the street to ask their patients about their well-being. This is the expectancy. If the same elements of narratives were woven into an urban setting, however, the idea would quickly lose its credibility:

"You'd have to admit that if you wrote what we wrote in a town ... [setting] ... all your friends would laugh at you because everyone knows that it isn't like that. You simply can't do that"

(Production Designer, Heartbeat Production Team)

For some programme makers, this relationship between the popular appeal of the series and the urban audience is clearly bound up with a sense of plausibility afforded to the construction of rurality because viewers are spatially remote from the specificity of the depiction. As one member of the Peak Practice production team suggested, the series,

"[L]eads people who queue up for doctors' surgeries in London to think that there's some rural idyll whereby if you move to the country everyone is known by their first name and no one ever locks their front door ... In their heads they want to think that this place exists and they want to think that doctors like that exist ... There's overall sense of community which loves itself, where everyone loves everyone else, which I think as an urbanite you do tend to translate that into a 'wouldn't
it be nice if we didn't have to lock our doors and we knew the women in the corner shop', and all that.”

(Script-editor, Peak Practice Production Team)

These constructions of rurality enjoy popular appeal, then, because they set up as utopian visions for those spatially removed from the realities of rural life. As one put it, they created "a kind of peep show for the urban audience" (Heartbeat Production Team). It could also be inferred from this logic that these utopian ruralities will be regarded as decidedly less appealing for the savvier rural viewer. If the rurality of the text is winning audiences through the fantasies, desires and expectancies of the large urban audience, then surely this success will be at the expense of the more knowing, and therefore more discriminating, rural viewer? In fact, the opposite appears to be case:

"People in ... [the village] ... Critch are going to watch ... [Peak Practice] ... just as much as people in my old housing estate in Derby"

(Writer, Peak Practice Production Team)

Indeed, the picture which emerges is that contemporary socio-spatial life, whether this relates to a rural or urban audience, is always constructed by media producers as somehow spatially removed from, and therefore always in the desire of, these utopian rural worlds. As the same programme maker continues:

"So if you live in the city you think 'cor! That would be nice living in Derbyshire, isn't that interesting'. If you live in Derbyshire you think 'I'm sure the village over there might be like that'"

What also must be added to these conceptions of the spatially removed audience was the way they were thought to evoke a sense of nostalgia in the audience. This was true of Peak Practice as much as it was in the Heartbeat’s
period dramas. One producer involved in the production of Peak Practice claimed that both dramas were "frankly sentimental" and "none the worse for it". Others expressed similar views:

"Villages are changing ... This is the nostalgia thing. People would like to think of the village as they knew it. It's never actually right. But people always look back on the happy things ... They'll remember the good bits. And that's what Heartbeat's doing. It's picking out the good bits ... "

(Production Designer, Heartbeat Production Team)

"We are creating the myth because we understand what the myth is, because we are equally susceptible to the myth ... You see villages were like that and they've sort of lost it in a way ... and all we're really doing is we're reassessing and recreating what the end of the century's got rid of ... So we're not actually creating a myth ... a lot of the audience that watch it know that it existed and now think it still exists in reality."

(Producer, Peak Practice Production Team)

Like the originator of Heartbeat these comments were firmly connected in to a nostalgic realism. Heartbeat was about "looking back on the happy things" and "picking out the good bits" while Peak Practice was about recreating a lost experience of rurality that audiences could experience as the here and now.
9.5 Summary

This chapter has considered some of the relations of narrative and characterisation in these three dramas, placing the texts on an often quite different trajectory of ideas to those explored in the preceding chapter. It began by exploring the way programme makers often wished to create 'hard hitting' narrative in order to construct the drama as credible. The use of idyllic images of rurality were seen to accommodate this emphasis, while simultaneously demanding the relations of conflict to be intensified. It then went on to demonstrate the way these dramas are bound up with a desire to create realist portraits of rurality. In Heartbeat, programme makers were shown to highlight generally negative constructions of the incomer and local in a way that apparently befitted the drama's time and place. In Dangerfield, programme makers have been actively trying to create an anti-idyllic construct of rurality, specifically one that developed the middle classes as the focus of problems. Despite a temporary drift to what were regarded as idyllic storylines, Peak Practice was trying to reclaim its realist focus in a way that simultaneously downplayed the presence of middle class characters in the drama.

At the same time, this realist endeavour must be set against the way that main protagonists were constructed highly positively in relation to the conflicts in play. Incoming professionals were consciously given a problem solving function as well as positive sets of cultural competencies through signifiers of lifestyle, attitude and emotion. Constituting the professional as a problem solver appeared to be particularly suited to the development of narrative events and that, while not flawless, through the
use of the dis-equilibrium/equilibrium model protagonists would always be successful in negotiating conflict. Some producers drew attention to the social-spatial power relations that were implied by this framework.

There is evidence to suggest that producers in Peak Practice and Dangerfield also identified these characters as middle class and encoded the texts with common symbols of middle class identity at the writing and design stages of production. The class relations of these texts were again related to imaginings of the audience in the schedule and their escapist and aspirational desires. Some of these imaginings were highly gendered in tone, and fed into the creation of romantic serial narratives that involved male professionals.

The discussion also drew attention to the serial narrative of 'staying and leaving'. This particular storyline appeared to emerge out of practical concerns surrounding the commitment of actors, a desire to develop storylines that appealed to the tastes of urban audiences, as well as a way of tapping into wider social investments in the countryside. The final section of discussion drew attention to the way producers in Heartbeat and Peak Practice also sought to cloak these dilemmic worlds in an idyllic sense of rural community, an idea again routed through notions of the escapist audience.
9.5.1 Multiple Authorship in the Construction of Dramatised Ruralities

Whether it is at the origination, writing, design, recording or editing stages of production it is clear from the analysis of the last three chapters that many of the themes I have outlined in the textual analysis are implicitly and explicitly at work among the thoughts and practices of media producers. These encodings of rurality are routed through a wide variety of interweaving discourses, including within these notions of realism and fantasy, ideas of dramatic worth, creative protocols of storytelling, technological demands of recording images, biography, political comment, imperatives of reproducing audiences, and the construction of audience identity.

What appears clear when reflecting more generally on these encoding practices is that programme makers in these dramas are profoundly ambivalent about the portrait of rural social relations they are trying to create. Indeed, in one sense, programme makers will wish to create dramatic worlds that are anything but idyllic. They will speak, for instance, of a desire to comment on those marginal by rural life, reveal the prejudices and suspicions of village life, downplay and contest constructions of a middle class rurality, create hard-hitting drama that is relevant and credible. At the same, so too do they intend to create gentle dramas that portray positive ideas of rural social relations, construct picturesque settings in soft focus, bring senses of nature to the fore, embellish the drama with signifiers of middle class identity. This is not just a question of competing visions within productions, but the ambivalence of individual producers. Take, for instance, the following comment by a senior member of Peak Practice reflecting on
script written recently for a forthcoming episode of the series:

"Episode Six is about a paraplegic farmer who's had a motorbike accident who wants a baby through artificial insemination, and the fact that the moment she says 'I'm pregnant' he tries to kill himself is appalling ... And it is frankly fucking bleak, because the best that I can give you is she nearly has a miscarriage, he leaves her and they're reconciled in the end, but you're never going to change the ultimate. In the end, he is still a paraplegic, she is still running the farm, and she is still having a baby by artificial insemination, which is all rather heavy going quite frankly"

Moments later the tact changes:

"It's exactly what we major on: the rural idyll. Peak Practice is Brigadoon. The leprechaun could pop down the high street at any minute now. Anything could happen in Cardale"

In a comment manifestly different in tone to her previous one then, the vision of rurality working through the texts of Peak Practice is explicitly bound up with an idyllic discourse of rurality. As she puts it, the rural idyll is: "exactly what we major on", a point made using a heady mix of cultural references, from the mysticism and enchantment of Irish folklore ('the leprechaun') to the pastoral rurality of a Hollywood musical set in Scotland (Brigadoon, 1954), (for a discussion of the latter see McArthur 1997). It is fair to say, however, that 'Episode Six' conjures up ideas that are anything but Brigadoon and leprechauns.

This clear contradiction in a programme maker's conception of dramatic themes is one that is commonplace among all production teams. On the one hand, producers would gesture at the idyllic nature of their dramas:
"[Heartbeat's] ... a bit sentimental and idealistic",
"[Dangerfield’s] ... just a chocolate box idyll". On the other, they would make a reading that runs contrary to this conception of rurality:

"There’s been drug abuse, incest, murder, people have been raped! It's hardly the 'sleepy village' now is it?!"

(Heartbeat Production Team)

"[Dangerfield’s] Macabre. It got a very dark, gritty, under belly"

(Dangerfield Production Team)

Competing visions, both across production teams and within the thoughts expressed by individual practitioners, is one of the enduring impressions that I have been left with in my interrogation of media producers and the social construction of the countryside. These productions are marked as much by their multiple, and often contradictory, sense of authorship as they are by a systematic, coherent and unified vision of rurality being presented to audiences. The constructions of rurality that I have made of the texts, and those that may be fostered in the readings of wider audiences, I would argue, is at least partly defined by these complexions in the creation of media images of the countryside.
Chapter 10

Conclusion
10.1 Introduction

In developing the ideas in this thesis, I have adopted a common style of storytelling, that is also indicative of the very object I have been interrogating, series television drama. I started in the midst of abstracts world (geography, rural geography, cultural studies and media studies) within which I, the main protagonist in this story, wished to intervene. To do this, I highlighted a series of incidents (a cultural turn, an engagement with the mass media) and created a pay-off (the need to attend to dramatic constructions of rurality across the circuit of culture). I then set myself on a journey of discovery, progressively expanding the dilemmas at stake in exploring this issue, first through the insights of others (linguistics, semiotics, cultural studies) and then through my own empirical inquiry (a reading of texts and producers). In reaching the end of story, the logic of the archplot formation usually demands that conflict is resolved and a new equilibrium restored. My aims in this final chapter, however, are more modest. In the first section of this discussion, I summarise some of the key propositions I have made in this thesis. Discussion then goes on to review some of the possibilities opened by his research, and in doing so, reaffirms the importance of examining popular media constructions of rurality across the circuit of culture.

10.1.1 Key Proposition in this Thesis

This thesis began by stating that rural geography had undergone something of a cultural turn, and suggested that this turn had opened up a space for greater critical reflection upon objects of study traditionally thought the
preserve of other academic domains within the social sciences and humanities. It went on to outline how geographers had begun to engage with one such object of study, the contemporary popular media. Discussion highlighted a modest tradition of work investigating this circuit of discourse up until the 1980s and how a growing interest in these forms had been defined by the work of British cultural studies. Within human geography I positioned this engagement as partly a reaction to modes of cultural enquiry within modern human geography that had tended to take as their focus objects of study often thought of as markers of 'higher' or 'elite' culture.

It was argued that rural geography has increasingly engaged with the insights of social and cultural theory within which the possibilities for research into the popular media have been defined. I suggested that rural studies has increasingly problematised its object of study, the rural, through the terrain of these ideas, positioning it within the realm of social signification which had to be made and remade in thought and practice. In particular, it was shown how rural geographers have become increasingly concerned with how rurality is constructed as meaningful within different circuits of discourse and the power relations that are invested in these. Consideration of the popular media in rural geography was argued to be defined by this concern with the production of meaning, and discussion went on to outline the nature and scope of this emergent body of research.

Nevertheless, the suggestion was that an understanding of these forms had not been adequately developed, and with the odd exception, constituted a fairly marginal
enterprise within discussions of other substantive concerns. The argument I made was that rural studies could be doing more to understand the complexity of these forms and the meanings about the countryside they imbue. In particular, it suggested that within the discourses of television, there were a number of widely circulated constructions of rurality repeatedly drawing up to seventeen million viewers, but whose particular dynamics had been explored in only minor detail by rural studies. It was to this end that the study proposed to explore how discourses of rurality may be constituted through the texts of television drama, a genre that might be said to be at the 'popular end' of popular discourses of rurality circulating within contemporary social life.

Discussion highlighted that care must be taken, however, in assuming the authority of the critic to grasp the meaning of cultural forms. It argued that texts have been increasingly shown to have a 'polysemic' potential and that correspondences between signifier and signified cannot be assumed. It suggested that while the critic may be able to open up the text to some of the readings available to audiences, this would still be a partial exercise. It highlighted the need for the author to actively reflect on the discourses that construct the critic-driven reading. At the same time, discussion cautioned that media texts work along a circuit of culture of which the moment of reading is just one. It suggested in this respect that research must not neglect the possibility that these texts are put together by media producers who have it within their power to delimit at least some of the readings that audiences make. It was in this context that a second major trajectory of inquiry was proposed, considering how and why media producers might
construct discourses of rurality through the texts of television drama.

The second chapter went on to expand on these premises. It began with an outline of how media texts could be theorised and approached through a semiotic tradition of enquiry. The historical roots of these ideas in linguistics were briefly traced and how these might apply to the analysis of television. While the discussion accepted the principle of a relational form of enquiry that this work encourages, it did not accept all of its propositions, such as the distinction between denotation and connotation. It also noted the potential of this approach to eschew the media text's wider sense of form, and suggested that it may be possible to connect these insights to ideas of narrative. Nonetheless, semiotic, critic-driven analyses were stressed as too narrow in scope when they failed to connect with the wider relations of the circuit of culture. In this respect, the discussion briefly explored how media studies had treated the relationship between producers and audiences, highlighting the way that it had moved through notions of short-term effects and long-term cultivation of attitudes, into the ideas of cultural studies and the antagonism it initially set up between media producers and sociologically grounded ideas of the audience. Through the terrain of postmodern and poststructural thought, this work was shown to increasingly celebrate the idea of an active audience.

The discussion then intervened in this debate by reasserting the possibility of the critic to partially speak of a text's meaning, while acknowledging the need to critically reflect on the status of the claims made. It went on to outline recent re-evaluations of audience
orientated criticism in cultural studies, and the suggestion by some of its key proponents that consideration of media producers had been increasingly underplayed. The thesis then moved onto its substantive empirical analysis. It began with an overview of the way texts were selected for this study, acknowledging the lay and academic discourses at work in their apriori selection. It demonstrated how a modest quantitative analysis was used in the selection process, and while these results were significant, it showed how a reading of these dramas as rural might be usefully understood in a relational fashion. It also highlighted how wider circuits of popular discourse read these dramas as rural. The discussion then moved on to reflect on the way a framework for study was developed, highlighting the academic, lay and professional discourses at work in the framework devised to approach the meaning of these dramas, and the particular meanings I created. This set the context for a substantive analysis of case study texts from each of the three dramas.

Analysis of these dramas began by extending insights into the construction of material setting, highlighting the way these dramas' fostered highly positive visions of rurality. With a few exceptions these worlds were imbued with abundant senses of flora and fauna, patient views over village settlement and extensive landscapes, and the display of a strong regional vernacular. Broader aspects of production style were also shown to grant these settings a positive inflection, particularly the soft, filmic, effect that governed the look of the three productions.

It considered the way two of these productions, Heartbeat and Peak Practice, also developed positive notions of
village community, based around impressions of intimacy and participation, whereas Dangerfield cultivated a rural world of anonymity and privacy. Analysis also demonstrated how these dramas' developed a construction of the urban, highlighting the post-rurality of these symbolic spaces, as well as the way rural settings could sometimes be set up in opposition to the urban. This latter idea often had the effect of emphasising the idyllic nature of the rural setting. So too were these dramas argued as evoking a feeling of a timeless rurality, and in the case of Heartbeat, a sense of nostalgia for a recent past.

These rural worlds were shown to be dominated and regulated by problem solving incomers whose ability to address narrative conflict was defined not only by their occupational status as professionals, but also in relation to competencies of disposition and commodity. It was suggested that the social-spatial identities of these characters were configured in a highly positive fashion. Moreover, in Heartbeat and Peak Practice, these positive constructions were arguably emphasised further through their insider position in established village settings. This latter theme was absent from the private world of Dangerfield's single main protagonist.

Competencies of both disposition and commodity were replicated through the wider families of the main protagonists, although other supporting characterisations sharing a professional incomer identity were often characterised quite differently. While some did replicate notions of the dynamic and culturally competent professional incomer, many also inverted this idea, presenting these identities as ineffective, inconsequential and often foolish. Other incomers residing
in the villages of Cardale and Aidensfield tended to collude with the professional incomers and demonstrated some of their positive cultural competencies, while locals were constructed as comic and untrustworthy figures.

Discussion then moved on to a consideration of how rural identities specifically unfolded through story events. It examined the way that many of these dramas begin with a sense of equilibrium where positive ideas about the countryside, often built around the social identities of main protagonists, were brought to the fore. Analysis then went on to demonstrate the way these equilibriums were suspended through the idea of the inciting incident. It highlighted three broad types of incident particularly significant to these dramas.

First, incidents predominantly built around characters who might be read as local and working class in identity, and who were constructed as either objects of personal tragedy or suspicion. Second, incidents built around the incomers of a variety of different social identities, from the middle classes to the homeless, and who were predominantly constructed as figures of suspicion, vulnerability, prejudice and criminality. Third and finally, incidents build around an extra-personal force unsettling the equilibrium of the countryside and unifying village communities in the process. Using a selection of case studies, it was shown how episodes operating under these three themes developed over the remainder of the narrative. It was argued that the social-spatial identities of these dramas could be seen to be transformed, as well as affirmed, as conflicts were gradually addressed and resolved.
Attention was also drawn to a series of subsidiary narratives that developed the social-spatial identities of the drama in particular ways. It noted, for instance, the way Heartbeat repeatedly develops an episodic narrative around the misdemeanours of Greengrass, a narrative that contrasted the more sombre main narrative but which encouraged a mocking assessment of the local. Peak Practice was shown to developed an ongoing commentary on the village surgery and the dilemmas it experienced as a fund holding practice. While this narrative unsettled idyllic notions of attentive patient care in the village, this was played against narratives in which willing doctors appeared to be constantly at the beck and call of the community. Discussion also noted the way these texts developed a narrative of 'staying and leaving' in which both positive and negative constructions of rurality were articulated through the dilemmas of middle class lives, as well as a 'fitting in' narrative in which middle class incomers sometimes lacked the social competencies to deal with the life in the country.

It was against this context that the thesis then moved on to a consideration of the thoughts and practices of media producers responsible for creating these texts. It began with an overview of how the relations of media production were approached, providing an overview of the key stages of creating dramatic output and the methodological options open to this research. Through this, the rationale for a methodology that combined observational and interview research was developed. An overview of the persons interviewed, and the nature of questioning was also outlined, as were the practical dimensions of applying this methodology in practice.
Over the course of these three empirical chapters, analysis of programme makers demonstrated how these texts were subject to a series of demands over their content and form. Analysis began with a consideration of programme origination, highlighting the way dramatic themes at work in the textual analysis could be clearly related to the imperative of reproducing audiences. This theme was developed particularly in relation to ideas of emulation and originality, within which a focus on professional identities set in a country context was indicative outcome. This theme carried on into ideas of an imagined audience in the schedule, where notions of rurality were related to the needs and desires of the pre-watershed audience.

Originators also developed output in relation to notions of realism, but they did so in quite different ways. I argued Peak Practice was developed around ideas of social realism, Heartbeat around a sense of nostalgic realism, and Dangerfield around an ambivalent realism. Each of these senses of the real made for quite different ideas of rurality, which partly related to my own readings of the texts. Discussion also highlighted the way in which elements of drama fitted in with notions of effective storytelling, from the creation of problem solving and incomer identities of professionals, the use of village social-spaces, and into the exploration of universal human themes in the drama.

The final two chapters considered the thoughts and practices of those involved in the contemporary production of these dramas. The first of these considered ideas of setting. Moving through each of the stages of the production process, it demonstrated the way producers
sought to emphasise images of rurality, often, but not exclusively of an idyllic nature. These constructions related to a wider range of rationales, from notions of the escapist urban audience and the pre-watershed audience to ideas of realism, fantasy and audience expectancy and into the technological demands of recording images of rurality for television, and personal judgements over the aesthetic quality of particular images.

These thoughts and practices worked alongside the creation of character and conflict. Here it was highlighted the way that programme makers' sought to elevate the intensity of conflict because the presence of idyllic images demanded this. So too were these images seen to accommodate the creation of narrative dilemma, allied with a desire, among some, to constitute these dramas as credible. Ideas of realism were also at work in these practices, and it was here that departures from the original premises of Heartbeat and Dangerfield were at work. It highlighted how ideas of incomer and local, noted in the textual analysis, were actively at work in the development of scripts for Heartbeat because they were seen as authentic portraits of rural social relations, while in Dangerfield programme makers were seeking to contest and comment on the notion of a middle class rural idyll. In Peak.Practice, the social realist impulse of this production and its desire to represent the dilemmas of non middle class people in the countryside was being reaffirmed. Set alongside these themes producers were shown to position the main protagonists as problem solvers who worked at the heart of the narrative. Dispositional competencies were emphasised, and while these characters were not constructed as flawless, implicit recourse to the archplot formation was designed to reveal these
protagonists in a positive light. Some practitioners were aware of the social-spatial power relations that this framework implied for the instigation and resolution of problems in countryside.

Furthermore, in spite of the tendency of Peak Practice and Dangerfield to claim that the portrayal of the middle classes were alienating for audiences, notions of audience escapism and aspiration also implied a need to encode middle class signifiers in the text. Indeed, programme makers appeared to simultaneously want to elevate and play down the middle class relations of these rural worlds. Notions of escapism and class were also in play in the creation of serial narrative. Here it was noted the way stories built around romantic male professionals were linked to a gendered construction of the audience.

Other serial narratives such as 'staying and leaving' storylines also appeared related to audience needs. In Dangerfield, the main protagonists relocation into the town of Warwick was linked, for instance, to the urban audiences propensity for urban images. In Peak Practice and Heartbeat, the development of this theme was closely related to contractual arrangements surrounding the use of particular actors, but was taken on and actively developed as a positive construction of countryside. The discussion concluded by noting the ambivalent, contradictory and multiple sense of authorship that appeared to govern the creation of dramatic ruralities.

10.1.2 Continuity and Change in the Construction of Dramatic Ruralities

In this thesis I have focused my analysis on the production-text relations of series television drama in
1997 and 1998. In a medium that demands the constant creation of new output, the episodes that I read and re-read for this study now seem like part of ancient televisual history: texts that even the most ardent fans may have put to the back of their minds. And yet, as I write these concluding notes, Dangerfield, Peak Practice and Heartbeat are all still in production and regularly commanding between 10 and 17 millions viewers an episode, with Heartbeat fast approaching its 10th anniversary. While the specificities of episodes are always changing, the basic premises remain firmly in tact.

Take for instance, the series Heartbeat. Recent output reveals PC Mike Bradley is now the drama's principal focus of attention, and displays all the competencies of the character he replaced, PC Nick Rowan. Arriving from the city, Mike has quickly started a relationship with another professional, Jackie Bromley, a solicitor from Whitby bay, who, to replace the void left by the departure of Jo Weston, has also moved into the village. Sergeant Blaketon has retired from the police but has been replaced by Sergeant Craddock, who also demonstrates remarkably similar character traits to his predecessor. Blaketon has not left the series. In fact, he moved from Pickering into the village of Aidensfield, first taking over the village post office, then the village pub, while also starting to run the village council! Greengrass is still up to his usual doomed to fail antics. Gina is still passing on information to the problem solving incomers. Ventress and Bellamy are still administering the police station, although in an interesting inversion of competencies, Ventress occasionally stands in as acting police sergeant, while Bellamy is now taking his sergeant exams.
In an episode I recently watched from this series, the drama predictably started with a vision of rural equilibrium, based around Mike and Jackie relaxing in a sun-filled village. This world was turned upside down by the arrival of an incomer from London, who was quickly implicated in a criminal act. With the help of another incomer, Alf Ventress, the problem solving professional pursued the conflict to a successful resolution in which the incomer was incarcerated and Greengrass made to look foolish. All of these events were interspersed with fetching views over extensive landscape, images of village settlement, and the upbeat sounds of the rock 'n' roll years. The world emphasised its return to equilibrium through a village cricket match displaying its togetherness.

This sense of replication is also at work in the texts of Dangerfield and Peak Practice, even though the central characters of both series have changed. While I could continue with these insights, the point is clear: these dramas continue to be governed by many of the same, or slight variations on the same, social-spatial dynamics that governed my reading of the texts in this thesis. As the originator of Dangerfield said to me when reflecting on the medium of television, "more of the same is very important. Audiences like to know what they are getting, and producers like familiarity because it makes their job easier". Time has moved on since the episodes I considered were broadcast, but the premises they explore endure.

While all of these dramas, I am sure, will undoubtedly end, so too do I feel that their marks will be felt in other future productions, as media producers anxious to reproduce audiences reflect on their televisual histories
when creating new output. If the logic of media producers that I have outlined in this thesis prevails, these reflections will be based around tactics of both emulation and difference. In this sense, the output of Dangerfield, Heartbeat and Peak Practice will be part of a process that commissions dramas along minor variations in theme (a flying doctor in the Outer Hebrides?) to major reversals (the homeless in London?), but the residues of these texts will be partly within them.

My own suspicion is that these rural texts will have significant bearing on the commissioning of new media output, as programme makers seek to find the 'next' Heartbeat and the 'next' Peak Practice. These two dramas in particular, are exceptionally high rating relative to other television programmes, both past and present. When television companies commission new output, their purchase on audiences will not be quickly forgotten. In an age where audiences are thought to be increasing fragmented through the development of new media technologies, and audience share consequently less certain than it has ever been, it would be of no surprise to find remarkably similar dramatic output emerging. Indeed, in an interesting example of the tendency to replicate these conventions, Yorkshire Television produced a 'spin-off' feature length drama in 1998 built around the experiences of Nick and Jo after they left Aidensfield. Apparently, Nick becomes a mountain policeman in an isolated rural settlement in the Canadian Rockies. Here he finds a police sergeant, an apathetic set of administrators, a slightly dishevelled comic local who sells scrap metal illegally. The formula is strikingly clear.
There is scope within rural research for an ongoing programme of research that critically examines how rural identities unfold in contemporary media forms. As I made clear in the theoretical discussion, this is not a question of positioning texts in a hierarchy of truth wherein they are judged to reflect or depart from a more authentic rurality. Rather, it is about critically examining how a socially convincing sense of real is constructed through these texts. It is about teasing out what truths they try to tell. If Mckee (1997) is right, and I believe he is, when he suggests that story telling is a central way in which we grasp insight into the patterns of our chaotic lives, and that 'fiction' gives life its form, then an important enterprise for a rural research must be to interrogate the key sites where these stories are told. It is through these popular media constructions of rural life, I believe, that many values and ideas held about social-spatial life are implicitly absorbed. In this thesis I have attempted to touch on some of issues at stake in three major cultural texts, although as I noted earlier, its predominant focus on class and incomer/local identities is by no means exhaustive. I would suggest there is also plenty of scope for revealing how these texts, and the popular rural media in general, create and position a range of other crucial social identities, such as gender, race and sexuality.

However, the rationale for this critical endeavour is not solely related to the assumed effects of these texts over audiences. It also about grasping how social life thinks and operates in relation to the rural more generally. These texts are not simply visions that originate 'from nowhere', instructing people to think about the rural in certain ways. They are drawn out of the
sites of discourses within which we are all immersed and complicit. Interrogating the nature of media texts, I would argue therefore, is also a process by which discourses of rurality circulating within contemporary social life are revealed, as well as constituted.

10.1.3 Texts in the Context of Audiences

The way in which texts such as series television drama specifically relate to the situated audience is also an important enterprise that has been beyond the scope of this thesis and one that has not be adequately explored by rural research to date, (although for a tentative step in this direction see Phillips et al forthcoming). In the introduction I suggested that rural studies had tended to explore popular media texts in relation to its longstanding concerns with the processes of material rural change. The possibility that these texts may feed into wider social expectancies and understandings of rurality should not, I feel, be necessarily fastened to processes taking place within what are conventionally taken to be material rural spaces. I think the ideas of media producers that I have presented are instructive in this respect. As it has been consistently shown, media producers often try to imagine the social-spatial identities and needs of the audience when creating rural images. These constructions have ranged from shockable grannies who like tranquil images and middle class mums 'who like to cry', through to the aspirations and self identifications of rural residents, and into the escapism and aspirations of a classed urban audience.

In such ideas there is an agenda to pursue that could explore how images of rurality relate to the thoughts and
practices of audiences operating within different social groupings and spaces of existence. This is an agenda that would consider how media texts may be bound up with material rural social change and conflict, but also one that considers the thoughts and practices of those occupying material spaces unfamiliar to the traditional concerns of rural studies. Indeed, rural studies in an age of free-floating signifiers has much to say, for instance, about the urban living room as well as within its empirical heartlands of material rural space. This point could be extended further when it is considered that these dramas are also exported worldwide, to countries such as Iran, America, Iceland and Australia, often to great success (see Phillips and Fish 1998). Exploring how such audiences read and use these texts would be a fascinating and ambitious agenda for research, a cross-cultural terrain of inquiry that would explore notions of British rurality on a truly global scale.

10.1.4 Texts in the Context of Production

A critical rural studies must also endeavour to examine the small number of people invested with the means to put together, and help define, an understanding of social-spatial life for the many. The experience of watching television is the outcome of a myriad of thoughts and practices that are consistently, and necessarily, hidden from view. Revealing and interrogating these invisible authors illuminates the terms on which our social-spatial imaginations are partly shaped. Not only does this serve an important function in making explicit, as well unsettling, the constructed and partial nature of socially convincing texts, it also encourages programme makers to critically reflect on their creations. I feel it
is vital that media producers are part of an academic enterprise that encourages those invested in positions of power to actively interrogate their own practices, whether this means politicians formulating legislation on the 'right to roam' or script-writers creating a Heartbeat text that constructs a black incomer as a figure of suspicion and prejudice.

At the same time, while media producers must be seen as articulators of discourse of rurality, so too are they bearers of them. Exploring the relations of media production is about tapping into discourses of rurality circulating more widely. Like the situated audience, they too are instances of wider social life. They speak through the discourses within which social life is inscribed. Coming to an understanding of the thoughts and practice of media producers is about understanding some of the terms on which wider society makes sense of rurality. It is not about interrogating a distinctive breed of human born and existing inside the corridors of television companies! Approaching the thoughts and practices of media producers is about understanding, in part, wider social investments in particular ideas of rurality.

10.1.5 Fade to Black

In this thesis I have endeavoured to make some contribution to recent debates about the socially constructed nature of rurality. I have made this in relation to one site of cultural production that I feel, more so now than ever, is explicitly, as well as implicitly, bound up with a whole range of rural identities. The circulation of popular ruralities, I believe, demands ongoing critical interrogation, both as
objects of study in their own right, and in relation to
the wider circuit of culture of which they are a
differentiated part. For the moment, though, I'm going to
interrupt this discussion. While Doel (1999 p.3) has
suggested, quite correctly in my view that "one will never
be finished with the task of doing justice to the event:
of read and re-reading, of thinking and re-thinking, of
repeating and differing", everyone deserves a break. In an
ironic and fitting testimony to the pervasiveness of the
medium I have been studying, I may even go and watch some
television.


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