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HERE & NOW:
INTIMACY, IMMEDIACY AND AUTHENTICITY IN
NEW ZEALAND'S REALITY TELEVISION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses a range of reality television programmes produced in New Zealand as part of a wider investigation into the affective strategies and discursive practices of the medium of television itself. The capacity of television, and more specifically reality television, to bring things close and render them present - spatially, temporally, socially and emotionally – is the thematic fulcrum of this study. Closeness is variously interpreted here as proximity (in terms of space, geography or social position), co-incidence (in terms of time) and intimacy (in terms of emotional affect). The present-ness of reality programming is both temporal (occurring now, in the present tense) and physical (occurring here, in this body, in this home, in this country). It is through this affect of present-ness that reality television most clearly engages with the domain of the real. Thus, this study also turns upon a consideration of the various significant ways in which reality television defines, pursues and manifests moments of realness on screen. The thesis is broken down into two parts, entitled *Here* and *Now* respectively, reflecting the double axis of spatial (incorporating social) and temporal present-ness. Within this bi-partite structure, six chapters focus in turn on a number of different discursive threads: Viscerality, Ordinarity, Community, Amateurism, Intimacy and Temporal Immediacy, producing a cumulative theoretical framework through which to address reality TV.

In terms of methodology, this thesis pursues its exploration of reality television through close textual readings of selected programmes which have been produced for a New Zealand audience. Where appropriate, however, it draws on international examples of reality programming, in particular, those high-profile formats from Europe and the United States which have generated new paradigms for the production and reception of reality television worldwide. In addition, this thesis analyses programme form and content through a range of theoretical frameworks drawn from television studies and other academic disciplines. It also seeks to engage with international critical and academic debates surrounding the often controversial rise of reality programming as a televisual phenomenon in the nineties and into the twenty-first century. The production of this thesis coincides with a surge in academic output on the subject of reality television, and has benefited from recent publications in this area.

This thesis attempts to balance both general and specific interests in New Zealand's reality programming. On one hand, it places reality television within the context of long-established, international academic discussions about television as a medium, with the intent of showing that reality programming has an innate applicability to the domestic medium out of which it has arisen. On the other, this thesis pursues a more specific project, as it considers locally-produced programming as the particular output of the island nation of New Zealand. In this case, I argue that the particular aesthetic and discursive practices of reality programming, which devolve upon the ordinary, the domestic and the local, are well-suited to the ongoing production of culture and identity in a settler nation such as New Zealand.

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I dedicate this thesis to my two beautiful children, Toby and Jim, who both came into being during the course of my doctoral study. Thank you for sparing your mother so very, very often.

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INTRODUCTION

Keeping in Touch:

Intimacy and Immediacy in the Age of Digital Reproduction

A thin pale girl huddles by the window of a basement bed-sit looking up at a rain-bleached London sky. She pulls her layers of winter woolens closer around her body. A tear comes to her eye. What's she doing in the miserable place? Just then, her inbox blinks an incoming message: From 'Mum'. She opens it immediately and smiles to herself. Working quickly she prints out dozens of coloured pages, trimming and numbering them as they spool from the printer. Using spray adhesive she begins to plaster these images over one of the room's bare walls. As she works she becomes much warmer and sheds her layers of clothing until she is barefoot in a summer singlet and denim skirt. The separate squares of paper coalesce and the image emerges - a life-size representation of the sun-drenched view from her beach-front family home on the other side of the world. This is a quintessential New Zealand landscape: golden sands, sparkling surf and the unmistakable outline of Rangitoto Island, framed by a gnarled pohutakawa in full flower. An empty garden seat beneath the tree seems to invite occupation. As the girl stands back to survey her work, shafts of sunlight dance across the picture, bringing it to life. Reciprocating her mother's gesture of communication, she dials home. Through the picture, mother and daughter speak to one another across time and space, co-present in the sun-dappled garden. The lost child smiles through her tears – she has come home.

This is the scenario of a sixty second television commercial by Saatchi Wellington for New Zealand Telecom's 'Keep in Touch' campaign which screened in New Zealand from May 2001. In this story line, an everyday act of digital communication (an email from Mum) transcends the quotidian to become a point of imaginative fusion between mother and daughter, past and present, near and far. I wish to open my discussion of reality television programming in New Zealand with a brief consideration of the extent to which this commercial enacts the ambitions of all forms of telecommunication: producing (and thus validating) a mode of long-distance intimacy which is both synthetic and authentic, both mediated and immediate.

As Lynn Spigel has noted in her work on the post-war promotion of the new domestic medium, television has always aspired to the kind of affective immediacy which transports the viewer (emotionally, imaginatively, sensationally) to another time and place.

Television – at its most ideal – promised to bring to audiences not merely an illusion of reality as in the cinema, but a sense of 'being there', a kind of hyper-realism. Advertisers

repeatedly promised that their sets would deliver picture and sound quality so real that the illusion would come alive. (*Installing* 14-15)

In the Telecom commercial, the digital image, pasted-up billboard-like on the wall, is not only life-size but seemingly alive¹. Flickering and glowing with a light and warmth seemingly its own, the picture transfers a vibrant energy to the girl as she views it, and, like sunshine, warms and animates her. The capacity of the image to generate light and warmth, as well as produce feeling, imparts a magic-realism to the picture which elevates it beyond the mere photographic, fulfilling the promise of a *moving* image. The extent to which the shimmering scene contracts time and space, taking the girl 'there', and making the faraway garden present in her room, likewise enacts the principal ambition of telecommunications to bring things closer – temporally, spatially and affectively. The special quality of liveness accorded to the picture of the garden is also signalled by a formal shift in narrative tone and pace: from a reflective, passive, everyday kind of present (before the picture arrives) to an active, effective, productive hyper-present (in which the picture emerges). Part of the promise of this model of telecommunication seems to be the capacity to 'bring to life' dormant people and places, as it brings them into an urgent and immediate present-tense. In this way, the image is not only life-like and seemingly alive, but invested with properties of vivification. While Spigel's comments on television's promise of a viewing experience which feels 'alive' apply to the medium as a whole (and interestingly, distinguish it from cinema), reality television, in particular, exemplifies an intention to produce screen images which are both temporally 'live' and sensorily vibrant.

'Keep in Touch', says Telecom. Silently, suggestively layering these words over the closing images of the commercial, New Zealand's principal telecommunications network proposes a point of human contact which is neither verbal nor written but sensory and affective. Accordingly, the different commercials in the Telecom campaign centre on moments of intimate connection between families, friends or lovers, rather than foregrounding particular products or services.² The wordlessness of the represented communication is significant because it subordinates cerebral connection (mediated by language) to sensual connection (mediated by the body), thus making 'touch', perhaps curiously, the pre-eminent experience of digital communication. Reality television similarly

¹ Both the size and clarity of the digital reproduction are technologically improbable. Luke Goode notes the 'tendency for hi-tech advertising to work within the realm of the hypothetical' and categorises these examples as 'vapourware' (279).

² For example, another television commercial in the same campaign represents an affluent, professional couple in their mid-thirties who are separated for a few days while he takes a business trip to Shanghai. She, heavily pregnant with their first child, remains at home in their high-rise Auckland apartment. Alone in the evening, she undresses, showers and prepares for bed, caressing her rounded belly and thinking of her husband. Standing in her pale, satin nightgown she begins to stroke a silver laptop and scanner. In Shanghai, he sits by himself in his neutrally furnished hotel room and misses her too. Checking his email messages on his laptop he finds a beautifully realised digital image of her left hand pressed against the screen, fingers outstretched, palm inviting, wedding band gleaming. He reaches up to the screen placing his left hand to hers, fingers to fingers, palm to palm, ring against ring. Back in Auckland, alone in her bed, she knows that contact has been made and turns to sleep with a smile.

See Luke Goode's article on 'technoculture' for an analysis of this advertisement, as well as other New Zealand telecommunications commercials. See particularly 278-281.

'keeps in touch', as it prioritises sensory and affective experience over linguistic or cognitive response. This applies equally to the people represented on screen and those watching the screen at home. The girl in the Telecom advertisement acts as a proxy for the television audience at large, as she ritualises the experience of viewing. Standing back from the image she has just (manually, mechanically, yet magically) 'projected' onto the wall, she wipes away a tear. This tear signals the emotional climax of the miniature narrative, because it proves that the image has 'worked': she has been moved. As a missive of love from her mother, as well as a totem for the homesick traveller, the image of the beach-garden has a symbolic power which 'touches' her heart, and her expression of intense emotional feeling is registered via the tear, as a palpable, external and visible marker of interior experience. The particular processes enacted here, as the wordless, yet emotionally resonant, image moves or touches the viewer, and the body of the viewer produces (in saline) material evidence of emotional affect, are symptomatic of a viewing dynamic in which authenticity of experience is registered via the body. As has been established by Linda Williams in her work on pornography, the pre-eminence of visual form on screen, which she has tagged as the 'frenzy of the visible', threatens to marginalise interior emotional or sexual experiences. Thus, the 'bodily confession', in which bodily fluids (blood, tears, sweat or semen) are ejected by the body as a sign of experiences which must remain unseen, becomes the definitive proof of the real in screen media.³ Not only does reality television routinely engage with the bodily emissions of people on screen (especially, and almost universally, the tear), it also seeks to register emotional response, thus, authenticity of experience, in the bodies of viewers at home.

While the representation of emotional authenticity is registered, in this commercial, via the body, the catalyst for emotional experience is mediated by digital technology. In this regard, the story of the homesick girl and the digital postcard resonates with Walter Benjamin's paradox of technology-permeated realism, as discussed in his essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. The image on the wall 'offers, precisely because of the thoroughgoing permeation of reality with mechanical [or, here, digital] equipment, an aspect of reality which is free of all equipment' (227). The 'live' qualities of the shimmering, breathing picture elevate it beyond the quotidian apparatus of its transmission and reception, producing a significantly immediate (thus, unmediated) experience of 'being there' in the beachfront garden. At the same time, the hyper-realism of the image on the wall makes a virtue of the technologies of reproduction, insofar as it renders the remembered garden more vivid, more resonant and more affective than the original. As Benjamin suggests elsewhere in his essay, 'process reproduction can bring out those aspects of the original that are unattainable to the naked eye' (214). Thus, even as the image of the garden appears 'free of all equipment' its heightened reality is an affect of its 'thoroughgoing permeation' by the digital

³ See Chapter Two of Williams' *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*, especially pages 48-51.

technologies to which it owes its reproduction.⁴ In fact, the pasted up image on the wall, full of light, warmth and colour, not only appears more real than its original but more real than the tired and faded girl, the drab room she inhabits or the rain-grey day outside. The art direction of the commercial contrasts the milieus of England and New Zealand in ways which flatter an antipodean audience. But this contrast is not only between two countries, or between cityscape and beachscape, but between lived experience and mediated reality. In this dynamic, the latter – through its heightened clarity and vibrancy, and its capacity to produce intimacy - just feels more real.

As suggested, the girl in this story assumes a symbolic position as (television) viewer. Since photographic processes 'bring the original to meet the beholder halfway' (Benjamin, *Work of Art* 214) she ritualises the reception and consumption of a mediated image. Her emotional response to the picture, and the intimate connection with her mother which it facilitates, are represented as irrefutably real, through the bodily evidence of her tears. The technology of global telecommunications allow her to 'keep in touch', not only with her mother, but with her homeland, her history and herself. Thus, the mesmeric, mythical image of the tree at the beach is a psychic touchstone for the girl, just as the advertisement itself is a 'lovemark'⁵ for the company it promotes. Drawing together the discursive threads of intimacy, immediacy and authenticity, this commercial may also offer a touchstone for critical readings of reality television. Importantly, it starts from a place in which authentic, intimate experience is manifested via the transmission of electronic images. If mediation may be read productively, as enhancing, amplifying and multiplying experience, rather than reductively, as an obstacle to engagement, then reality television may, after all, make a legitimate and sophisticated claim on the real.

Finally, like this thesis, the Telecom commercial keeps New Zealand at its centre, even as it incorporates other countries into the frame. Through its thematic treatment of New Zealand as a home land, the commercial (produced and consumed by New Zealanders) participates in the perpetual 'production of locality' with which smaller or emerging communities typically engage, as

⁴ As Benjamin writes, the re-contextualisation of the scene at the beach 'reactivates' (*Work of Art* 215) the original and enhances its affective meaning. 'One might generalise by saying: the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition. By making many reproductions it substitutes a plurality of copies for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to meet the beholder or listener in his own particular situation, it reactivates the object reproduced' (*Work of Art* 215). Thus, the moment of reception produces an energy of its own, in which the reproduced object (no longer attached to its original place in tradition/history) ignites new meanings in its newly held relationship with the 'beholder'.

⁵ Kevin Roberts, CEO of the advertising company responsible for this campaign, has identified his philosophy of product promotion as exceeding the domain of mere branding, creating instead a 'trustmark' or, one better, a 'lovemark'. As has been noted by Stephen Turner, 'the bond Roberts articulates in terms of "trust" or "love" is a feeling, a purely affective communion' (93). Information about the company Telecom or the broadband internet service they offer is peculiarly absent. Rather, the focus of trust and love is on family, on belonging and on New Zealand. As a by-product, the brand name Telecom is imbued with the same sense of love and of belonging (as 'our' telecommunications company).

defined by Arjun Appadurai in his work on 'cultural dimensions of globalization'.⁶ This locality, and the work which produces it, is, in Appadurai's terms, both 'social' and 'material', that is, both imagined and actual. The picture of the garden by the sea – which foregrounds emblems of New Zealand's particular landscape (the native tree and volcanic island) while carefully eliminating temporally or socially specific markers which may anchor it to any single personal narrative⁷ - balances the material actuality and permanence of the land itself against myths of an 'imagined nation'. As such, it makes itself available as a locus of memory and desire for all New Zealanders, and proposes an imaginative site which far exceeds the temporal or spatial boundaries of the actual place depicted by the photograph. In this sense, there is no original for the garden at the beach. The picture itself, read in isolation from the parable of the homesick art student, is a timeless, iconic, idealised postcard of a New Zealand summer, generated by a collective, national imagination. Thus, returning to Benjamin, the reproduction of such an image can not eliminate its 'aura' because it has no original which may claim a singular 'presence in time and place' (214).⁸ Rather than a 'unique existence' (214), the image of a New Zealand garden at the beach has its origin in multiples, and thrives on the social communion of an imagined nation which reproduces, idealises and enhances its subsequent existence.

In this way, the Telecom commercial exemplifies the extent to which television advertising in New Zealand produces, as Stephen Turner suggests, 'communion, collective identity, or [...] will-to-identity', thus constituting a form of 'self-advertising' (94).⁹ Locally made reality programming similarly exhibits a 'will-to-identity', or in Appadurai's terms, produces 'locality', through the reproduction and amplification of stories about people and places which are recognised by viewers as their own (socially, emotionally and geographically). The ritualised transmission, reproduction

⁶ This phrase refers to the subtitle of Appadurai's book *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. For a full discussion of ideas around locality and community, see Chapter Nine of *Modernity*, entitled 'The Production of Locality' (178-199).

⁷ Although the commercial interweaves images of the garden which include people (either the girl's mother in a contemporary time frame, or the younger girl and her mother in a past time) into the frame, the only sign of human occupation in the photograph itself is an empty wooden garden chair (a classic design which could belong to any decade of the last century). The empty chair is positioned invitingly, offering a multiplicity of viewers a past, present or future place in the garden.

⁸ Although Benjamin distinguishes between a 'work of art' (for which he uses, among others, the example of Leonardo's 'Mona Lisa') and a scene in a natural landscape ('a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you' [216]) as objects which may undergo 'mechanical reproduction', and considers the loss of 'aura' differently in each case, he never doubts the original, singular existence of the pro-filmic. In the Telecom commercial, the photograph of a natural landscape (with a volcanic mountain on the horizon and a pohutakawa branch casting its shadow), while appearing to represent an actual place, resists attachment to a singular time, place or history. The digital image exceeds the limitations of a finite space or frozen moment, just as the 'Mona Lisa' (as an image, but also in terms of the history of its viewing) exceeds the singular existence of the woman who modelled for it. The digital image in the commercial is thus, properly, the 'work of art' in question.

⁹ Roger Horrocks makes a similar point in his work on the history of New Zealand television: 'Tiresome as they may be, commercial breaks do provide viewers with a certain sense of local orientation. In the early days of television they represented virtually the only forms of New Zealand drama or comedy. It is not surprising then that advertising has been, for better or worse, a strong part of what New Zealanders think of as their shared culture' (*Local Content* 284).

and reception of an iconic New Zealand landscape by a Kiwi girl on her OE,¹⁰ stages an encounter in which, as Appadurai writes, 'moving images meet deterritorialized viewers' (4), producing the 'locality' of home *in absentia*. As Appadurai further claims,¹¹

Because of the sheer multiplicity of the forms in which they appear (cinema, television, computers, and telephones) and because of the rapid way in which they move through daily life routines, electronic media provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project. (4)

Reality programming exemplifies the ubiquity of electronic media. It is everyday television: incorporated into our 'daily routines', on all the time and about everyday people. When studied in a national context, the 'everyday social project' of 'self-imagining' facilitated by reality television is inflected with a specificity of place, one which may be social, actual or imagined. Thus, my decision to write about New Zealand examples of reality programming is not simply an accident of place (that is, of my being at university in Auckland), but a reflection of theoretical interests in intimacy and immediacy, as produced via domesticity, familiarity and locality. Like the girl in the Telecom commercial, I choose to go travelling with a postcard from home on the wall.

New Zealand-Made

As a small, island landmass at the bottom of the globe, with a national population roughly half that of the city of London, New Zealand has always struggled to identify itself on a world stage. Established as a British colony in the nineteenth century, its remote position and tiny populace have necessitated its continued cultural, political and economic dependence on more powerful nations (initially, of course, Great Britain, but increasingly the United States). Moreover, the imperial apparatus by which the nation of 'New Zealand' came to prevail in the land of Aotearoa, ensured a certain insecurity of tenure (morally, if not politically) for the European settler society which quickly assumed dominance over the indigenous Maori. Thus, the evolution of a coherent cultural identity is a challenging prospect for New Zealand/Aotearoa, both domestically and internationally. In this context, the production of an 'imagined nation' via the public consumption of media texts, to borrow from Benedict Anderson's well-known idea of social communion (*Imagined Communities* 30-36), may be of critical service. Thus, the arrival of broadcast television in the early 1960s inaugurated a significant new era in New Zealand's cultural identity. To quote Roger Horrocks, 'Television can be

¹⁰ Common abbreviation in New Zealand for a young person's Overseas Experience.

¹¹ In this way, Appadurai seems to suggest that, in terms of the potential fragmentation and dissipation of local and national communities under globalisation, electronic media may be both the symptom and the cure. This reading counters anxieties raised by theorists such as Joshua Meyrowitz, who contend that electronic media have disestablished the notion of locality. David Morley offers a précis of Meyrowitz's argument in his (Morley's) article 'Notes from the Sitting-room':

Thus, 'community' is transformed: living physically near to others is no longer necessarily to be tied into mutually dependent communication systems; conversely, living far from others is no longer, necessarily, to be communicatively distant. Thus, it seems, locality is not simply subsumed in a national or global sphere; rather, it is increasingly bypassed in both directions: experience is both unified beyond localities and fragmented within them. (8)

a powerful medium for a former colony that is striving to develop an independent cultural and political stance, and struggling to achieve critical mass in a world that seldom notices such a small country' (*History* 22). However, television's potential to foster cultural and political independence is, inevitably, circumscribed by the socio-economic conditions into which it emerges. From its inception, New Zealand's broadcasting service was subsidised by commercial interests and sustained by imported programming. Today, a second free-to-air network has intensified commercial competition and schedules are still dominated by programmes from elsewhere, principally the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia.¹²

In this context, the 'local content' campaign for New Zealand-made programming reflects, as Horrocks suggests,¹³ the anxieties and ambitions of a settler culture determined to establish a distinct national identity, both economically and culturally, both nationally and abroad. Despite considerable financial disincentives, television broadcasters in New Zealand maintain locally-produced programming at an approximate level of twenty-five percent,¹⁴ because 'local programs that click with the audience create a special sense of relevance and loyalty' (Horrocks, *Local Content* 277). This 'special sense' refers to the indefinable satisfactions associated with the social and material 'production of locality' as defined by Appadurai and cited above. In an emerging culture, television programming which reflects the social, cultural and geographic environment of its audience¹⁵ manifests both social communion and material evidence of localised industry. Thus, despite the fact that television is 'an expensive medium for a small country' (Horrocks, *History* 20), broadcasters in New Zealand shoulder the risks associated with local production¹⁶ because these programmes generate network loyalty, thus revenue, through their otherwise unquantifiable affect of national communion. The number of New Zealand-made programmes screened locally, as well as the cultural implications of self-representation, were ratified by the government in 2001 through the introduction of a broadcasting Charter. This document, described by Horrocks as 'aspirational rather than prescriptive' (*History* 37), signalled a return to the principles of public service broadcasting, in its emphasis on 'quality' programming which reflects the varied interests of a culturally diverse population. How best to fulfil this mandate remains, however, an ongoing subject of cultural debate.

¹² See Roger Horrocks, 'History', for a detailed summary of the evolution of television broadcasting in New Zealand.

¹³ See Roger Horrocks, 'Local Content', for an extended discussion of these issues.

¹⁴ According to Horrocks, 'local content' (meaning material made by New Zealand-based companies) 'represents approximately a quarter of the schedule of the main free-to-air channels [...] and though it occasionally goes up or down a few percentage points it has always hovered around this level' (*History* 23).

¹⁵ Just who exactly is reflected and/or targeted by this model of local programming is inevitably contentious. Both Kavka and Horrocks note that prime-time local content in New Zealand (reality television and otherwise) tends to represent a mainstream, pakeha, settler culture rather than indigenous or immigrant populations, or minority interests. See Horrocks (*History* 23-24) and Kavka: 'On New Zealand reality television, Maori and Pacific Islanders (as well as Asians) are strikingly absent, despite their strong presence elsewhere on screen, [...]. This fact, that reality television here rarely makes use of and is not screened for minority populations, deeply implicates reality television in the white reconstruction of nation, and the naturalisation of habitat' (*Reality Estate* 231).

¹⁶ See Horrocks, 'Local Content', especially pages 277-281.

Since the late nineties, prime-time schedules across all free-to-air channels have been increasingly dominated by New Zealand-made reality formats, reflecting their popularity with local audiences and (consequentially) broadcasters¹⁷. However, many programme-makers, cultural critics and viewers disparage reality programming as cheap, trivial and having little to offer in the way of culture¹⁸. Its mainstream popularity, translated as ratings, makes it popular with broadcasters – thereby crowding other forms of locally-produced programming out of prime-time and out of the ‘local content’ quota. However, as this thesis will go on to argue, reality television is particularly adept at fostering social communion, through its emphasis on intimate and immediate experience, its cosy familiarity with the local and its adherence to ordinary and domestic concerns. Misha Kavka, reviewing the increasing prevalence of local reality formats on screen, has suggested that reality television offers local viewers a ‘strong sense of cultural place’ and that ‘the history and size of New Zealand make this sense of place especially wanted here’ (*Reality Estate* 223). While it rarely claims to achieve a ‘quality’ rating¹⁹ and deliberately appeals to a mainstream audience (thereby failing to represent minority interests) reality television may make an important and productive contribution to the evolution of New Zealand’s identity as an emerging nation. For instance, in the context of Horrock’s comments on the significance of local accents on national television (*Local Content* 280-281) reality television ably assists in the production of a national linguistic identity through its representation of colloquial language. In locally-produced reality programming, New Zealand voices are not only privileged, they are presented in unscripted, informal conversation, thus disclosing regional and national idioms and slang (including coarse language) which may not otherwise be aired. In a broader sense, reality television, with its emphasis on everyday people and local places, manifests and maintains a sort of vernacular cultural identity, in which ordinary New Zealanders participate as both television subjects and viewers. As Kavka comments: ‘What reality television offers – and to which audiences respond – is a regular flow that gives viewers a more particularised sense than other programming of who we are, in the place where we live’ (*Reality Estate* 227). The ubiquity and everydayness of reality programming (as opposed to other types of locally-produced television) assures its easy incorporation into daily experience, and makes it, to quote Appadurai again, a productive ‘resource’ in the ongoing process of ‘self-imagining as an everyday social project’ (4). The success of locally-produced reality television in New Zealand may therefore be credited to a confluence of complementary factors. By fostering a sense of place for New Zealanders while generating a high number of locally-made programmes at a relatively low cost, reality television increases local

¹⁷ For a detailed account of the rise of reality programming in New Zealand see Misha Kavka’s article ‘Reality Estate’, especially pages 227-232.

¹⁸ Writing in 2004 on the audience resistance to/ ambivalence towards locally produced programming, Horrocks notes that ‘In recent years there has been a trend towards low-budget lifestyle and “reality” programs, and though these have continued to rate well, they have polarised audiences and given local content a reputation in some circles for cheapness and superficiality’ (*Local Content*, 279).

¹⁹ A possible exception is the historical re-enactment format *Pioneer House* (2001), which was screened on Sunday evenings on TV One, just prior to the ‘quality’ British drama slot at 8.30pm. Both its representation of history (which provided nice period costumes on the one hand, and information about the past on the other) and its format origins in Great Britain created a sense of ‘quality’ programming which appealed to the older, more conservative audience of TV One.

content on screen, makes economic sense to the broadcaster and provides audiences with encouraging signs of an emerging culture,²⁰ albeit one which is, as Horrocks puts it, still 'under construction' (*Local Content* 274).

In keeping with both cultural and economic imperatives, as indicated above, the majority of locally-produced reality television in New Zealand is mainstream, family viewing, showing local people in their natural habitat. These programmes are populated by conscientious home owners, unassuming heroes and cheerful underdogs, who are generally either 'just doing their job' or, in the competitive formats, willing to 'give it a go'. Formats tend to represent existing situations (such as occupations) or contrive situations within an existing environment (such as home makeover). Perennial favourites include workplace docu-soap *The Zoo* (TV One 2001-), real-life romance show *Weddings* (TV2 1999-), home renovation formats *Dream Home* (TV2 1999-) and *DIY Rescue* (TV3 2001-), consumer advice show *Target* (TV3 1999-), police ride-along format *Motorway Patrol* (TV2 1999-), real estate sales formats *Location, Location, Location* (TV ONE 1999-) and *Hot Property* (TV3 2001-) and philanthropic garden show *Mucking In* (TV One 2000-). More ambitious projects, such as historical re-enactment formats which require the construction of specialist environments - *Pioneer House* (TV One 2001) or *Colonial House* (TV One 2003) - or competitive challenge formats in overseas locations - such as *Shock Treatment* (TV2 2006) - appear less regularly, although they are often promoted more vigorously. *Treasure Island* (TV2 2000-), a competitive format set on a desert island in the Pacific, is one programme shot outside New Zealand (although Fiji is, arguably, still our own back yard) which has run to many series, appearing annually since 2000 and generating several format variants including *Celebrity Treasure Island* (2001-) and *Treasure Island: Extreme* (2002). In terms of casting, New Zealand reality programming reflects a cultural preference for a 'good keen man' or woman with a 'hands on', practical approach to tasks - be these home maintenance projects, extreme sports or ballroom dancing competitions. This is no where more in evidence than competitive talent formats such as *New Zealand Idol* (TV2 2004-), as viewer-voting patterns (which typically reject the divas and reward the more unassuming characters) disclose and quantify audience responses to on screen behaviour.²¹

Taken as a body of work, New Zealand's locally-produced reality programming has a low-key feel to it. In both style and subject matter it is informal, domestic, quotidian and slightly *ad hoc*. The

²⁰ Or, as Kavka puts it: 'what we see on screen are not just "real" people, but people who bear the markers of a particular place, who carry the stamp, as it were, of a neighbourhood. We barely notice this part of reality television because these places are so familiar, but the programs in this way consolidate what it is we know about our own country and the kinds of people in it. Reality television, in other words, rewards our hours of watching with cultural (self-)recognition' (227).

²¹ The tendency to favour 'down to earth' participants over more showy performers was exemplified by a locally-produced format entitled *Miss Popularity* (TV2 2005). This show started out like a model-search format, selecting attractive young women to compete for fame and glory. Then, with more than a nod to *Outback Jack* (TBS 2004), it relocated the chosen candidates in a small town in the Australian desert, billeted them with locals and put them through a series of physically and emotionally demanding challenges. Finally, in a dusty, torch-lit ceremony at the local cattle yards, the resident community singled out a 'good keen girl' as the winner, on the basis of her good humour, stamina, and willingness to 'muck in', rather than, as might have been expected at the outset, her well-groomed beauty-pageant appeal.

programmes are generally shot on location in the places people live or work, deploying small crews and portable cameras. As production turnaround is fast, first episodes often screening while the series is still in completion, programmes are edited to a basic template of continuity matches and narrative interest.²² Where possible, stories emerge in their own time, rather than being marshalled into pre-conceived narrative arcs.²³ (See, for instance, comments on the relative narrative pace of New Zealand's *Treasure Island* and the American equivalent *Survivor* in Chapter Five). On the other hand, many formats make rather heavy-handed use of voice-over commentary to cover narrative gaps or to segue from one storyline to another, a strategy which masks or countermands an otherwise relaxed narrative pace. A propensity towards 'down to earth' characters applies equally to issues of setting and style. Kavka has noted the resistance of local audiences to programme formats which (in an exception to the norm) relocate participants in expensive or luxurious environments. As these viewers tend to confound contrived surroundings with artificial behaviour, rejecting such formats on the basis of their 'false' representation, Kavka suggests that 'the will to natural habitat in New Zealand reality television is ideological, and psychological, as much as financial' (*Reality Estate* 231).

The production of reality television in New Zealand has been influenced, inevitably, by programming trends in both the United Kingdom and the United States. Numerous examples of reality shows from both countries have screened in New Zealand since the mid-nineties. In some cases, local production houses buy the format rights to overseas programmes which already screen here, and then produce a local version.²⁴ In other examples, trends in imported programming will influence the production of locally-conceived formats which may then be sold on the international market.²⁵ As detailed in Chapter Three, the home improvement category of reality programming is the bedrock of prime-time viewing in New Zealand, with long-running series such as *Changing Rooms* (TV One 1998-), *Dream Home* and *DIY Rescue* running alongside an average of two to three new formats per year. This reflects the strong representation of property renovation formats in

²² This may be usefully compared with Mark Burnett's comments on the time spent on post-production for each episode of *Survivor*. The high cost of production (both in terms of time and money) is one way in which Burnett distinguishes his shows from other examples of reality television. Commenting on the *Big Brother* production schedule Burnett says 'You're shooting all that stuff and expecting to turn around a network hour and have it on TV *tomorrow*? We take six to seven weeks to make 44 minutes of *Survivor*!' (qtd in Kavka and West 145).

²³ Writing on New Zealand's reality programming, Misha Kavka has characterised this tendency as a 'more documentary commitment to allowing the life to lead the story' (*Paradise 70*).

²⁴ When this occurs, as for instance in the case of *Changing Rooms*, the locally-produced version is given precedence by broadcasters (who have no doubt invested in it), screening in prime-time and with considerable promotion, while the original version will continue to run in an off-peak slot.

²⁵ As for instance, in the case of *The Chair* (TV2 2002), a high-pressure quiz show format conceived by Touchdown Productions and licensed to twenty-nine countries internationally. Although this show was registered as an original format, it reflected the rising popularity of quiz shows such as *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* (ITV1 1998-) and *The Weakest Link* (BBC Two 2000-), both of which screened here as imports. *The Weakest Link* had previously been bought by Touchdown and reproduced in New Zealand under the same title from 2001-2002.

Britain's reality programming market ²⁶ many of which screen in New Zealand and/or are remade locally. The influence of Britain is also evidenced in the number of vocational docu-soap series on New Zealand screens, covering workplace environments such as veterinarian school, driving school, hairdressing and hospitality.²⁷ *Pioneer House*, New Zealand's version of the historical-re-enactment reality series, detailed in Chapter Six, is another reproduction of a British format, and reflects the rise in historical reality shows in the United Kingdom, many of which are screened in New Zealand.

Similarly, trends in the evolution of reality programming in the United States are reflected in television production patterns in New Zealand. Examples of locally-produced reality shows in the nineties, including the video clip format *The Great Kiwi Video Show* (TV2 1995-1999) and a plethora of emergency services shows from *Police Stop!* (TV3 1996-) to the long-running *Motorway Patrol*, owe their inception to early examples of reality programming in the States such as *America's Funniest Home Videos* (ABC 1990-) and the inaugural ride-along police format *Cops* (Fox 1989-). More recently, big budget competitive challenge formats from the United States – *Survivor* (CBS 2000-), *The Apprentice* (NBC 2004-), *The Bachelor/Bachelorette* (ABC 2002-), *America's Next Top Model* (UPN 2003-), *Project Runway* (Bravo 2004-), *Extreme Makeover* (ABC 2002-), *Fear Factor* (NBC 2001-) or *The Biggest Loser* (NBC 2004-), all of which screen in New Zealand as imports - have influenced local productions. Formats which take, for example, romance, business success or personal makeover as their subject are indebted, to a greater or lesser degree, to the popularity of America's high-rating shows. For instance, *Going Straight* (TV3 2003) (discussed in Chapter One) and *Downsize Me!* (TV3 2006), adopt the general rubric of *Fear Factor* and *The Biggest Loser* respectively. However, as suggested above, New Zealand reality programming may be characterised by a low-key production style, a restricted budget, and a cultural resistance to over-achievers or self-promoters. For these reasons, among others, competitive shows are less in evidence in New Zealand, and, where material prizes are offered, they are relatively small. Thus, the influence of the American shows, in this case, is circumscribed by the particular cultural, social and economic conventions which define New Zealand television.

But New Zealand has not only been derivative in its production of reality formats. In 1999, a local television production company released a series called *Popstars* (TV2 1999), which followed, in docu-soap style, the formation of a female singing group and the release of their first single. Unlike docu-soap, however, the production company contrived the circumstances of the story as it unfolded. In a rubric which now seems commonplace, the making of the band was masterminded by the makers of the television programme, and the success of the group's musical release was predicated on the popularity of the television series. The *Popstars* format was taken up by a total of twenty-five countries (Horrocks, *Local Content* 275) including Australia (1999), the United Kingdom

²⁶ For further discussion of British trends in property makeover television see Rachel Moseley's article in *Screen* on the 'Makeover Takeover'.

²⁷ New Zealand versions include *Driving School New Zealand* (TV3.1998), *The Zoo* (TV One 2001-) and *Service with a Smile* (TV2 2000).

(2001) and the United States (2001). It seems likely that the international phenomenon of the *Pop Idol* shows, which audition hopeful solo performers and launch their careers in pop music, first produced in 2001 in Great Britain, was influenced by the success of the *Popstars* format. The top-rating American, British and Australian *Idol* series all screened in New Zealand, before a local production company bought the rights to the show, enabling viewers to finally vote for a *New Zealand Idol* in 2004 (and subsequently in 2006). The *Idol* template has inspired, here, as elsewhere, a number of locally-produced variants, including talent searches for male strippers (*Stripsearch* [TV2 2001]) stage dancers (*So You Think You Can Dance?* TV3 2006) and, in a celebrity variant, ballroom dancers (*Dancing with the Stars* [TV One 2005-]). Thus, the making-of-a-star reality format has circled back to New Zealand, and been re-incorporated into the ongoing evolution of local reality programming.

In his analysis of 'local content' on New Zealand television, Horrocks has noted the 'cultural cringe' which strikes New Zealanders presented with images of themselves on screen (*Local Content* 279-281). This behavioural paradigm, treated with both affection and exasperation by commentators, translates, in terms of television production and scheduling, as cultural timidity.

Broadcasters in New Zealand tend to believe that the best way to ease viewers into local material is to employ familiar overseas formats so its 'New Zealandness' will be a matter of quiet nuance or local colour, avoiding the common accusation that the program is trying too hard. (*Local Content* 282)

When New Zealand production houses reproduce formats which have originated overseas, substituting Kiwi accents and locations for British or American ones, the local inflection may seem cosmetic. However, the contextual shift signified by a transfer from big country to small, or from empire to colony, or from centre to perimeter, may dramatically alter the production and reception of such programmes. For instance, New Zealanders' resistance to divas, over-achievers or self-promoters (popularly known as 'tall poppies') compromises, if not completely stymies, the competitive thrust of the big-name challenge formats which work so well in the United States. Locally produced challenge formats tend, as suggested, to invert the competitive rubric by privileging the position of the underdog.²⁸ To take another example, when British home improvement formats are relocated in New Zealand, the act of building, re-siting, redeveloping or selling private property inevitably recalls the (often iniquitous) processes by which first generation European settlers established control over a new land. As Kavka observes in her commentary on the preponderance of real estate formats on New Zealand television, 'New Zealand was settled after Maori by those drawn here by the promise of land and a homestead. [Thus,] in this country the promise of owning a quarter acre and your own home still lingers as the felt basis of settlement, of cultural rootedness' (*Reality Estate* 232). In this context, mundane domestic renovations take on

²⁸ The landslide victory of former 'All Black' Norm Hewitt in the first series of *Dancing With the Stars* (a celebrity ballroom dancing competition in which viewers vote out contestants each week) is indicative of this trend. Hewitt won audiences over because, as a bulky, middle-aged rugby player, he seemed such an unlikely candidate for success. In comparison, the willowy blonde model-cum-presenter Nicky Watson, a former ballerina who met the challenge with ease, was one of the first contestants to be voted off.

the urgency and significance of settler claim-staking or, as Kavka puts it, 'Real estate here is heightened reality – it is a dramatic enactment of identity and place' (*Reality Estate* 232). Similarly, the relocation of the British historical re-enactment format *1900 House* to the New World dramatically altered the historical significance of the year 1900. From a British perspective, the turn of the nineteenth century is recent history, even modern. In New Zealand, however, (where the programme was retitled *Pioneer House*) 1900 represents an early phase in the development of New Zealand as a British territory. Despite its adherence to the format precept of Victorian, suburban domestic life, the New Zealand production was, thereby, confused by a wholly different context of colonial settlement.²⁹ In summary, international trends in reality programming are writ large across local television schedules, whether programmes from overseas are screened as imports, bought as franchises and reproduced locally or simply mined for inspiration. Yet, as these examples indicate, New Zealand's particular cultural framework, both in terms of production and reception, reorganises material in ways which speak to local cultural projects. Thus, no matter how 'quiet' the cultural nuances registered by local production may be, reality television in New Zealand constitutes a productive site for readings of home and history in a national context.

Like imported programming in New Zealand, academic writing on reality television derives principally from America and the United Kingdom. In the United States, critical writing has naturally reflected the formal and thematic concerns of the principal trends in American reality programming. Law and order formats, inaugurated by the popular 'ride-along' series *Cops* in the late eighties, dominated academic debates in this area in the nineties. Thus, documentary theorist Bill Nichols responded to reality television in his 1994 work, *Blurred Boundaries*, as if crime and punishment were the only subjects of reality programming (43-62). Similarly, one of the first compendiums to emerge on the subject of reality programming was Fishman and Cavender's collection of critical essays on law and order programming in the United States, *Entertaining Crime* (1998). Video blooper shows and daytime talk shows have also marked the evolution of 'ordinary people' television in the United States. Thus, thematic concerns with amateur video-production and confession often accompany considerations of crime programming, as in Kevin Glynn's monograph *Tabloid Culture* (2000). In 2002 James Friedman edited a collection of articles on television and the real, *Reality Squared: Televisual Discourse on the Real*. As the title suggests, this collection surveys a broad range of televisual forms in its analysis of a mediated real, rather than necessarily discussing programmes which are popularly designated by the term reality television. These essays approach television along a number of axes, including, for instance, performance (Berenstein), time (Sobchack and Freidman) and digital media (Feitveit). Familiar themes in American television criticism are evident here, as other essays focus on racial politics, crime and therapy. Since the

²⁹ Although the politics of colonial settlement are all but absent from the series *Pioneer House* (in keeping with the propensity of all reality programming to focus on the personal and domestic rather than the public and political), the title itself registers, albeit rather clumsily and inaccurately, the significance of the Victorian era in New Zealand's history. An effort to more properly address and represent the period of European arrival in New Zealand's history seems to have been one reason why the subsequent New Zealand production of the same format, entitled *Colonial House*, returned to the year 1850. (See Chapter Six for a full discussion of the extent to which *Pioneer House* and *Colonial House* attempt to represent history).

early 2000s, the phenomenal success of desert island challenge format *Survivor* has generated considerable academic debate in the United States, producing, among others, Smith and Wood's edited collection *Survivor Lessons* (2003). Murray and Ouellette's compendium *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture* (2004) focuses on a range of reality formats produced in America, including case studies of *Survivor*, *The Real World* (MTV 1992-), *The Osbournes* (MTV 2002-2005) and 'Court TV'. Again, key critical themes in this volume are criminality, racial and sexual politics and personal confession. Mark Andrejevic's *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched* (2004) is the first monograph to specifically address reality programming in an American context. Andrejevic approaches reality television as part of a broader culture of surveillance, and discusses the significance of digital interactivity and webcam developments such as Jennicam. In doing so, he references a range of American reality formats, paying particular attention to *The Real World*, *Temptation Island* (Fox 2001-2003), *Survivor* and, most significantly in this context, the American version of *Big Brother* (CBS 2000-). In 2006, David Escoffery edited a new compendium of writing on American reality formats, *How Real is Reality TV?*, which includes studies of *Survivor*, *The Real World*, *The Osbournes*, *The Amazing Race* (CBS 2001-), *The Apprentice* and *Extreme Makeover*. The axis of investigation in this volume is that of personal and political representation, and articles approach formats according to issues of race, gender and democracy.

In the United Kingdom, a tradition of documentary production and 'gritty' drama has occasioned the rise of the docu-soap, first registered by Paul Watson's landmark observational documentary series *The Family* (BBC 1974) and reworked for a reality television market by the same director in the British/Australian co-production *Sylvania Waters* (ABC/BBC 1992). Alternately, BBC Two's 'Community Programmes Unit', which produced handy-cam diary formats for television in the 1990s (*Video Diaries* [1991-1992] and *Video Nation* [1993]), established another generic strand for contemporary reality programming. Jon Dovey's work on camcorder culture, *Freakshow* (2000), reflects these critical concerns in its discussion of new forms of factual television. Dovey, mostly citing examples of programming from the United Kingdom, analyses confessional chat shows, video diaries, docu-soaps and some examples of reality programming (in particular emergency services formats) as a shift in documentary culture towards 'first person media'. More recently, the European phenomenon of the *Big Brother* (2000-) franchise has attracted critical interest, occasioning a special edition of *Television and New Media* edited by Annette Hill and Gareth Palmer in 2002, which includes an article by John Corner in which he moots the possibility of a 'postdocumentary' television culture in light of developments in reality programming. Richard Kilborn also focuses on *Big Brother* in his book *Staging the Real* (2003), in which he traces the evolution of 'factual entertainment' television, and the rise of the docu-soap and the 'game-doc'. Also in 2003, Brenton and Cohen review the evolution and implications of 'gameworld' formats in *Shooting People*, which reads reality programming within a broader political economy. In 2004, further writing on *Big Brother* was collected in Mathijs and Jones' volume *Big Brother International* which studies the format from a pan-European perspective, and places an emphasis on 'international comparison and on television as a cultural industry' (Corner, *Foreword* xii). Also in 2004, a general compendium on

reality programming, *Understanding Reality Television*, was published in the United Kingdom, edited by Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn. This collection deals specifically with popular examples of reality programming in both Great Britain and the United States. Contributions include writing on *Big Brother* (Holmes), *Survivor* (Gray Cavendar) and *The Real World* (Christopher Pullen). In 2005, three monographs on reality programming in Britain extended critical debates on this subject. Annette Hill's *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television* surveys audience responses to reality television in the United Kingdom and includes particular consideration of *Popstars (UK)* (ITV 1999), *Big Brother*, *Changing Rooms* and *Animal Hospital* (BBC 1994-2004). Jonathan Bignell's *Big Brother: Reality TV in the Twenty-First Century* offers case studies of a number of reality formats in the course of his analysis of the genesis and genre of reality programming. Biressi and Nunn's co-authored work *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation* addresses a range of reality formats, including Paul Watson's documentary *The Family*, personal video diaries, *Crimewatch UK* (BBC 1984-) and *Big Brother*, in terms of theories of self-revelation, truth-telling and confession. The same year, *The Spectacle of the Real*, edited by Geoff King, presented a range of articles which consider representations of the real on both film and television as well as theoretical responses to the events of 9/11. Essays on reality television include approaches to medical formats (Frances Bonner) and romance programming (Misha Kavka).

Frances Bonner's work on *Ordinary Television* (2003) includes reality formats in its discussion of 'ordinary people' programming in Australia and Great Britain. Jane Roscoe, writing from New Zealand and Australia, has contributed to international debates on docu-soap and *Big Brother*. To my knowledge, published academic writing on reality television in New Zealand is limited to Misha Kavka's contributions to the 2003 special issue of *Metro*, and the 2004 anthology *Television in New Zealand*, edited by Horrocks and Perry. She has also co-authored, with Stephen Turner, an article on web-based reality programming in New Zealand for Bell and Matthewman's compendium *Cultural Studies in Aotearoa New Zealand* (2004). Related material on New Zealand television may be found in both the latter collections, including Horrocks on the history of broadcasting, Turner and Luke Goode on advertising and Annie Goldson on documentary.

A Closer Look

[T]he desire of the human masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, [...] is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Everyday the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction. (Benjamin *Work of Art* 217)

The capacity of television, and more specifically reality television, to bring things close and render them present - spatially, temporally, socially and emotionally – is the thematic fulcrum of this study. Closeness is variously interpreted here as proximity (in terms of space, geography or social

position), co-incidence (in terms of time) and intimacy (in terms of emotional affect). The present-ness of reality programming is both temporal (occurring now, in the present tense) and physical (occurring here, in this body, in this home, in this country). It is through this affect of present-ness that reality television most clearly engages with the domain of the real. Thus, this study also turns upon a consideration of the various significant ways in which reality television defines, pursues and manifests moments of realness on screen. Both present-ness and realness, as they occur in reality programming, are indebted to a number of different discursive threads: Viscerality, Ordinarity, Community, Amateurism, Intimacy and Temporal Immediacy. The six chapters of this study focus on these concepts in succession, although each one is embedded within the network of the others, and their development is intended to be cumulative. The study is broken down into two parts, entitled *Here* and *Now* respectively, reflecting the double axis of spatial (incorporating social) and temporal present-ness.

For the purposes of this thesis, the designation 'reality television' is used inclusively, and covers a broad range of programming which represents the experiences of 'ordinary' people (that is, non-television-professional) and privileges their point of view. Accordingly, this thesis embraces a wide variety of televisual forms, from caught-on-tape bloopers to elaborate social experiments, from personal video diaries to celebrity showcases, from talent quests to historical re-enactments. Subject matter is similarly varied, and includes blind dates, emergency rescues, gardening tips, extreme physical stunts, natural disasters and family dinners. As Holmes and Jermyn note in the introduction to *Understanding Reality Television*, the designation 'reality television' covers a very broad range of formats in the current televisual landscape, with the result that 'the variety of programmes explored in this collection [...] may well have as many significant differences as commonalities, as well as different historical precedents, generic precursors, pleasures and modes of address' (5). Nevertheless, the representation of television amateurs on screen, and their unscripted, undirected, reactive behaviour, maintains a strong yet flexible thread of commonality, one which binds these programmes to critical discussions of authenticity and the everyday. Some television categories which feature ordinary people – including chat shows, game shows, news programmes, current affairs, consumer advice programmes and popular documentary – fall outside the scope of this study, in part because they constitute distinct forms of television which have been discussed elsewhere,³⁰ and partly because the ordinary people on these shows are framed, both discursively and practically, as television-worthy, in ways which place them at a distance from their audience. The appeal of reality television, on the other hand, is founded on the emotional experiences of people who have no special reason to be foregrounded by the medium of television. Thus, reality programming often registers a conflation of intimacy and banality. The specific affective experience which this may generate is of critical interest to this thesis. The chapters which follow draw on New Zealand examples of reality programming as principal texts, with reference to international paradigms where appropriate. By way of selection, I have tended to focus on formats

³⁰ See, for instance, Shattuc on talk shows, Langer on current affairs and Bruzzi on documentaries.

which attract me as a viewer. This has given the project a certain coherence, as my viewing preferences map onto and overlap with academic theories of domesticity, authenticity and intimacy.

The four chapters of Part One - *Here* - interpret reality television in terms of its affective proximity in both spatial and social terms. These frameworks overlap because the spaces determined as being Here in reality television are social spaces - the private home, the local community, the (imagined) nation. These places are sites of physical occupation and activity, which are assessed in terms of their concrete materiality (the square meterage of a house, the geographic borders of a country) but they are also imaginary sites of intimacy and social cohesion. As reality television circles around the intimate socio-spatial sites of home and home-land, domestic space becomes the pre-eminent Here of reality television. Not only do many examples of the form take private houses as their subject or setting, but domestic activities are evident in the most exotic (that is, extra-domestic) of reality television formulations (for instance, those predicated on survival, history, glamour or business). In fact, as will be discussed, the further environments stray from the domestic norm, the more intense their scrutiny of domestic practices, as a continued adherence to customary routines comes to substitute for the lack of familiarity perpetrated by an unknown environment. This attachment to the domestic (whether private or national, material or imaginary), is productive for reality programming because it facilitates discourses of ordinariness, typicality and familiarity. Ordinariness operates as a proof of authenticity because it makes the people on screen socially proximate to the viewer. Similarly, the representation of living rooms (of all descriptions) on screen reflects the site of reception, creating immediacy as it locates 'us' all together in the same socio-spatial environment. Thus, reality television comes close when it deals thematically with domestic space, because the private home is both satisfyingly material and thrillingly intimate.

A similar dynamic is at work when reality programming represents the people or places of a particular nation for consumption by that nation (as most of the examples in this study do). Programmes about New Zealand and New Zealanders rely on the thematic use of family, home and community to establish a sense of shared place, of being Here together. In this way, an actual experience of the immediate place overlaps with an affective experience of social proximity. When reality television represents New Zealanders abroad, their attachment to their place of origin is particularly emphatic. Again, home operates as a marker of authenticity, as a stabilising point to return to, and its centrality is all the more insistent once it is undermined by displacement. In summary, the locus of Here incorporates a powerful affective dimension, subsuming the collective social immediacy of Us, as well as the socio-spatial intimacy of Home. In a study of a national television, Here is both expanded and contained through its attachment to a particular place and a localised sense of social identity.

Chapter One – *Real Life: Reality, Viscerality and the Body* - begins by considering the discursive significance of 'real life' as a point of reference in debates about the realness of images on screen. Perhaps surprisingly, the term 'real life' is often used in counterpoint to ordinary, lived experience,

and designates a heightened and intensified experience of life which is emotional, intuitive and idealised. Nevertheless, when this version of heightened reality is represented on screen, emotional intensity is translated into intensity of bodily experience. As established by Linda Williams and others, the 'body genres' of cinema (pornography, horror, thriller, slapstick and weepies) provide 'bodily evidence' of the real through incursions into the body on screen which generate physiological responses in the bodies of the audience (*Hardcore* 5). Bodily fluids elicited on screen heighten viewer engagement as a proof of the real, even when they are faked. The physiological reaction of bodies in the audience (which may also produce bodily fluids) is another way in which the images on screen may be rendered as real, through their capacity to elicit palpable responses. Reality programming has made a name for itself through its appeal to bodily experience (decried by Bill Nichols as 'affronts to the body' [*Blurred Boundaries* 45]) and many high-profile formats take incursions into the body as their central motif (showcasing surgical procedures, bodily violence or endangerment, 'gross out' eating contests, extreme weight loss or sexual relationships). Like the film 'body genres' discussed by Williams, these programmes suffer cultural devaluation because they privilege the bodily over the cerebral. However, this chapter suggests that while viscosity remains central to the precept of reality programming, evolutions in the form indicate a trend away from the abject, and towards emotional epiphany. In this context, the gentle tear becomes the critical 'bodily confession' which proves the real, even in formats which, as indicated above, spectacularise damage to the body. Using the New Zealand physical challenge format *Shock Treatment* as an exemplar, I explore the relationship between interior and exterior feeling in reality television, and place this in the context of interpretations of 'real life' on screen.

Chapter Two – *Everyday People: Ordinarity, Authenticity and the Nobody* – considers the discursive framework through which television sites itself in the realm of the ordinary, and the extent to which this framework serves its principles of intimacy, immediacy and authenticity. Both in form and content, the medium of television has been characterised by ordinariness since its inception. Continuing discussions around spatial and social proximity, this chapter explores the various discursive routes by which markers of ordinariness bring people on screen close to their television audience. People on television are sited as ordinary (even when they are quite special), because ordinariness is affiliated with guilelessness and, thereby, authenticity. Being ordinary on television is thus characterised, perhaps ironically, by camera-innocence. The domestic site assumes a key role in the production of ordinariness on television because, as signalled above, it presupposes that which is both intimate and banal. Everyday conditions of living – eating, sleeping, bathing – become totems of authenticity in reality programming because (like the 'bodily confessions' discussed in Chapter One) they make visible that which is usually experienced in private. This chapter deploys the landmark documentary series of the 1970s, *An American Family* (PBS 1973), arguably a

forerunner for much reality television today,³¹ as an instructive exemplar of the production and reception of television ordinariness. In the context of debates surrounding the elevation of ordinary people to celebrity status through their exposure on television, this chapter goes on to consider the implications of high-profile international formats, namely *Big Brother* and the *Idol* shows, which combine the representation of ordinariness with the production of celebrity. Finally, in the context of a national study, the determination of ordinariness becomes more specific as typicality assumes certain cultural conditions. This chapter concludes with a discussion of several examples of reality programming in New Zealand, including life-stories format *Weddings* and the celebrity version of *Treasure Island*, in an attempt to register ordinary appearances and practices within a specific locality.

Chapter Three – *Imagined Neighbourhoods: Community, Locality and the Home-Made House* – focuses on the production of social and spatial proximity via the literal and figurative investigation of the private home. The chapter begins by considering the extent to which television as a medium, as interpreted by various theorists, fosters a sense of community between its individual viewers. This collective communion, as interpreted by Anderson's discussion of the imagined nation (30-36), encourages viewer engagement through its attachment to a local or national identity. With reference to Appadurai's work on the 'production of locality' as both spatial (ie. material) and social (ie. imaginary) (180), this chapter analyses a number of well-known television formats about domestic renovation, including *Changing Rooms*, *Dream Home* and *DIY Rescue*, in terms of their representation of nation as neighbourhood. The pre-eminent place of real estate programming in New Zealand's prime-time schedules, already noted earlier in this Introduction, indicates a cultural attachment to the material production of nation, which is here linked to settler anxieties about the right to own and occupy the land at all. Thus, home (land) improvement is a fertile subject for an analysis of reality television immediacy as it makes manifest (and material) the pursuit of social cohesion. As for the ordinary people discussed in Chapter Two, the domestic and private status of the homes represented on reality television certifies their authenticity as televisual subjects, and brings them near to the viewer. Unlike ordinary people, however, houses are unable to dissemble or resist investigation, and reality programming capitalises on this degree of accessibility in shows which 'peek' into private homes. Therefore, this chapter also considers the readiness with which reality television 'reads' the domestic dwelling for biographical information about its occupant. Two programmes, *How Clean is your House?* (TV One 2006) and *House Dates* (TV3 2003), about housework and romance respectively, are discussed here in terms of their pursuit of intimacy (sexual, familial, confessional) through the inspection of a private home. Finally, this chapter engages with popular renovation format *DIY Rescue* in more particular detail, as an exemplar of cultural anxieties surrounding the intimate relationship between the 'Kiwi bloke' and his 'quarter-acre'. Thus, settler fantasies of ownership and control are both challenged and assuaged by this

³¹ See, for instance, the opening of Susan Murray's article on the evolution of documentary form in American programming. Murray observes that the 'struggle to define exactly what *An American Family* was bespeaks much of what is at stake in our current generic placement of texts into the categories of documentary and reality TV' (41).

endlessly repeated narrative in which a male, European homeowner marshals his domestic property into order.

Chapter Four – *Intimate Technologies: Amateurism, Intimacy and the Hand-Held Camera* - considers the origin of reality programming in the amateur video clip shows of the eighties, and the particular intimacy generated by the use of hand-held recording equipment. The accidental or aberrant status of events represented by these video clips is critical to their affect of intimacy and authenticity. Amateur production, evidenced on screen in a variety of ways, produces authenticity via a similar discursive route to that which supports ordinariness, since that which is not premeditated appears guileless and genuine. Furthermore, the very intimate and visceral connection between a hand-held camera and the body of the person operating it registers immediacy as it produces a specialised on-screen aesthetic of bodily experience. Thus, this chapter returns to considerations of a bodily real first raised in Chapter One. Much of the material aired by video clip shows illustrates damage or endangerment to the human body. However, evidence of a bodily real is written over processes of production, as the portable camera replicates the physical and emotional responses of the operator. In this way, handy-cam footage renders the experience of the moving body behind the camera the pre-eminent narrative on screen. Affiliated with the video clip shows are diary-cam formats in which ordinary people, who have been supplied with basic digital recording equipment, represent their own stories. Here, the discourse of accident and disaster is supplanted by one of confession. With reference to Foucault and others, this chapter briefly considers the production of confession on television, and the paradox staged by the public display of private and secret experiences. It goes on to analyse a New Zealand example of the diary format - *Life on Tape* (TV2 2000) – in terms of intimacy, confession and amateurism. In conclusion, this chapter considers the extent to which evidence of amateur video production persists in reality programming, despite the dramatic format evolutions which have occurred since the eighties. The seemingly irresistible associations between amateurism and authenticity, between disaster and the real, and between private experience and truth, confirm the role of amateur, hand-held video footage as both a progenitor of reality programming and an anchor point for its evolution.

The two chapters of Part Two - *Now* - focus on issues of temporal immediacy in reality television. This section sustains an interest in the thematic function of domesticity, ordinariness and intimacy in reality programming, while making temporality its principal axis of approach. In this dynamic, strategies of temporal elision (effected by formal aspects of production and reception) not only produce affects of liveness and temporal immediacy, but reproduce structures of televisual intimacy and authenticity, as they bring things close. An almost exclusive focus on an urgent, unfolding present moment in time, narrows the frame of reality programming in ways which intensify the expression and manifestation of emotional experience, thus establishing a reciprocal relationship between the proximity of Now and the intimacy of Here.

Chapter Five – *Island Time: Isolation, Immediacy and the Present* - begins by considering critical debates as to the capacity of television as a medium to represent, manifest and mediate time. Recurrent issues in this critical arena are liveness, spectacle and the loss of historical context. Theorists such as Doane (*Information*), Heath (*Representing*) and Nichols (*Blurred Boundaries*) interpret television as a medium of the present moment which focuses urgently and exclusively on the immediate Now. This propensity is either read productively (in its transmission of affects of catastrophe - Doane) or negatively (in its elimination of critical perspective and historical consciousness - Nichols). This chapter applies these readings to an analysis of reality programming, and offers its own theory of television's temporality as 'unlocated'. This strategy of free-floating, unlocated time offers viewers an alternative temporal plane, which disengages from the linear historical continuum in order to facilitate an immediate interface with an ever-present Now. Consequently, events on screen appear to occur at the time of their reception rather than at the time of production, a dynamic which holds viewers captive in the present moment, heightening and intensifying emotional affect. Through an analysis of high-profile reality formats *Survivor* and *Big Brother*, as well as local variants *Treasure Island* and *100 Hours* (TV2 2002), the second part of this chapter applies theories of unlocated time to programmes which isolate competitors in artificially contrived environments. Here, a reciprocity of time and (social) space becomes evident, as temporal isolation feeds into spatial disorientation and vice versa. The extent to which participants on these programmes over-determine their social and spatial relationships within the 'tribe', team or group may be read as an effort to compensate for the alarming absence of conventional temporal markers. In this way, an emphatic expression of the Here anchors both participants and viewers otherwise bewildered by the elimination of temporal perspective occasioned by the pre-eminence of the Now.

Chapter Six – *Living History: Re-presentation, Nostalgia and the Past* - extends the discussion of reality television present-ism through an exploration of time in historical-reality formats. Television theorists have tended to assert television's present-ist impulse as antagonistic to the project of history, suggesting that television, as a medium, eliminates historical consciousness. Using New Zealand's *Pioneer House* as an exemplar, this chapter analyses the manifestation of 'living history' in reality formats which seek to reproduce the domestic experiences of past lives. The interaction between contemporary bodies and historically-located objects is critical to this representation and the production of household dirt is considered as another 'proof of the real' which is rendered meaningful by its present-tense production. This idea is extended through a consideration of visceral and bodily experiences, as rendered by the historical-reality format, and contextualised in terms of academic and industry debates about the proper way to tell history (on television and elsewhere). Finally, in the light of Linda Hutcheon's comments on the rise of nostalgia at the turn of the second millennium (*Irony, Nostalgia and the Postmodern*), this chapter considers the extent to which *Pioneer House* fosters nostalgic fantasies about the colonial era. As a structure of temporality, nostalgia operates ambivalently, both 'distancing and proximating' (Hutcheon 3) the historical site it aspires to. Moreover, in the particular case of *Pioneer House*, nostalgic fantasies

about the past are inflected with a contemporary desire for an idealized experience of life in New Zealand, one characterised by family, community and self-reliance. In this way, reality television manages the representation of history in ways which enhance, rather than contradict, television's present-ist temporality.

Conclusion

In summary, reality television engages with the real because it is about the body, but equally because it is about the nobody. It registers authenticity via the ordinary and the everyday, even as it makes the everyday extraordinary. It feels real because it is sensory and intimate, yet it makes a virtue of its technological production. It predicates authenticity on spontaneous, un-scripted or aberrant behaviour, but contrives the circumstances of such behaviour without compunction. It relishes the immediate present, even as it steps out of time altogether. Elsewhere, it maintains a focus on the present even as it re-enacts the past and produces nostalgia for *les temps perdu*. Reality television bears the weight of all these contradictions because it privileges the experience of intimacy and immediacy, facilitating an eternal present in which ordinary people (viewers and viewed) are sutured together, Here and Now. In so doing, reality programming celebrates, perpetuates and elaborates the particular strengths of television itself.